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PERFORMING TRAUMA AND MEMORY IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN CINEMA:

MULTIMODAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE GUIDE

TETIANA KRYSANOVA
Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Ukraine

Tetiana Krysanova is a Professor of Linguistics at Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, Ukraine. She holds a PhD degree for her thesis on emotive meaning-making in film discourse. Her research interests focus on film semiotics, discourse and multimodal studies, and cognitive pragmatics.
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9456-3845

Corresponding author
Tetiana Krysanova
Voli Ave, 13, Lutsk, Volyn Oblast, 43025,
krysanova@vnu.edu.ua

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Abstract

This study explores the multimodal construction of trauma and memory in contemporary Ukrainian cinema, focusing on *The Guide* (2014). Ukrainian films increasingly address historical and political trauma, negotiating personal and collective suffering through embodied and sensory cinematic practices. Drawing on multimodal discourse theory and trauma studies, the analysis examines how visual, verbal, auditory, gestural, spatial, and temporal resources converge in constructing trauma and memory. In *The Guide*, trauma is foregrounded as a bodily phenomenon which renders psychological and moral conflict visible, transforming suffering into an affective experience. It merges individual grief with collective trauma. Multimodal orchestration collapses the temporal distinctions between past and present. Memory is enacted through ritualized practices, including musical performance and material artifacts. Songs, clothing, and instruments such as the bandura function as mnemonic tools that frame memory as participatory and situate Ukrainian national identity within sensory frameworks. *The Guide* exemplifies a distinctive trajectory in Ukrainian cinema by emphasizing corporeality and ritualized memory as central to cultural resilience. By showing how trauma and memory are multimodally enacted, the film demonstrates the inseparability of historical suffering and cultural continuity, offering a new insight into the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of post-Soviet cinematic practices.

Keywords: film, Ukraine, trauma, memory, multimodality, discourse, The Guide

Introduction

> "*In times of tyranny and injustice, there are always singers, those who tell people about the times when they were strong, proud and free*" (Sanin, 2014, 00:00:16)

These words from the film *The Guide* (*Поводир)* (Sanin, 2014) resonate deeply with Ukraine's ongoing efforts to preserve its national identity, focusing on the role of art and memory amid repression and trauma. Trauma, both historical and collective, has shaped Ukraine's cultural memory and continues to influence its artistic representations. Decades of political repression during the Soviet period have resulted in a significant destruction of intellectuals, contributing to the restraint of linguistic and cultural autonomy (Kipiani, 2020; Sinchenko, Stus, & Finberg, 2021). The Holodomor, an artificial famine of 1932-33 that claimed millions of lives, remains one of the most traumatic events in the collective memory of the nation (Kulchytsky, 2008; Applebaum, 2017). These historical traumas are now being refracted through the experience of ongoing Russian aggression, from the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Donbas to the full-scale invasion of 2022. In this multi-layered landscape of historical and contemporary violence, the question of national identity is constantly reinterpreted in films.

This article examines how contemporary Ukrainian cinema represents trauma and memory, focusing on the embodiment and contestation of national identity under political repression and historical violence. Using *The Guide* directed by Oles Sanin as a case study, it analyzes how the film transforms early Soviet history into embodied and affective experiences of suffering. Through the narrative of a young boy navigating oppression, the film employs bodily expression, ritualized gestures, musical performance, and spatial-temporal composition to communicate trauma and memory. The musical instrument functions as a repository of heritage, linking individual suffering to national identity.

As Blight (2009) argues, the critical examination of a nation's traumatic history enables processes of healing, commemoration, accountability, or at least understanding. Societies carry deep and often unspoken wounds that require exposure and acknowledgment. For Ukraine, a postcolonial and post-totalitarian society that has experienced multiple historical traumas over the past century, representing and interpreting this complex history has become especially urgent in the context of the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war, which directly threatens the country's national identity. Cinema, as both a cultural artifact and a multisensory medium, interprets and embodies trauma through the dynamic interplay of semiotic modes, integrating visual imagery, sound, movement, gesture, and spatial composition. As Coëgnarts (2017) notes, cinema engages viewers cognitively and bodily, employing metaphor and embodied simulation to produce meaning that resonates at the sensory and affective levels.

