East European Film Bulletin

ESSAY

Livings of Futures Past

Kostadin Bonev's *Sinking of Sozopol* (2014) as a Non-City Text

VOL. 137 (SEPTEMBER 2023) BY DAVID GOMIERO MOLINA

And who knows, if then

Rio might not

Be some sunken city

The divers will come

Explore your home

Your room, your things

Your soul, your nooks

– Chico Buarque, "Futuros Amantes".

Kostadin Bonev's 2014 film *The Sinking of Sozopol* presents something of a paradox of urban space. On the one hand, the film is explicitly coded as a city-text in the manner of Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* or James Joyce's *Ulysses*, a mystical and personal exploration of the Bulgarian town of Sozopol through the eyes of Chavo, a Sofia architect. Suffering a psychological breakdown, Chavo returns to the Black Sea resort – his childhood refuge – accompanied by ten bottles of vodka that he intends to consume in rapid succession. On the other hand – like in Ina Vultchanova's eponymous novel on which the film is based – the film tracks the systematic erasure of the urban, Sozopol's so-called "nonexistence," through a series of devices aimed at unmooring interpretation from geographical, historical, and epistemological solid ground.

The autophagic nature of Vultchanova's prose is central to the film's attempt to generate a view of Sozopol as a locus erased, as an Atlantis all but underwater. [1] With blank spaces separating the text's brief chapters, the novel's characteristic device is to take away the little it gives: even within individual literary units – sentences, paragraphs, chapters – details are undone, questioned, or contradicted, creating the illusion of non-writing, of the radical non-being of the characters and situations described. The larger plot, in fact, only progresses through the gradual accumulation of narrative shards that perdure through the oceanic ebb and flow of Vultchanova's language.

As in the novel, in Bonev's film, self-erasure is markedly aquatic. The title of the two works, "*The Sinking of Sozopol",* carries a twofold meaning: that of an apocalyptic threat still to come in which the town and its past will be destroyed by the elements, drowned by the Black Sea; and a state in which the urban transformations undergone in Sozopol over the last few decades – its metamorphosis into a "sanitized" commodity no longer recognizable to its inhabitants and long-time visitors – is already one of watery death, one that renders the "true city" accessible only in memory or flashback. The profusion of such returns to the past – along with the ontological ambiguity of the present – establishes an associative connection between Chavo's journey of self-examination, his "dive" into his earlier life, and a *scaphandrier*'s underwater attempt to uncover the material culture of a lost civilization. The film, in fact, exposes the metaphor by presenting viewers with images of a snorkeling Chavo's discovery of an underwater room in the Sozopol bay, replete with an icon, a wall, a window, and a bedframe. To find the room, to go under, has both social and psychological implications: it represents both an attempt to preserve, in memory, a Sozopol now dead to the eye, and a plunge into the dark recesses of the psyche to mollify trauma's stranglehold over the present. Chavo's coming to terms with his Sozopol past is one of the primary narrative arcs of the film.

In Bonev, however, the aquatic conceit is emphasized repeatedly: in the rippling effect applied to the paratextual material in the film's opening; in the shots of water and underwater life, ripe with jellyfish, algae, and bubbly effervescence; in images of swimming and submersion; and in shots of showering and cleaning. The watery motif's simultaneously prospective and retrospective temporal dimensions are also developed at the level of plot and personal history. One of the key traumatic moments in the life of Chavo is the death of his brother, Plamka, who, in a tragic accident, drowns in the sea of Sozopol. In returning to the town, Chavo is haunted by memories of his brother and of his relationship to their father Stefan, which are frequently triggered by matter and space: the stairs, the refrigerator, the shower water, the cabinet, the bedroom, the corridor, and the view of the bay itself. Watery submersion is thus associated with the site of Plamka's death and with the imperious father as a shared generational burden.

