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## **An attempt to approach the *sacred* through the film on the example of the analysis and interpretation of the journey of a yurodivy in the film *The Lonely Voice of Man* by Alexander Sokurov**

**T**he debut film of Alexander Sokurov *The Lonely Voice of Man*, prepared as a graduation film in the Moscow VGIK<sup>1</sup>, was created in the place where no one expected a prophetic word. In 1978 the film was not well received by the university authorities because of ideological vagueness. The only person that defended it was Andrei Tarkovsky. Many years later Sokurov recalled that the film tape of *The Lonely Voice of Man* would not have survived without that proof of faith given by Sokurov's master (EM, 1989, p. 14). Only in 1987 the film was shown to a wider public.

The work of Alexander Sokurov is based on several texts written by Andrei Platonov<sup>2</sup>. In fact it is, however, a collage of meanings reaching much deeper. On the horizontal plane (at the level of the storyline) the ordinary story of two young people is presented, they try to be happy in the world recovering after the civil war (Vogel, 1989, p. 64).

<sup>1</sup> The Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography (direct translation from Russian: All-Russian State University of Cinematography named after S. A. Gerasimov).

<sup>2</sup> The references to two Platonov's texts are the clearest: *The River Potudan* (*Река Потудань*) and *The Origin of a Master* (*Происхождение мастера*).

On the vertical plane, allowing us to access the substance, the deepest structures of the film story, *The Lonely Voice of Man* tells us about a man who has the internal conflict – there is a confrontation between corporeality and spirituality. Seemingly a cosy story about Nikita Firsov, who is unable to achieve perfect love, harmony of body and soul in this world, and who voluntarily agrees to the "torture on the cross" and suffering beyond human strength so as to unite with Luba – he becomes the archetype of the tragic Russian mentality, expresses the idea of the Russian spiritual martyrdom which refers to the attitude of a yurodivy ["a Holy Fool" – J.M.J.] whose features can be found in the main character.

The aim of this article is to present how the director, using the cinematographic means of expression, shows the relationship between the content and the form, how he reflects what is invisible to human sight, i.e. located in "space beyond the frame", how he interprets the lonely human voice, depicts the pained soul and thus moves closer to the sacred.

## The journey along the borderline of two worlds

The work of Andrei Platonov constantly balances on the borderline of two worlds: [it is characterised by continuous mutual interpenetration (...) of themes: life and death, what is dying, going to the past and what is reviving, growing and living]<sup>3</sup> "charakteryzuje [ją – A.K.] nieustanne wzajemne przenikanie (...) motywów: życia i śmierci, tego, co obumiera, odchodzi do przeszłości i tego, co odradza się, rozwija i żyje" (Bogdanowicz, 1992, p. 111). We can reach similar conclusions only on the basis of fictional paradoxes contained in *The Lonely Voice of Man*. Nikita carries the coffin on his shoulders walking exactly the same way along which he went to meet Luba. The young couple cannot afford the wedding, because the person accepting money cannot give their change and suggests that they wait for a funeral and there will be some small change in a till.

The exploration of borderline spaces between life and death, memory and oblivion is the pivot of many Sokurov's films. The spectre of death may be expressed literally: by talking about it, by a dead body, degradation of the world, hoot of owls, tawny owls, caw of ravens<sup>4</sup>, black shots, sleep, presence of liminal symbolism<sup>5</sup>. The impression of timelessness is intensi-

<sup>3</sup> If not stated otherwise, all the translations in square brackets are done by the translator (Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak).

<sup>4</sup> Ravens, like tawny owls and other birds, are a harbinger of the approaching death. See: entry: sowa [owl] Kopaliński (1997b, p. 1090).

<sup>5</sup> Sokurov places the characters in liminal spaces: Luba is learning at the window through which Zhenya enters and goes out, the father is sitting and smoking also at the old shutters, in a reminiscence Nikita is standing on the threshold of

fied by the scenery: houses are usually located in remote places, characters are presented on the background of the horizon.