Ukrainian filmmakers explore collective and transgenerational trauma by creating works that embody lived experience and evoke memories of violence and survival in the viewer. In Nariman Aliyev's *Homeward (Додому)* (Aliyev, 2019), a father's struggle to return his son's body to Crimea intertwines personal grief with the collective trauma of the Crimean Tatar community. *The Century of Jakub (Століття Якова)* (Nedich, 2021) traces a Ukrainian peasant family through wars and Soviet repression. It shows how intergenerational trauma shapes identity with memory linking personal suffering to collective history. In *And There Will Be People* (*І будуть люди)* (Nepytaliuk, 2019), individual struggles unfold against the broader tragedies of the Holodomor and cultural suppression, which demonstrates how historical trauma informs collective memory and national identity.

The literature on the representation of trauma in film is well-established, encompassing diverse theoretical and methodological approaches that examine its complex narrative and aesthetic dimensions. Modern works reveal several

distinct but complementary approaches. The narrative-psychoanalytic framework, exemplified by Whitehead (2004), foregrounds trauma's disruption of linear storytelling and the impossibility of fully representing traumatic experience. The work highlights fragmented narratives and haunting imagery as formal expressions of trauma's paradoxical nature. Another approach is centered on cultural memory and political trauma, as developed by Radstone (2007) and Cook (2005). It explores film's role in mediating collective memory and negotiating historical wounds within public discourse, with the focus on trauma's social and identity-forming dimensions. More recent work by Koehne and Kabalek (2014) adopts an aesthetic and ethical dimension for how films confront the unspeakable aspects of violent experience through visual and narrative strategies.

Research on trauma in Ukrainian cinema remains limited and fragmented, with most studies concentrating on either narrative structure or visual semiotics. The concept of "cinema of traumatic reality" proposed by Demura (2024) describes post-2014 Ukrainian films that combine aesthetic depth with truthful depictions of trauma, portraying flawed characters as active witnesses to collective suffering. In analyses of Ukrainian Holocaust films, Sharpylo (2022) demonstrates how visual language functions both as commemoration and as an open semiotic space for postmodern trauma discourse. Examining wartime Ukraine, Prykhodko (2024) highlights the phenomenological and cultural dimensions of visual media to explore how visual media shapes national identity and mediates collective trauma. Kanivets (2022) points to the structural constraints of Ukrainian cinema, including ideological control and limited production capacity, and argues that these conditions amplify the cultural significance of works addressing historical trauma.

Despite these contributions, the existing scholarship overlooks the ways multimodal strategies, such as the integration of sound, movement, gesture, and spatial composition, embody trauma. This article addresses that gap by applying a multimodal framework to examine how trauma and memory are enacted in *The Guide*. Multimodality functions as a medium through which trauma is embodied and collectively remembered, thereby reinforcing connections to national identity. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 2) observe, "common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes, and in which it is therefore quite possible for music to encode action, or images to encode emotion." From this perspective, multimodality reveals how Ukrainian cinema enacts cultural memory and articulates resilience in the face of systemic threats.

In this paper, I aim to elaborate on the following research questions:

RQ 1: How does *The Guide* represent trauma as an embodied phenomenon through bodily expression and cinematic techniques?

RQ 2: How does the film enact cultural memory through multimodal resources, linking historical suffering to Ukrainian national identity and heritage?

RQ 3: How do visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and temporal modes interact to convey trauma and memory to the audience?

Theoretical framework

The study of trauma in contemporary Ukrainian cinema necessitates an understanding of trauma as both a personal and collective phenomenon. As Caruth (1996) argues, trauma is 'unspeakable' because the experience exceeds the capacity of language itself, returning instead through silence, fragmentation, or nonverbal forms of expression. Moreover, trauma resists immediate comprehension at the moment of occurrence; it returns belatedly, often beyond conscious

control: "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (p. 9). This belated structure demonstrates the paradoxical character of trauma: it is simultaneously present as a lived experience and absent as something that can be comprehended or integrated into memory. Cinema is particularly suited to capturing this paradox. Its capacity for non-linear storytelling provides formal means of representing what Caruth describes as "the narrative of a belated experience" (Caruth, 1996, p. 4) characteristic of traumatic memory.

Precisely because of this paradox, trauma is inseparable from memory. Trauma persists through its disruptive returns in memory. In cinema, this manifests in fragmented structures or embodied forms that evoke trauma indirectly through gesture, sound, or silence, rather than through straightforward narration. Memory functions as the site where the past becomes visible as affective, often painful, re-experiencing.