Stefan's brand of domineering fatherhood is marked by an extension of the individual personality beyond the locus of the body. Stefan treats his two children, Chavo and Plamka, as appendages to himself and, as such, behaves as though their successes and failures were not their own, but imputable to him as progenitor. In a late conversation with Chavo at the Czech club – after Chavo abandons his wife and children – Stefan calls attention to this dynamic by describing the relationship between himself and his boys as one of *continuation*, one that leads to a misrecognition of his children's agency and an attempt to possess what is properly theirs. Especially threatening to his identity as a People's Artist, however, is the popular perception of his children's artistic gifts. While studying at the academy to become a visual artist – following in the steps of his father – Plamka, at one point, displays samples of his artwork to his loved ones on the rightmost wall of the second floor of their Sozopol home. Unnerved by the perceived shortcomings of the drawings, Stefan cruelly and silently removes the tacks supporting the images and, in one instance, even begins to "correct" the picture with the aid of his own utensils. Chavo also recalls another art-related incident, this time from his childhood: having been asked to draw a snowman for a school assignment, Chavo presents his rendition to his father who, disapprovingly, draws his own iteration, insisting that Chavo submit the second to his teacher instead. If the latter interaction ultimately devolves into a largely failed attempt to impart painterly sight unto Chavo – the father forces the kid to look out the window to see the snow as an artist might, identifying the greenish tinge that arises from the white as sunlight falls upon it –, the mere substitution of the son for the father in the snowman assignment renders explicit the megalomaniacal scope of the fatherly persona.

The events leading up to the death of Plamka, however, are the most explicit manifestation of Stefan's patriarchal overreach. Very importantly, the Plamka drawings criticized by Stefan in the household exhibit were nude drawings of Plamka's girlfriend Gill, who also witnesses Plamka's humiliation. Gill, in fact, plays a crucial role in the conclusion of the scene: after he has attempted to "fix" one of Plamka's drawings, a drawing of her, Gill asks Stefan to sign it. His response, that he only signs things he draws slowly, sets the stage for the double betrayal that unfolds the subsequent evening. Rather than accompany Plamka to the bonfire where the youth of Sozopol spends its nights, Gill claims to have a headache and remains in the house in order to pose for Stefan in the nude. Plamka never suspects it, but Chavo, noticing their earlier interaction, interrupts the intimate drawing session and threatens them both, prompting the departure of Gill the following morning. Humiliated by his father and abandoned by his girlfriend in a short span of time, Plamka goes for a swim and dies, a tragedy that alters the family dynamic ever after. That Stefan feels guilty about his son's death is conveyed by his deathbed demeanor and behavior, but his renown as a painter, the film shows us, ultimately obscures the less pleasant facets of his character from the outside world. This is made evident in a late conversation between Chavo and Uncle Manol about the moral

standing of Stefan, Plamka, and Chavo himself. After Manol claims, naively, that Stefan was a “good man,” Chavo questions his judgment, adding, yet again, to the self-reflective tenor of the film.

In all of this, the town of Sozopol serves as both the trigger of recognition – as a catalyst of flashback – and as a site of alienation from the always already lost world of the past. The epistemological split between these seemingly contrasting reactions is often mapped across lines of sense-perception. If tactile, aural, and gustatory cues are stimuli for partial recognition, vision creates a sense of dissonance between the Sozopols of past and present.[2] Considering the film medium’s photographic qualities, the film’s insistence on associating the sight of urban space with loss (with what is, by definition, invisible) is remarkably destabilizing. If every image of the city in the present is marked by what it is not then Bonev’s city-film can only truly exist in our mind’s eye as the opposite of sight, as a blank reel, an astonishing equivalent of Vultchanova’s own attempt to write a language of loss that asymptotically approaches the blank page.

That Chavo’s alienation from the sight of Sozopol is socially and economically coded is communicated by various details in the film. The motif of decadence in the guise of economic growth, for instance, is a presence throughout. In a flashback conversation between Neva and Chavo unfolding the very day of Stefan’s death, Neva asks him elliptically: “Do you still like it?” Chavo’s response is telling: “Sozopol? No matter what awful things they do to it, the bay always stays the same”. The inversion of evidentiary weight between ocean and land is also telling: it is the former that preserves the past as radical change unfolds on shore.