In the analysed film Sokurov applied the method of systematic blurring of points of view visible only for a moment, and as a result he achieved the effect of steady penetration into the sad world of the lost "I". This impression was obtained by the consistent use of the means of expression accessible to film, which are: half-close-ups (bust shots) when the hero's eyes are closed eyes, black shots accompanied by non-diegetic sounds of sentimental music, hero's disappearance from the field of view as a result of jumps. The first time when the theme of closed eyes and thus switching off "the look from the outside" was used as early as in a poetic prologue during Nikita's trip over the hills to his home. In this way the director emphasised the presence of "the other voice" in the film, and thus making the adaptation similar to the original style of Platonov, in which the features of skaz<sup>6</sup> expressed also by using the film means of expression are visible.

## The return as the beginning of the journey

Nikita's return to his home extends very much. The scene consists of six shots divided by black shots<sup>7</sup>. In every successive shot the hero walks in a different direction. First to the right and then straight ahead, but he looks to the left twice as if he let his thoughts wander between what has happened and what is going to happen. Yi-Fu Tuan notices that the right side is associated with the holy power which is the principle of every intentional activity and the source of everything that is good. The left side is antithesis thereof: means the weak, the unclean, the secular and the uncertain, what is bad and what we should be afraid of (Tuan, 1987, p. 62).

The soldiers described by Platonov [went and they had the heartache with surprise when they recognised again fields and villages on their way; (...) now they went as they

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the chamber of Luba and her mother, the jumper on the edge of the boat is between life and death, etc. Thus the director once again stresses that the hero oscillates on the borderline of two worlds: earthly and spiritual, as evidenced by the internal conflict of Nikita Firsov between corporeality and spirituality. The elements of space also refer to the theme of penetration: floorboards are put parallel and across in such a manner that we can see joints and cracks, walls are rough, there are scratches and cracks on them. Moreover, there are photos there which by their nature refer to a different reality.

<sup>6</sup> Skaz in Russian folklore is a form of narrative with addressing a listener and containing numerous repetitions. It is similar to a tale where the very narrator is the most important factor. The principal bond in the case of skaz is not the content of the storyline, but the very course of telling the story, free and often chaotic.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 16.

had to start new lives, vaguely remembering themselves as they used to be three or four years before because they became different people (...) ] "szli i ściskało im się zdziwione serce, gdy znów poznawali pola i wsie rozpościerające się na ich drodze; (...) szli teraz, jak gdyby mieli zacząć życie od nowa, niejasno pamiętając siebie takimi, jakimi byli trzy czy cztery lata temu, ponieważ stali się innymi ludźmi (...)" (Płatonow, 1969, p. 169).

Therefore as early as the first scenes of the film show the beginning of the journey of the hero, this journey is going to occur in at least two dimensions: literal, understood as travelling, and metaphorical, which is the inner journey. The successive stages of the prologue are a subtle story about Nikita's experiences. The hero is shown at the front, in the light of the afternoon sun, which indicates that he had to set off very early, perhaps even at dawn, so as to cover such a distance. The time of sunrise is best to take up the challenge, the sudden awakening – the jump into the unknown. It is when good powers are struggling with evil. Nikita leaves the frame, but we can still see the way. It is worth noting that the space at the front is associated with the future, and at the back – with the past. Yi-Fu Tuan points out that a human face seen from the front causes respect and even anxiety (Tuan, 1987, p. 58). Changes of the directions may signify the emotional condition of the main character who even at the beginning of the journey is in the liminal space: between the experience of the war that he still remembers<sup>8</sup>, and memories of the past triggered by the view of the familiar area, his home town. The space modified after some time, where Nikita enters, places him on one more borderline: something that has vanished, but is still lasting and something that is only going to happen.