As trauma exists only in and through memory, it cannot be reduced to the individual phenomenon but must be understood as embedded in broader social frameworks. This is where Halbwachs' (1992) theory of collective memory claims that individual memory is never isolated; it is always "embedded" within collective memory schemes structured by social groups and institutions. A person does not remember independently but through an interpretation provided by community and culture. Consequently, even deeply personal trauma enters a broader social space, becoming part of the collective memory. In the Ukrainian context, this insight clarifies how extended periods of Soviet ideological control have systematically suppressed or distorted collective memories. Historical traumas were silenced for decades, and their representation in cinema has become one of the main aspects of modern cultural revival, making visible the repressed dimensions of history.

Assmann (2011) further develops the affective and communicative dimensions of memory, stressing that social interactions and media preserve and transmit memories over time. As she explains, "Communicative memory is characterized by its proximity to the everyday, by its strong emotive charge, and by its embedding in the life-world of groups bound together by living memory" (p. 37). Cinema translates private, emotionally charged recollections into publicly accessible narratives through collective spectatorship and shared affective engagement. In this way, films allow these experiences to circulate beyond the lives of direct witnesses and to resonate across generations.

Grounded in these social and communicative dimensions, Rothberg's (2009) concept of multidirectional memory emphasizes that traumatic memories circulate across communities, historical periods, and cultural contexts. Memory, Rothberg argues, is both collective and shared, produced within social frameworks and mediated through cultural networks: "in both its individual and collective versions, memory is closely aligned with identity" (p. 4). This connection between memory and identity is salient in Ukrainian cinema, where films link historical traumas such as Soviet repression and the Holodomor with contemporary experiences of war and occupation, embedding them within broader processes of nation-building. By framing the public sphere as a "malleable discursive space" (p. 5), Rothberg underscores the dynamic character of collective memory, in that it is constantly reshaped through social interaction. This perspective highlights memory's ethical and political dimensions as it provides the grounds for constructing visions of justice and confronting (pp. 15–16). In this context, Ukrainian films operate not only as sites of storytelling but also as active agents in negotiating national identity and social justice amid ongoing conflict.

Drawing on Merleau-Ponty (1962) and Fuchs (2012), this approach focuses on the body as the central site of experience, where traumatic events influence perception and emotional

responses. As Merleau-Ponty asserts, "the body is our general medium for having a world" (p. 169), which means that all perception, including memory, is mediated through embodied being. Perception is always situated and relational, arising through interactions between the body and its environment. The body holds a form of pre-reflective knowledge that precedes conscious thought and includes habits, gestures, and movements that preserve past experiences. Memory, therefore, can be conceived as a form of corporeal inscription, layering experience into bodily comportment. Merleau-Ponty further emphasizes that embodied meaning extends beyond natural objects to cultural artifacts, including language and media: "it is my body which gives significance not only to natural objects but also to cultural objects like words" (p. 273). Cinema, integrating sound and image, exemplifies this principle: its elements interact to create meanings that cannot be reduced to their individual parts. In this sense, cinematic form, including camera angles, rhythm, and sound, can reflect the embodied logic of traumatic memory in ways that reflect how traumatic experiences are actually felt and remembered.

According to Fuchs (2012), mental processes, including trauma, emerge through the interplay of the body and social environment. Fuchs describes body memory as a habit structure in which "situations and actions experienced in the past are… fused together" (p. 91) forming implicit bodily knowledge and skill. This memory, Fuchs argues, "does not take one back to the past, but conveys an implicit effectiveness of the past in the present" (p. 91). This clarifies how trauma is enacted cinematically. For example, in *The Guide,* fragmented gestures and sensory atmospheres reactivate historical trauma, resonating between characters and audiences. Through embodied memory, the film links individual suffering with broader national experiences of endurance and resistance.

Thus, trauma in Ukrainian cinema appears as both a personal and collective phenomenon. It doesn't conform to linear narrative due to its fragmented and overwhelming character, while collective memory shapes how these experiences circulate, linking suppressed histories with nation-building and ethical reflection. At the same time, an embodied approach highlights how trauma is inscribed in corporeal relations. These tendencies underscore the multimodal nature of how Ukrainian films construct and transmit trauma.