In an interview dated 26 June 2020, Sozopol mayor Tihomir Yanakiev addressed some of the changes to the urban landscape of Sozopol by means of an explicit reference to Bonev’s film. “There are fewer and fewer remaining pristine places with authentic nature, natural places with birds, wild beaches. This shortage repels people, I believe. Especially more affluent tourists who prefer other exotic destinations.”[3] The immediate catalyst for Yanakiev’s interview was a protest against the Black Sea development project Aleppo Village, which was registered as a landslide protection wall by previous administrations, but similar protests have been a common occurrence over the past few decades. Yanakiev continues, “when I look at the new town of Sozopol, I immediately think of the title *Sinking of Sozopol.* I allude to the film because the whole city is packed, strewn with buildings, and it seems like it will sink at any moment.”[4] Particularly upsetting to activists are the perceived violations of the established environmental protection regulations that operate in Bulgaria’s Black Sea region. These include, among others, a building density cap (20%); a minimum quota of green areas to be preserved (70%); and a building height cap (7.5 meters).

Sozopol's natural and spiritual deterioration in the film, however – which accompanies its rise to prominence as not just a Bulgarian, but a European resort town – is also characterized by the turbot (*kalkan*), a species of fish typical of the region. When Chavo's friend Jingie arrives in Sozopol without warning to check on him, the two friends choose to eat in a beautiful restaurant overlooking the bay. Checking the menu, Jingie expresses his outrage at the prices: "28.90 leva for turbot? Seriously? This is with no side dishes. I just hope it is not from last year." The changes in the price of the stock – and in the quality on offer as perceived by local and domestic visitors – reflect the resortification of Sozopol described by mayor Yanakiev: like the fish, the town itself has become more expensive and less authentic, less fresh. The dialog goes on:

> JINGIE: Back in the day, there were no freezers. They bought fish right from the port. Also, the cats were hungry.
>
> CHAVO: Since they started folding the napkins like fans, the cats have disappeared. There are no more cats. The cats ate their fill and completely disappeared.

The decrease in prominence of the city's stray cats, the rise in prices, the need to freeze fish to serve visitors year-round, and the arrival of fine dining in the form of fanned napkins, are the markers of the social and economic revolution undergone by Sozopol that so alienates Jingie and Chavo, its long-time visitors. That these transformations are sparked by an influx of international guests to the town is spectacularly revealed in a wide-angle shot of the table in which the characters are seated. This may be the only time we are shown an image of a mass gathering in the film – the restaurant is full –, a kind of visual commentary on the economic discussion unfolding in dialog.

The turbot-city connection is further developed through two additional episodes. Later that day, an already inebriated Chavo claims that the turbot eaten by the group "was not normal"; moreover, Chavo later asks a saleswoman on the street if her turbot is genetically modified, which she affirms is true. At the very moment in which Sozopol is subject to a plague of slugs – a quasi-Biblical event that foreshadows the image of sinking that brings the film to a close – the street seller's fish remains untouched, pristine, a perfect counterpoint to the neighborhood vegetable store, which has been completely ravaged by the shell-less mollusks. The metamorphosis in the fish's genetic make-up, too, is symbolic of the internal transformations of the city, a mark of its spiritual corrosion. For Chavo, Sozopol has become something of a latter-day Gomorrah, a city ripe for destruction through fire or water: "This [Sozopol] was the only refuge, a place where you could hide, but nothing is left of this place. There are no safe refuges anymore. […] [A refuge] from all this shit! How can you hide from all this shit except in the bottom of the sea?"

The principal issue that animates the *Sinking of Sozopol,* however, is ontological-epistemological and involves inquiring into the rules that govern the world presented in the "current" (non-flashback) timeline of the film. In this section of the film, Bonev destabilizes sight as a way of knowing: *The Sinking of Sozopol* flourishes in its ability to provide the viewer with contradictory interpretations of supernatural events that challenge the epistemological status of vision and give rise to the fantastic.