The hero stops to rest on the border outlined by shadows and he observes the town lit by the sun. The selection of the place is not random but it is another guidance for determining what is happening inside Nikita's mind: [(...) the warmth of life seemed to darken in him and Firsov fell asleep in the silence of deserted retreat] "(...) ciepło życia jakby pociemniało w nim i Firsov zasnął w ciszy bezludnego zakątka" (Płatonow, 1969, pp. 170–171). The above observation indicates a special symbiosis of a person and nature, which in the film will play an equally important role as heroes who believe that constitute [one indivisible household where can be seen the sadness of loss or the joy of rescued man's good] with nature ("jedno niepodzielne gospodarstwo i można z niego wyczytać smutek utraty lub radość z ocalonego, człowieczego dobra" (Płatonow, 1969, p. 388)).

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<sup>8</sup> Metaphorically they can be expressed in the form of shots showing dying animals in the slaughterhouse, which occur during Nikita's disease, at the marketplace and at the time of the last conversation of the young.

In Sokurov's concept the hero's look at the known-unknown space is warmed by the rays of the afternoon sunshine. However, anxiety and ambiguity of the landscape are introduced by a diagonal leading from the top left-hand corner of the frame, where the temple stands, to the bottom right-hand corner, where we can see Nikita. This arrangement shows that the way of the hero will not be easy and free of problems. A similar plan was repeated in the film once more, but in this case the monk<sup>9</sup>, as tree growing upwards, connects the earthly and spiritual worlds like mythical *axis mundi*. The main character seems to walk towards the sun, as if he was thirsty for it, which is evidenced by the unexpected jump from the hill towards the illuminated space. The time of the whole world in the text of *Platonov* goes [as usual far away, following the sun...] ("jak zwykle z dala, w ślad za słońcem...") (Płatonow, 1969, p. 171)). As early as in the initial prologue Nikita starts the relationship with light. When the twilight falls, he also closes his eyes<sup>10</sup> and plunges into [the darkness of his night] ("w ciemnościach swojej nocy"(Platonov, 1969, p. 171)).

## The journey of a yurodivy

When Firsov is shown in a half-close-up in front of a viewer, the landscape behind him has a dichotomic division. The borderline is determined by the line of trees – there is a dark forest over the man and his head is visible on a lighter background. This radical reversal of the world's components – dark at the top, bright at the bottom – intensified additionally by the view of the face with closed eyes, causes anxiety and indicates the direction where the viewer should look – deep into the picture. This is an attempt to signal that it is necessary to switch off the "external view", because this subjective perspective applied by Sokurov refers to a different reality at which the internal view is directed – this "third eye" of the hero (Dobrotworski, 2011, p. 353).

<sup>9</sup> The figure of the monk is the guard of "another land", as he appears in the storyline in significant moments, when a change happens, or further thresholds are crossed: when Nikita comes back home and watches working men through the window; after the first visit of the boy in Luba's house we can see the image of the river at night where he is sitting and splashing his face and body with water; at the wedding of the heroes; after the unsuccessful attempt to have sexual intercourse; when Nikita visits him in his cave in the desert. Then he appears in the film for the last time. We should also pay attention to the monk's relation with water. He is the second character who strips off in the film, pulls off the habit and his torso remains naked, he washes his face at the river. Just before this scene appears, there is a shot in which we can see water lilies, which mean majesty, dignity and revival ([Pl: lilia wodna] Kopaliński, 1990, p. 199), and this combined with a symbolic gesture of washing the body – washing sins, allows you to interpret the river as a place similar to "purgatory", and from this point you can continue your further voyage to heaven or hell.

<sup>10</sup> In *The River Potudan* the hero has the terrible dream at this moment when it appears to him that he is panting heavily as during the invisible run and fight, tormented by a small fat animal with hot hair as if fed on pure wheat. See: Płatonow (1969, p. 171).