Multimodal perspective on trauma and memory

The present study adopts a multimodal perspective to examine trauma and embodied memory in Ukrainian cinema, situating its approach within established traditions of multimodal discourse analysis. Following Kress (2010), multimodality is understood as a theoretical framework that treats communication as involving the interplay of multiple semiotic modes. From a social semiotic perspective, modes are culturally and socially shaped resources that individuals and communities draw upon to communicate and shape experience. Meaning emerges from the orchestration of diverse semiotic resources—visual, auditory, verbal, gestural, spatial—whose affordances are socially and culturally formed. The potential of various modes to convey meaning in film follows the underlying regularities of the human mind as humans are able to blend their experiences (Krysanova, 2023). This perspective emphasizes that meaning emerges through the dynamic integration of multiple modes in complex communicative phenomena such as film.

Jewitt, Bezemer, and O'Halloran (2016) emphasize that modes are interdependent, and that meaning arises from the combination of images, sounds, and other semiotic resources into ensembles. This approach frames film analysis around how modes work together, allowing complex experiences such as trauma to become communicable. Mapping semiotic resources as an analytical tool makes it possible to trace their interactions and to show how meaning is distributed across visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial modes.

Within this framework, Kress's (2010) notion of multimodal orchestration allows us to understand the interconnection of modes in meaning-making. Orchestration refers to the dynamic coordination of modes into a coherent whole, foregrounding how semiotic resources are arranged to complement or contrast with one another and thus guide interpretation. Cinema relies on precisely such an orchestration of heterogeneous resources—camera work, music, words, mise-en-scène, bodily performance—to construct meaning. In the representation of trauma, orchestration highlights not only what is shown or said but also how the elements of different semiotic systems converge into patterns. These patterns are viewed as "emergent discursive constructs," in which changes to individual semiotic elements can alter the meaning of the entire ensemble (Krysanova, Shevchenko, 2022, p. 246).

The systematic framework of multimodal film analysis developed by Bateman and Schmidt (2012) complements this orientation by demonstrating how film structures meaning through the interplay of shots, editing, sound, and composition. While primarily formal, their account provides tools for tracing the material organization of multimodal ensembles, which can then be interpreted in relation to trauma's disruptive and embodied qualities.

Finally, approaches such as Machin and Mayr's (2012) multimodal critical discourse analysis prove that semiotic arrangements are socially and ideologically positioned. This insight makes it possible to extend multimodal analysis beyond technical descriptions to questions of cultural memory and the politics of representing trauma.

These perspectives provide the theoretical grounding for the present study. They enable us to view trauma in *The Guide* as a multimodal phenomenon: simultaneously spoken and unspeakable, represented and resisted, narrated and embodied. This framework makes it possible to analyze how the film orchestrates diverse semiotic resources — language, music, gesture, sound, and image — to stage trauma as both communicable and in excess of communication. Within this framework, the film becomes legible as an embodied negotiation of trauma and memory.

To fully understand the distinctive ways in which trauma and memory are constructed in contemporary Ukrainian cinema, and why these experiences are represented through multimodal means, it is essential to examine the social and political conditions that have shaped their emergence. Analyzing cinematic representations within their broader historical context reveals how contemporary Ukrainian films convey collective experiences and cultural resilience.

Socio-political foundations of trauma-oriented contemporary Ukrainian cinema: national identity under siege

The emergence of contemporary Ukrainian cinema's engagement with traumatic memory is rooted in a complex interplay of historical legacies, political transformations, and ongoing social upheavals. For decades, Ukraine's cinematic tradition was under the influence of ideological control and cultural suppression of the Soviet system, which led to the erosion of the national identity of Ukrainians. From the 1930s to the late 1980s, film production was subject to strict censorship, which dictated the narratives allowed by the ruling propaganda and silenced or distorted depictions of politically sensitive events. As Halbwachs'(1992) concept of collective memory suggests, social groups, including the state, shape how the past is remembered, highlighting or suppressing events to serve ideological needs.

The few films of that era addressed themes of national identity and cultural memory due to the political and cultural restrictions shaped by ruling Soviet propaganda. In this period, filmmakers could not directly engage with historical traumas

and turned to allegory and folklore to explore themes of cultural integrity and the resilience of Ukrainian identity. For instance, Yuri Ilyenko's *A Spring for the Thirsty (Криниця для спраглих)* (Ilyenko, 1965) evokes the trauma of cultural and national loss under Soviet collectivization. The dried-up well, which is a symbol of community and nourishment in Ukraine, serves only a lonely old man, while the younger generation has departed. Minimal dialogue, barren landscapes, long takes, and stark black-and-white cinematography transform collective suffering into symbolic, poetic imagery, articulating trauma that cannot be spoken openly.