Tzvetan Todorov defines the fantastic as a genre in which a certain normative ambiguity governs the world of a supernatural literary narrative. When faced with a strange event, a devil or a vampire, the person who experiences the occurrence "must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of sense, a product of imagination – and the laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but […] this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us."[5] For Todorov, the fantastic qua genre only properly operates if this uncertainty is not resolved. The moment we, as readers, are given enough information to accurately choose between one response or the other, we abandon the fantastic in favor of adjacent genres such as the uncanny, where a straightforward explanation of the supernatural event – say through madness, a state of dreaming, or drug-induced hallucination – explains away the anomaly, or the marvelous, which effects a complete suspension of the application of everyday life as an approach to the world of the text (e.g. talking animals in fables).

The flashbacks in *The Sinking of Sozopol* reflect Chavo's memories. These memories are not "views from nowhere" but colored by his own perspective of childhood and its surroundings. The present timeline, starting with Chavo's decision to spend his sick leave in Sozopol, is similarly unreliable. Scriptwriters Bonev and Vultchanova depict a number of unusual events in their story, such as Chavo's conversations with Gina, who, as we later discover, has been dead for over a year; a windless rainstorm; a slug infestation; and Chavo's friends unexpectedly gathering in town before he drinks his tenth vodka bottle. Chavo does not seem surprised by all this. However, viewers are left puzzled. The instability and uncertainty raised by these strange events are similar to the instabilities already identified in the much smaller scales of past-present, land-water, and memory-sight. The following analysis thus argues that *The Sinking of Sozopol* places the viewer in the uncomfortable position of having to alternate between shots of personal memory and of a world whose epistemological ground remains uncertain. It is therefore a film with no firm ontological ground. Below, I explore the competing explanations given to supernatural events in the film's present timeline to elucidate how its creators instantiate a Todorovian *cinéma fantastique.*

The first explanation provided for the unusual events in *Sinking of Sozopol* is a view of Chavo as mad or in need of medical treatment. Medical terms are used

right from the start of the film, in the first line spoken by Chavo after the initial flashback: “I wake up, but I don’t know who or where I am. Once I was put under full anesthesia. An amazing high but a bad hangover. They told me to count back from 10. I made it to 6…”

In this early scene, the film blurs “uncanny” explanations: linking anesthesia with waking up that is then portrayed as substance use. Though we have no reason to suppose that Chavo’s trip to Sozopol is anything like anesthesia, the scene that follows suggests that a diagnosis of some kind could be impairing his ability to properly understand the world around him. Along with a ticket to Vienna to see his ex-wife and children, Doc – one of Chavo’s best friends – gives him a prescription for pills. While the exact nature of Chavo’s illness is left open, we may identify disillusionment with the world or signs of depression. The pill interchange also makes an even more serious diagnosis possible – one of paranoia, perhaps, with hallucinatory effects that might then significantly alter how we understand the episodes that follow. That Chavo could indeed be mad is suggested by Jingie on more than one occasion.

In this opening scene, the intriguing acting choices made by Doc (Stefan Valdobrev) and Chavo (Deyan Donkov) underscore the film’s deliberate pursuit of ambiguity and unresolved outcomes. Throughout the scene, Chavo fails to eat the eggs Doc puts in front of him. With each half-hearted attempt to pin the omelet with his fork, it slips away and slides back into the ceramic pot in which it was cooked. Doc, on the other hand, is very precise and direct when pinning and eating the egg, proficiently catching every piece and putting them in his mouth. Donkov’s acting here aims to highlight a sense of uncertainty or absent-mindedness, an inability to pierce through the truth like an omelet with a fork. This becomes clear at the end of the scene. When, at last, Chavo is able to get some of the egg off the pan, he lets a large chunk of it fall down on the table even as he chews the remaining bit very slowly. Not long after, he takes the prescription for the medicine Doc gives him and wipes the eggs with it. The film tells us that Chavo will go without medicine for the rest of the story. Could this be the reason why he begins to see his friends appear in Sozopol? When Doc arrives in town, Chavo returns to this moment with the line: “I’ve stopped the pills, Doc. Actually, I think I’m Jesus Christ. And since no one believes me, I decided to come to Sozopol. To drink ten bottles of vodka and then kill myself.”