At the end of the musical phrasing the man closes his eyes and remains in silence only surrounded by the sounds of nature: grasshoppers, crickets, rustling grass. He is swaying his body gently with them as [the weakest reed in nature] ("trzcina najwężlejsza w przyrodzie" (Pascal, 1921, p. 122)). The closed eyes in the prologue force the viewer to sharpen their hearing so as to understand this lonely voice coming out from the inside of the hero<sup>11</sup>. The first shots determine the rhythm of the film: contemplative, calm, steady. It is perfectly harmonised with the inner condition of the hero. Nikita most of the time does not say too many words<sup>12</sup>. If he answers questions, he does it perfunctorily, does not ask about anything, observes, is silent and rather he "speaks no word" (Tiutczew, 1989). Silence is the ideal language of a yurodivy (Wodziński, 2000, p. 137). Explosions, sounds of work or completely unidentified atonal sounds audible from time to time<sup>13</sup> to some extent substitute the voices of the characters and are the traces of drama<sup>14</sup>, which in space outside the frame was caused by death some time before. Music is a medium that makes it possible to express not only the vibrations of a single soul, as it is gently done by light, but also goes beyond the boundaries of the individual. In this context the debut film of Alexander Sokurov is the story about the man whose lonely voice is a metonymy of thousands of quiet whispers of degraded beings struggling with the post-war reality. The director stresses that the world is not a homogeneous mass, a person does not need to conventionally agree with the view of the community, is a separate unit which is however connected by an invisible thread with other people living and deceased and is dependent on the time and the space in which lives<sup>15</sup>.

It may appear that the hero omits known, but sometimes changed hills on purpose, deliberately chooses detours, walks uphill so as to delay the arrival to his destination, as if he wanted to contemplate the nature reborn after the war. The change of directions suggests an association with walking in the maze: [This so important change: to the left and

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<sup>11</sup> Also the hero of *Chevangur* during the journey [closed his eyes to isolate from any views and thoughtlessly experience the way to what he had lost or forgotten to see during the previous journey] ("zamknął oczy, żeby odgrodzić się od wszelkich widoków i bezmyślnie przeżyć drogę do tego, co zgubił lub zapomniał zobaczyć w drodze poprzedniej" (Quoted following: Platonov, 1998, p. 32)).

<sup>12</sup> First words are said only in the eighth minute of the film.

<sup>13</sup> Sokurov reached the effect of sound disharmony, using overlapping fragments of compositions, which he played at the same time at different tempos on the tape recorder. See: Uvarov (2011, p. 20).

<sup>14</sup> Sekacki sees echo of war, revolution, hunger, seven plagues of Egypt in non-diegetic sounds. See: Sekatskii (2006, p. 15).

<sup>15</sup> According to Platonov, the living are connected with the dead by a special bond. Nature is the intermediary between the worlds of the living and the dead and can convey messages from those who are already on the other side. See: Platonow (1969, p. 388).



to the right – the antithesis of any monotony – appears quite often in dreams in the form of »a change of step«. Sometimes the »right« side, sometimes the »left« side of nature takes the floor, dominates] ("Ta tak ważna zmiana: w lewo i w prawo – antyteza wszelkiej jednoznaczności – występuje dość często w snach pod postacią »zmiany kroku«. To strona »prawa«, to znów »lewa« natury dochodzi do głosu, dominuje" (Santarcangeli, 1982, p. 185)).

All the elements of the prologue gathered together announce the fight between the powers of good and evil which will be conducted in the film space. Eliade argued that the way that the hero follows, must be steep, complicated, because [in fact is a rite of transition from the profane to the sacred, from fleeting and illusory matters to reality and eternity, from death to life, from a person to a divinity] ("w istocie jest obrzędem przejścia z profanum do sacrum, z tego, co ulotne, iluzoryczne, do rzeczywistości i wieczności, ze śmierci do życia, od człowieka do bóstwa" (Eliade, 1998, p. 28)). The tediously extended return is in fact the beginning of the journey through the internal world of Nikita Firsov, a specific spiritual journey, in which the hero must decide which way to choose in order to reach his destination.

The Christian symbolism tells about the journey as specific routes travelled across by a person. In this image there is a double meaning: literal – a distance – and metaphorical – progress in the spiritual sphere (Forstner, 1990, p. 86). This very understanding of literal and metaphorical travelling along a certain distance, as pointed out in the texts by Andrei Platonov, turns out to be appropriate in the case of *The Lonely Voice of Man*. The return contemplated in the prologue announces that the film is going to be the story about overcoming consecutive barriers on Nikita's way to achieve perfection. In his attitude we can notice features of the "Holy Fool".