While Ilyenko emphasizes emptiness and visual starkness, Serhii Parajanov in his film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors (Тіні забутих предків)* (Parajanov, 1965) foregrounds cultural memory through national traditions and color symbolism. Set in the Carpathian Mountains, the film portrays the intimate bond between humans, nature, and cultural heritage against the backdrop of love and tragedy among Hutsul villagers. The film embodies collective memory indirectly through folklore, dance, rituals, and the natural landscapes. Although internationally celebrated with the Festival Cup at the 1965 International Film Festival in Rome, Parajanov nonetheless faced censure at home for prioritizing national symbolism over the ideological norms of socialist realism.

These works reveal a tendency among Ukrainian filmmakers of the period to assert national identity despite Soviet efforts to suppress cultural consciousness. By constructing trauma and memory in symbolic forms, they bridged a cultural void and paved the way for post-independence cinema to engage with historical traumas more directly.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukrainian cinema entered a period of transition marked by economic crisis, underfunding, and institutional instability. Although the 1990s and early 2000s witnessed a sharp decline in film production, independent Ukraine faced the important task of creating a cohesive national identity. In this context, Oles Yanchuk's *Famine 33* (*Голод-33)* (Yanchuk, 1991) emerged as one of the first trauma-oriented films, confronting the unspeakable human and cultural devastation of the artificially induced famine (Holodomor) in 1932–1933. By centering the suffering body, the film materializes both personal anguish and collective loss. Cinematic techniques, such as close-ups of emaciated figures, the slow movements of exhausted people, and the spatial framing of desolate fields, mediate the viewer's engagement with trauma, shifting between raw suffering and attempts to narratively and ethically acknowledge it despite severe economic and institutional constraints.

The political turn towards Europe and the growing cultural focus on recovering suppressed histories has redefined artistic priorities in Ukraine. The 2013–2014 Maidan protests marked both a political and aesthetic rupture, forcing a rethinking of national identity. The Revolution of Dignity (2014) catalyzed new cinematic forms rooted in urgency, witnessing, and collective participation. Civic collectives documented the revolution as a communal experience and laid the groundwork for new practices of memory-making. Their use of handheld cameras, on-site sound, and polyphonic testimonies created what Assmann (2011) calls communicative memory, binding private grief to a mobilized public sphere. These films function simultaneously as historical chronicles and counter-narratives resisting pro-Russian propaganda. For example, *Heavenly Hundred (Небесна Сотня)* (Fedorchenko, 2014), the first film in the documentary series *The Winter That Changed Us*, commemorates those killed during the clashes in Kyiv. Their films are fragmentary: short clips, handheld, multiple perspectives combined with testimonies, faces, and sometimes silence.

Russia's subsequent seizure of Crimea and invasion of Donbas have further intensified the urgency of confronting the nation's past, marked by centuries of cultural oppression.

These events have deepened the public's engagement with questions of identity and historical memory, causing a wave of cinematic works that have addressed trauma in both its historical and contemporary dimensions. This variety is shaped by several converging factors.

Firstly, the emergence of grassroots collectives like Babylon'13 (n.d.), the rise of international co-productions, and the introduction of new Ukrainian state film funds (e.g., Derzhkino grants) have created a more open and decentralized production system. This plural production ecology has allowed civic or institutional production teams to coexist, each with different cinematic styles and audiences.

Secondly, the ongoing 'information war' with Russia has pressured Ukrainian filmmakers to address trauma not only as cultural testimony but also as a political counter-narrative. Films targeting domestic audiences have aimed to strengthen solidarity and resilience such as *Cyborgs. Heroes Never Die* (*Киборги. Герої не вмирають)* (Seitablayev, 2017), while those designed for international festivals (e.g., *Winter on Fire* (Afineevsky & Tolmor, 2015)) highlight Ukraine's victimization and democratic aspirations. This dual orientation explains the diversity of genres, from patriotic dramas to observational documentaries. The spread of smartphones, social media archives, and new forensic practices has expanded the aesthetic possibilities. This has contributed to fragmentary and multi-perspective forms.