With Chavo’s mention of alcohol, we are given the second explanation of the mysterious events unfolding in the film: substance abuse. After all, the film revolves around Chavo planning to drink a bottle of Stolichnaya vodka every day for ten days, waiting for *something* to happen. Throughout the film, Chavo is almost always seen drinking. Because of this, it could easily be suggested that the vodka, combined with his already unstable mental health, might be causing the hallucinations he experiences in the film. Chavo experiences hallucinations, including hearing things and feeling paranoid, similar to alcohol-induced hallucinations. This happens in moments such as when he imagines his

father alive or when he swims in the bay. Poor health and substance use might be behind these strange circumstances.

Sleep or dreaming is the third non-supernatural explanation for the mysterious events that occur in the film. Chavo, viewers will remember, falls asleep on the bus on the way to Sozopol, references “waking up” while not knowing where he is, before entering Doc’s house, and is presented in the midst of various nightmares as his experiences in the city unravel. Is it possible that everything we see, from the bus trip onwards, is a complex series of nested dreams?

This concludes the straightforward explanations for the uncanny events that occur in the present-day timeline of *The Sinking of Sozopol.* However, they do not fully account for the intricacies of the visions experienced by Chavo. Conjectures about the state of Chavo’s mental health, his level of alcohol poisoning or state of consciousness cannot answer the questions: Why Gina? Why slugs?

A complementary explanation may be found in the supernatural realm. The first and most developed interpretation of the text suggests that Sozopol is a magical town that connects with another world or dimension. This idea resonates with the city-text tradition, particularly with works like Andrei Bely’s *Petersburg*, where spirits, history, and present life interact in a magical urban space. In this magical reading of the film, Chavo’s arrival in Sozopol and his need for help bring Gina, Neva’s best friend, back to the world of the living. In this interpretation, then, Gina is sent to Sozopol as a guardian angel. She follows Chavo around town and sends emails and messages to his loved ones with cries of help, summoning them to Sozopol to stop Chavo’s vodka craze. This interpretation is significantly shaped by one of Gina’s letters to Neva: “It’s super cold and the town is empty even though it’s June 10. Nothing looks real. I feel like I’m sending letters from some other dimension and they’re sinking into a black hole. You’ve surely realized that I’m at some sort of crossroads.”

The view that Sozopol is a source of supernatural activity gains support when considering another person in town who can communicate with the dead: a mysterious woman named Auntie Dena. Dena’s role in the film is to dissuade the viewer from thinking that Gina is Chavo’s private ghost. She helps viewers understand that Gina is not only visible to him alone. Gina’s separate existence, in fact, is strongly emphasized: she is often shown by herself, writing emails by the lighthouse on her computer. Dena’s apparent omniscience and supposed physical difference from Gina, back when she was alive, only make the situation more puzzling.

That there might be a magical and possibly dangerous dimension to Sozopol is also a constitutive feature of the Plamka-Gill narrative. When Plamka meets Gill for the first time and he touches her, he is surprised to discover that contrary to popular belief, she does not have gills that allow her to swim underwater like a fish. Plamka’s final words before passing away are that merpeople – humans

with gills – do exist, despite evidence against it. A possible connection between Gill and a mermaid is further underscored by the song “Plachesh li” by Reviu, sung in the bonfire scene in which Gill and Plamka are seen spending time together. The text of the song reads:

> On a black horse in the darkness I come
>
> Hugging the darkness I carry sadness
>
> The night enters my chest
>
> With a woman’s quiet steps
>
> Come to the edge of the cliff,
>
> From there my world begins
>
> In front of us the moon rises
>
> But the shadow is left behind…
>
> Are you crying?…You are alive

In Reviu’s rendering of the song, the opening four lines are sung by a male voice while a choir of women sings the next four lines, beginning with “Come…”. The lines “In front of us the moon rises/The shadow is left behind” create the effect of a siren choir. Gill’s name and his connection to this song provide another magical explanation for Plamka’s death: he drowns for not having gills after falling in love with a *rusalka.*

Still following Todorov’s concept of the fantastic, *The Sinking of Sozopol* provides another source of magical power apart from the city: Chavo himself. One of the most plausible supernatural interpretations of the film suggests that what we see happening in the city is merely a projection of Chavo’s own soul. This transforms him into a demiurge responsible for the supernatural events unfolding in the town. A few interactions, in fact, render this possible magical blending of inner and outer experiences explicit. One example is the moment in which Chavo asks Doc whether he thinks that he, Chavo, is causing it to rain. Doc’s reply is highly Todorovian: “this is a possibility we cannot rule out.” Another moment like this happens when Jingie, in a late-night drunken conversation, blames Chavo for the destruction of his family. He says, paradoxically, “You destroyed Plamka, you destroyed your father, you destroyed Neva too.” How could the family tragedy be linked to Chavo except through mystical or magical means? Is the reliving of the past throughout the film an act of destruction, a way of exorcizing each friend before the final apocalypse arrives? Jingie’s next line presents this as an option: “What else do you want to destroy?” “Who knows,” says Chavo, “How about Sozopol! It’s a

shithole, if you ask me."

Chavo's professional identity as an architect underscores the demiurgic reading, as it calls attention to Bonev's own idiosyncratic view of Sozopol's urban environment. As Bonev himself has highlighted,[6] *Sinking of Sozopol* represents a highly selective cut of the town's urban space. Gone are the beautiful beaches, blue skies, resorts, crowds of tourists, and many of the characteristic landmarks at the heart of Sozopol's Old Town such as its churches, galleries, restaurants, and street vendors. Instead, what we are shown is a ghost city populated by meandering seaside paths, gray skies, solar railings, and two-story Revival houses characteristic of the 18th and 19th century Bulgarian Black Sea coast. With a ground level made of stone that historically served as storage space for commercial and fishing activities and a sunlit residential floor made of adobe with wooden floors and paneling, the Revival house in the film becomes the defining feature of Sozopol, the architectural nexus around which the present and past narratives of the film revolve.

Bonev, in fact, employs the natural differences in luminosity that characterize the lower and upper floors of the Revival house to great effect in the film: as a general rule, scenes set on the ground floor of the house are dark, mysterious, cold, and alienating – an atmosphere that is magnified by the stone floors and limited access to natural light – while sequences on the upper floor are warmer, well-lit, and backgrounded by vistas of the sea. In defining the Revival house and especially its interior as the characteristic marker of Sozopol in the cinematic imaginary, Bonev architecturally highlights Chavo's self-reflective stance in the film. In *Sinking of Sozopol,* space appears to move from the outside to the inside: from the ocean into the house and into the mind.

Bonev's urban sleight of hand, however, is marked by a move from the inside out. Alongside the inordinate role played by the Revival house in the film – in detriment to other slices of space that might equally define the Sozopol landscape – is the fact that the film is not shot entirely in Sozopol*.* For both logistical and aesthetic reasons, a lot of what passes for Sozopol in the film is in fact located in the adjacent towns of Akhtopol and Sinemorets, a fact that underscores the fantastic quality of the urban environment portrayed in the film. To search contemporary Sozopol for vistas of Bonev's work thus is, perhaps by design, an endeavor destined but for partial success. Just as Sozopol is, in the demiurgic reading, portrayed as Chavo's own creation, a reflection of his inner state, Bonev's city may well be a fabricated urban environment that exists only on screen, a cinematic montage of three Black Sea towns crafted to authentically capture not a real place but a symbolic one. As Bonev himself put it: "Sozopol is a symbol for Bulgarians. In a way, Sozopol is the catch (*ulovkata)*."[7]

In the film, the storm and slugs that take over the town give further credence to the reading of Chavo as an apocalyptic Christ figure who has come to bring

about the city's ultimate demise. The association between Chavo's behavior, spells, the slugs, and the rain is established by yet another unusual dialog between Doc and Chavo.