## Jumps

At the end of the prologue Firsov rises, throws away his bag, takes off the outerwear – the soldier's coat. This gesture may suggest the symbolic breakdown with the past. The very theme of taking off specific parts of clothes refers to the Bible: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Taking off the greatcoat indicates that the place where Nikita jumped resembles home, has the characteristics of transcendental space where neither the external protection nor tangible goods are necessary. It is worth noting that the blind about whom St. Mark writes took off his coat: "Throwing his cloak

aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus" (Mark 10: 46–52) to ask Christ to restore his sight. The coat was everything to him: protection against heat, bed, portable home. Therefore the blind disposed of the most precious thing so as to follow Jesus.

In the whole film the jumps of the characters into unknown space, black shots<sup>16</sup> and "pillow shots" show the narrative that goes beyond the framework of the story. They depict the transition to another reality, to the world which a soldier of the Red Army cannot enter with a "burden" – with the bag, in the soldier's coat. This is the way to the place where no one can slip smoothly. It is worth pointing out that [the Russian yurodivy has to be stigmatised with the mark of alienation – foreignness<sup>17</sup>] ("rosyjski jurodiwy naznaczony być musi piętnem obcości – cudzoziemskości" (Wodziński, 2000, p. 42)). The hero has to die in a sense so as to get reborn. Maciej Bobuła interprets the scene of throwing off the coat at the plot level of the story as an attempt to break with the past of war and liberate oneself from the post-war trauma (Bobuła, 2014, p. 208). At the metaphysical level this gesture – combined with the hero's jump from the hill – refers to the Bible and defines the way of Nikita Firsov as *iter mysticum*.

Jumps are one of the ways of examining the soul and the spirit (Szaniawski, 2014, p. 104). Like a dream, they are an attempted death, intrusion in the spirit world from which only some muffled sounds of surroundings can be heard. In Platonov's story *The Origin of a Master*, from which the director took the theme of fishermen wondering if they should check what was hidden in water depths, a daredevil jumping overboard does not surface any more. Sokurov shows something opposite: at the end of the film the character deeply shocked by its experience returns to the boat<sup>18</sup>. The return is confronted with inability to exceed a certain borderline and the suffering resulting from it. Wodziński noticed the cor-

<sup>16</sup> Sokurov practically does not apply subjective shots. The exception are black shots and "pillow shots". In Sokurov's debut film they intensify feelings, and this intensification happens because the viewer has time to "spread their emotions", to sink the emotions in the film image. As the image of the emptiness they are like a mirror: show internal experiences of the hero, his ups and downs on his way to the destination. But in Zen philosophy the mirror disperses after long meditation, as well as the entire world around the person gazing at the icon disappears. Only the Essence remains which finally the hero reaches after crossing the "gateway" of Luba's home. In turn, the black shots occur frequently close to the jumps, and this gives them a special character – an otherworldly look, a gap leading to another world.

<sup>17</sup> The emphasis done by Cezary Wodziński – A.K.

<sup>18</sup> The relationship between water and the motif of travel to another world is obvious. The river, which in the film space has got liminal nature, recalls the waters of Hades, through which the deceased went to the other side, to the kingdom of death. In Russian folk tradition the soul of the deceased on the fortieth day after the death crosses the river Zabyt (Oblivion) (Propp, 1998, p. 492), then forgets about all the events of earthly life. On the other side the deceased members of their family and friends are waiting. In the picture by Joachim Patinir *Crossing the River Styx* the boat flows from the left to the right. In the film *The Lonely Voice of Man* the river is presented in such a way that the left bank is virtually invisible, while the right part of the frame is dominated by trees plunged into darkness. The application of the cultural patterns makes us conclude that the dark area on the right bank of the river is just this "land of dead".



relation between the look inside a human being and an individual jump "into the depths". In both cases cognition is the aim.