Finally, to approach traumas such as Holodomor, Stalinist repression, WWII, or the Donbas war, filmmakers have placed them in dialogue. For example, *Diagnosis: Dissent* (*БожеВільні)* (Tarasov, 2023) revisits Soviet punitive psychiatry as a weapon of silencing political dissent. The film connects historical state repression with the contemporary struggle for dignity and freedom, emphasizing the continuity of trauma across generations.

This diversity produces a broad thematic scope in the depiction of trauma. War films move between myth-making heroics and intimate explorations of psychological strain. In *Cyborgs. Heroes Never Die* (*Киборги. Герої не вмирають*) (Seitablayev, 2017), the siege of Donetsk Airport becomes a legend of resilience, yet its force lies in the details—exhausted bodies, strained gestures, and wounds that register the toll of combat. *Cherkasy* (*Черкаси)* (Yashchenko, 2019) shifts focus to the tense stances of sailors during the 2014 seizure of Crimea, where fear, endurance, and collective identity are inscribed directly onto the body.

Post-occupation films confront the aftermath of conflict, revealing the fragility of national identity under territorial loss. *Atlantis* (*Атлантіс)* (Vasyanovych, 2019) depicts Donbas as a wasteland of scarred bodies and shattered infrastructure, its slow and uneven recovery reflecting the broader societal uncertainty. By contrast, *Bad Roads* (*Погані дороги)* (Vorozhbyt, 2020) presents multiple interwoven narratives, dramatizing the vulnerability of civilians and soldiers while probing the moral ambiguities of war.

Historical epics articulate resistance by linking past and present traumas into a shared continuum. In *Zakhar Berkut* (*Захар Беркут)* (Seitablaiev & Wynn, 2019), the Mongol invasions are interwoven with national mythology, while choreography, sound design, and visual imagery converge to embody trauma and reinforce collective cultural memory.

Films addressing Soviet repression and intergenerational trauma illuminate how violence persists across decades. *There Will Be People* (*І будуть люди)* (Nepytaliuk, 2017) traces family histories shaped by Soviet and post-Soviet trauma, and shows how generational memory carries ethical legacies. *Homeward* (*Додому)* (Aliev, 2019) depicts the forced displacement of Crimean Tatars, where private grief and collective loss converge. Here, a ritual of bodily and cultural

belonging demonstrates that historical memory and trauma shape contemporary identity.

The variety of approaches through which Ukrainian filmmakers address trauma enables cinema to examine suffering from multiple historical and social perspectives. Each cinematic mode performs a distinct task of memory: myth-making and commemoration, forensic witnessing, ethical testimony, or generational linkage across epochs.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, the urgency of confronting both the traumatic past and the no less traumatic present has intensified. Ukrainian cinema has responded by seeking to interpret not only the unfolding realities of war but also the deeper historical experiences that have shaped them. This has given rise to a cinema of open wounds, where trauma is captured synchronously. Maryna Er Gorbach's *Klondike* (*Клондайк)* (Gorbach, 2022) depicts the Donbas war through a family whose home becomes a frontline, emphasizing civilian bodily vulnerability. Valentyn Vasyanovych's *Reflection* (*Відблиск)* (Vasyanovych, 2022) visualizes torture in war and its enduring psychological effects. *Butterfly Vision* (*Бачення метелика)* (Nakonechny, 2022) follows a female drone operator and former POW, whose captivity produces psychological trauma and pregnancy following sexual violence, foregrounding the gendered dimensions of war and PTSD. These films employ visual framing, sound design, and embodied performance to render trauma both immediate and affectively resonant.

Across these phases, a clear through-line emerges: from allegorical survival under censorship, to the naming and reconstruction of suppressed histories, to plural, audience-specific memory work after 2014, and finally to the real-time representation of trauma after 2022, embedded in the comprehension of national identity. Ukrainian cinema foregrounds the bodily inscription of trauma, showing how suffering is experienced and performed through physical presence and embodied interaction. National identity is re-authored by bridging personal testimony and collective narrative, while preserving distinctions between individual and communal experience. While the 'wound' remains open, it operates as an embodied memory strategy, using the body and affective experience to mediate trauma and actively shape contemporary understandings of national identity.