> CHAVO: Do you think I've come to Sozopol to cast magical spells and make sacrifices? Don't tell me you believe in magic.
>
> DOC: Magic is magic. And rain is rain.

That Chavo believes something will happen when the 10th vodka bottle is finished – something that, as in Tarkovsky's *Sacrifice,* does in fact take place (the television stops working, the electricity runs out, and the four dogs of catastrophe, standing in for horses, announce themselves as the water level rises) – is another justification of this reading. Could it be that Chavo's own self-destruction – his suicide – is simply being projected onto the cosmos? Could the erasure of this city merely stand in for Chavo's own departure from the world of the living? Bonev's *cinéma fantastique* is however Todorovian in its indecision. It is *The Sinking of Sozopol's* radical refusal to position itself in relation to any of these questions – neither through denial nor through confirmation – that animates the work's philosophical burden: to a create a cinematic world whose rules remain indeterminate; to render a photographic medium less reliable than other memory-senses; and to film a non-city-text about the past that, far from being a foreign country, is definitionally inaccessible to the eye.

References

1. In the Sinking(s) of Sozopol, the relevant spatial conception is not so much Marc Augé's "non-place,'' a challenge to ethnography's spatial rootedness through an appeal to what he calls the "overabundance of the present'' (33-35) as embodied by changes of scale, a proliferation of mass media, the acceleration of means of transportation, and movements of population, but the one characterized by Pierre Nora in the preface to the first volume of Lieux de memoire. To quote Nora in Augé: "What we are seeking […] through our religious accumulation of personal accounts, documents, images and all the `visible signs of what used to be' is what is different about now; and `within the spectacle of this difference the sudden flash of an unfindable identity. No longer a genesis, but a deciphering of what we are in the light of what we are no longer'' (25-26). Marc Augé. (1995). Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, translated by John Howe. London: Verso.
2. The film's concluding voiceover also emphasizes the unreliability of vision: "If you are forced for some reason to return to this town, close your eyes and don't look at all. Why bother looking, you remember it, don't you?

Smell it, it still smells good, if you avoid the donut stands. You can still hear it in certain places. Remember, the Sozopol you will see if you come here exists only temporarily. There is no trace of our Sozopols.'' Bonev's use of montage, too, often privileges other senses as markers of structural unity between frames. Chavo's tango record spurs the image of the mother and father dancing with the children; the taste of the sausage connects the mother's afternoon reading of Flaubert in the porch of the Sozopol house with her last moments in the Sofia cancer ward; falling objects from the cabinet bring about memories of the wife and children, etc.

3. Teodora Burzakova. 16 June 2020. "Potavaneto na Sozopol – edna istoriya na 15 godini'', BGVoice: https://bgvoice.com/potuvaneto-na-sozopol-edna-istoriia-na-15-godini [Accessed on 1 December 2023].
4. Burzakova 2020.
5. Tzvetan Todorov. (1973). The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre. Cleveland/London: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 25.
6. Veneta Pavlova. 14 November 2014. `Potavaneto na Sozopol' – film za vinata i nadezhdata'', Radio Bulgaria: https://bnr.bg/radiobulgaria/post/100485401/potavaneto-na-sozopol-film-za-vinata-i-nadejdata [Accessed on 1 December 2023].
7. Emil Spahiiski. 2 April 2015. "Kostagin Bonev: Sozopol e simvol za balgarina'', Trud News: https://trud.bg/article-4692609/ [Accessed on 1 December 2023].