Thus the author of *Św. Idiota* [St Idiot] expressed the thesis that the way of a yurodivy when the hero has to cross many thresholds of his own weaknesses, is a journey into the depths of the human whose direction is God or rather searching for God on the border of life and death.

The way contemplated in the prologue at the end of which the Orthodox church is, sets the direction appropriate for the fool-for-Christ. A similar shot with the temple can be seen at the end of the film when the desperate hero is running to his home town, having learned about the tragic condition of his wife. But he never enters the "house of God", which may be perceived as a type of betrayal committed by "God's chosen one", because the hero eventually reaches not the Orthodox church, but Luba's home.

## **Luba – the Goddess of the Sun, the epitome of the sacred**

We should not forget that a yurodivy is a master of delusion, and Sokurov thinks that [the feature film is a kind of »a play with a viewer« common experience] ("film fabularny to swego rodzaju »gra z widzem« wspólne przeżycie" (EM, 1989, p. 14)). Nikita as a "fool-for-Christ" knows that his aim is the unification with God, the eternal Love<sup>19</sup>, which in the film is symbolised by Luba. The risk of entering the path of yurodstvo is taken by the character blindly in a sense, but not without some light that appears in the alley at the first meeting with the girl and in this context it means the light of the Holy Spirit, the light of the will of God. From that moment the Sun will very often light Luba's house, in contrast to the dark space of the house of Nikita's father.

When a yurodivy joins the action, the world becomes subordinated to him and conveys information about what happens inside the hero. Therefore before the first meeting with Luba, in the alley strong wind gets up, reflecting the agitation of Firsov's spirit, and when the girl appears, the sun shines, and the man – like the moon – shows his glow. The very alley becomes a "cameo" (*kamea*)<sup>20</sup>, a shot that returns, and depending on the inner state of Nikita this alley is shown in the rain, illuminated by sunlight or plunged into darkness.

<sup>19</sup> The Russian name Luba – Любовь – this is the literal translation of the word "Love".

<sup>20</sup> Cameos – long shots on which nature, an empty town, an alley are seen, in which the action does not develop because it came to the peak, but one situation is deepened like in operatic arias. Their objective is to liberate our thinking from

The relationship of two young characters, based on the idea of pure, spiritual, unsummated love is the analogy of the perfect Creator's love to a human being. In this context it is relevant to recall Solov'ev's idea of "absolute unity" (вечное всеединство), which seems to be presented in the relationship between Nikita and Luba. The beautiful unity of the black clothes of the man and the white dress of the woman just after the scene of the wedding ceremony only confirms that they have been united in one spiritual body, resembling the perfect being – androgynous. The aim of such unity is the creation of a perfect and complete being, similar to the image of God<sup>21</sup>.

This thesis is also confirmed by the fact that Firsov does not show any physical interest in Luba, which is in line with his asceticism – when he is naked behind a screen during the wedding night, he dons the "robe"<sup>22</sup> of a yurodivy, which means that he ceases to be himself, he "dies for the world" so as to "throw himself into the world" (Wodziński, 2000, p. 57), to attain spiritual perfection and perfect love after death<sup>23</sup>.

The steppe soil which is brown, dried, burned by heat remains in close connection with the sunlight, and this soil is in perfect harmony with the hero's cloths of similar colour. Therefore we can conclude that the person in the film space is a horizon, a land over which the sun rises and goes down. In the film the analogy between the clothing "ageing" on the hero and Nikita Firsov's condition of spirit is expressed by the maximum similarity of the man's dress to the dried dark brown ground. The wayfarer thirsty for "the water of life" visits in the wilderness the hermitage of a monk to refresh himself before the final fight which is to be skirmished between forces of good and evil on the town marketplace.

## The image – the icon

According to Alexander Sokurov, the arts consist in discovering an archetype through "removing the curtain". An artist, like an icon painter, [does not create an image himself, but only removes the curtains from the already existing, immemorially existing picture, (...) reveals the »record« of spiritual reality] ("nie tworzy obrazu sam z siebie, lecz zdejmuje

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any restrictions which is taught by Zen philosophy, to focus on a specific moment and to get to the substance of the film image as to the interior of the icon. The deadline proposed by the Karol Irzykowski. See: Irzykowski (1977, p. 115).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Solov'ev (n.d.).

<sup>22</sup> The yurodivy is "naked for the world", so his attire will be here the metaphor of change that happens in the world by the very presence of the "fool for Christ".

<sup>23</sup> See section "skok" [jump], pp. 7–8.

tylko zasłony z istniejącego już, z istniejącego odwiecznie obrazu, (...) wyjawia »zapis« rzeczywistości duchowej" (Florenski, 1984, pp. 69–70)). If in the process of icon painting the aim is "revealing", tearing off the layers of an image so as to see the eternal "archetype (pre-image)", the sacred, thus in the films of the Russian director the truth about a human being is presented by building the mood of intimacy: through the use of filters, filming through the window, and the real presence of candles in the film space. The image is sometimes muzzy, smoky, contours are blurred, colours are worn, grey.

The film universe is heterogeneous, elusive because it is based on the transition [from one space to another, from one zone to another] ("z przestrzeni do przestrzeni, ze strefy do strefy"<sup>24</sup> (Florenski, 1984, p. 218)). The very borderline is construed dialectically: as something that divides and connects, restores the unity and eliminates contrasts. Exactly such dual status an iconostasis in the Orthodox church has, which links and separates at the same time visible and invisible space.

The director tries to understand how a person can overcome the awareness of their own mortality and how to live with this awareness<sup>25</sup>. Through the afore mentioned above measures he illustrates the spaces and liminal conditions, placing the viewer [behind the matte screen] ("za matową szybą" (Pitrus, 2003, p. 199)) like before the iconostasis in the Orthodox church and asking them to commune with what is behind the image. The poetics of Alexander Sokurov may, in this meaning and with full consciousness of limitations and differences that the film image causes, reflect the reversed perspective. The image invites the viewers to actively engage in the process, opens the doors and windows for the audience to look inside, because they are the part and the condition of the existence of the art work<sup>26</sup>. [The elegant beautification has to be disturbed for the destruction of vision] ("Elegancka estetyzacja ma zostać zaburzona na rzecz destrukcji widzenia" (Syska, 2014, p. 296)), giving a chance to display qualities of the soundtrack and acoustics (Uvarov, 2011,

<sup>24</sup> The world presented in the film is full of holes, windows, cracks, openings and other gateways that make the voyage of the hero – crossing between the worlds – possible in the space-time continuum of *The Lonely Voice of Man*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Proskurina (2002).

<sup>26</sup> An additional sign helping us look at Nikita and Luba as at the figures of the saints of the Russian icons is placing them in a wide variety of frames, embedding the characters in the frames created by door and window casings, screens, mirrors, etc. For example in the scene of looking through the old photo album, the figure of Nikita is placed in the frames separating him from the background. This special position of the character elevates the picture, it helps us look at him as at an icon behind which the true face is hidden, more important than the image itself. When in this stage Luba is presented in the mirror, as in the frame, an image is blurred at first, dancing like the flame of a candle, but after a while it becomes sharp. It is worth noticing that the position of the girl is very similar to the position of the angel of the icon *The Trinity* by Andrei Rublev. In order to notice the sacred, we must cross a certain frame, draw the curtain, penetrate through the layer of blurred, "degraded" image, at which Sokurov consistently aims in the analysed film.

pp. 16–17). The director in his work examined the entire spectrum of voices: hoot of animals, muttering, incoherent babble, and perfect diction. In the whole mosaic of sounds the human voice is the most important because it is able to express the groaning of the human soul.

## Conclusions

The way of Nikita understood as the journey of a yurodivy is full of difficulties, the overcoming of which can ensure the achievement of spiritual perfection. The initiated Firsov in *The Lonely Voice of Man* overcomes all these obstacles, because he knows the secret of his vocation, which pushes him to his destination on this specific *iter salutis*. The way of the "fool for Christ" has to be indirect, which is indicated in the intentionally extended prologue.

In the scene of viewing photos in the old album, the reflection of Nikita is visible in the mirror, which is an additional argument to support the thesis that the film is the story of the inside of the hero and takes place not in the real space, but in the metaphysical and spiritual space. Nikita "closed in the frame of the mirror" evokes Russian superstitions associated with death.

Sokurov, like many researchers<sup>27</sup>, also links the concept of a mirror with the concept of a gateway through which the soul can go to the other side to reach the inside of its own subconscious, meet its own true countenance. The blurred shots force our sense of sight to naturally adapt to the image. [Sokurov exceeds the limits of the film, rejecting what may appear to be the essence of cinematic quality] "Sokurov przekracza granice filmu, negując to, co może wydawać się istotą filmowości" (Pitrus, 2003, p. 198).

The director leads the viewer through the stages of the way of self-sacrifice, which is sometimes called [the way of the cross] ("droga krzyżowa" (Wodziński, 2000, p. 54)). What can happen after "Golgotha" is shown in the last scene at Luba's house. The hero reached his destination. Victory over death was presented by the conversation that is conducted outside the film frames and, that is in another, metaphysical space, while in the frame we can see a plant that breaks through the old boards, and in the background we can hear caw of ravens<sup>28</sup>. Therefore in the films of Alexander Sokurov we can find a separate version of infinite vision of a human being united with matter and subject to decay, and

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. W. Kopaliński, J. Cirlot.

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 4.

after death is given to the earth. The power of life and the mystery of death, the continuous travel towards intangible values are the distinctive signs of Alexander Sokurov's films, this is the consequence of Russian specificity and Orthodox tradition, which by the power of icons trains the audience to look into limbo, into depths and only then it is possible to look upwards.

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## **An attempt to approach the sacred through the film on the example of the analysis and interpretation of the journey of a yurodivy in the film *The Lonely Voice of Man* by Alexander Sokurov**

### **Abstract**

The author emphasises the relation between the content and the form of the film *The Lonely Voice of Man* by Alexander Sokurov and makes a point to place the film in the interpretation space which takes into account basic anthropological categories such as: space, time and a human. Artistic devices applied in the film lead to degradation of the image. Symbolism present in this debut work refers to a theme of a journey of a soul. All elements which appear in the film allow us to see *The Lonely Voice of Man* as an Orthodox icon. In this context the story of the main character can be perceived as a way of a yurodivy ("fool-for-Christ") who has to refrain from temptations, practice asceticism in order to attain spiritual perfection and holiness.

### **Keywords:**

film, Sokurov, death, journey, skaz, sacrum, yurodstvo, liminality



# Próba zbliżenia się do sacrum poprzez kino na przykładzie analizy i interpretacji drogi jurodiwego w filmie Aleksandra Sokurowa *Samotny głos człowieka*

## Abstrakt

W artykule szczególną uwagę zwrócono na ukazanie związku między treścią i formą filmu *Samotny głos człowieka* w reżyserii Aleksandra Sokurowa oraz na umieszczenie go na płaszczyźnie interpretacyjnej uwzględniającej podstawowe kategorie antropologiczne, takie jak: przestrzeń, czas i człowiek (bohater). Stosowane w filmie środki wyrazu powodują, że obraz ulega degradacji. Symbolika obecna w filmie nawiązuje do motywu wędrówki dusz. Wszystkie elementy stanowią podstawę do tego, by odnaleźć w debiucie Sokurowa cechy nawiązujące do prawosławnej ikony. W tym kontekście historia głównego bohatera jawi się jako droga jurodiwego, który musi pokonywać pokusy i zachowywać ascezę, by osiągnąć duchową doskonałość i dotrzeć do sacrum.

### Słowa kluczowe:

film, Aleksander Sokurow, śmierć, podróż, skaz, sacrum, jurodstwo, liminalność