Method and Material: Exploring trauma and memory through multimodal perspectives in *The Guide*

The material for this study is Oles Sanin's The Guide, which is a Ukrainian historical drama that intertwines personal and collective memory against the backdrop of the Holodomor, the man-made famine of 1932–1933. The film tells the story of Peter Shamrock, a ten-year-old American boy who comes to Soviet Ukraine with his father. After his father is murdered for uncovering the famine's political truth, Peter is saved by a blind kobzar, Ivan Kocherha. Together, they travel through areas devastated by violence, hunger, and cultural repression.

The narrative frames trauma as both an intimate and a national experience. The boy's loss of his father resonates with the larger suffering of the Ukrainian people, deprived of culture and food. The kobzar embodies a living archive of memory: as a blind bard, he preserves and communicates historical events through his stories and songs, and he defies the restrictions imposed by the Soviet regime. Through these figures, the film enacts memory as embodied and performative, enduring across generations despite systemic violence.

The Guide was selected for this study due to its historical and cultural significance, as well as international recognition. The film won the Grand Jury Prize for Best Feature at the 2015 Universe Multicultural Film Festival, highlighting its critical acclaim. Academic reviews have emphasized its nuanced portrayal of Ukrainian culture and history. For example,

Voloshyna (2022) notes that the film is "highly recommended … to those who want to understand the century-long dynamic of the Russo-Ukrainian relations and the historical roots of Ukraine's ongoing resistance." Beyond critical reception, *The Guide* has had a significant cultural and educational impact: in 2022, it screened in 600 cinemas across the United States, raising awareness of both the historical and ongoing traumatic experiences of Russo-Ukrainian relations and Ukraine's struggle for national identity (Detector Media, 2022).

Its combination of past and present events, along with the use of bodily expression, spatial composition, and audiovisual design, makes it an exemplary case for exploring trauma as an embodied and multimodal phenomenon, demonstrating how memory and suffering shape understandings of national identity. As Nikoriak (2025) observes, *The Guide* integrates individual experiences with collective historical memory, producing a metamodernist synthesis of national trauma. Consequently, *The Guide* provides a unique platform for investigating the intersection of individual and socio-cultural experiences of trauma, establishing its high relevance to the scholarly analysis of trauma and memory in Ukrainian cinema.

This study employs a multimodal analytical framework encompassing linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and temporal modes. Selected episodes were examined as integrated sites of meaning, where these modes interact to construct trauma and memory. Linguistic analysis focused on dialogue, narration, and song lyrics as carriers of suffering, resistance, and historical remembrance. Visual analysis considered camera angles, shot composition, lighting, and mise-en-scène, highlighting how bodies, objects, and spaces enact trauma and mediate memory. The auditory analysis addressed music, vocal delivery, and environmental sounds, tracing their role in shaping the embodied experience. Gestural and bodily expressions were analyzed to reveal how trauma is inscribed physically and memory performed through action. Spatial and temporal dimensions, including pacing, rhythm, and the organization of memory sites, illuminated how cinematic form structures audience engagement. This multimodal framework provides a holistic account of how contemporary Ukrainian cinema embodies trauma and memory, emphasizing the interplay of sensory, narrative, and performative elements in shaping collective identity.

The analytical procedure proceeded in three stages. First, episodes depicting trauma were identified according to clear criteria: references to loss, violence, or cultural suppression that directly engage the viewer with embodied suffering. Second, multimodal elements within these episodes were systematically transcribed following Baldry and Thibault's (2006) methodology, pairing verbal segments with detailed descriptions of corresponding visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and temporal elements. Third, these transcriptions were analyzed to map interactions among the modes and to interpret how trauma and memory are enacted across the film.

The Guide: Constructing trauma and cultural memory through multimodality

This section presents a multimodal analysis of selected episodes, chosen to illustrate the construction of trauma and memory in the film. The analysis follows a three-step procedure: first, describing the narration and its content; second, identifying and examining the deployment of multimodal elements including visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and temporal resources; and third, interpreting how these elements collectively signal and mediate trauma and memory.

Episode 1. The Kobzars in the Fortress *(Sanin, 2014, 00:35:16-00:36:15)*

One of the film's early episodes stages the gathering of blind kobzars in the ruins of an old Cossack fortress. Once a site of military strength, the fortress now lies in decay, its dark walls contrasting with the light of the exit toward which the protagonists, Ivan and Peter, slowly move, greeting the kobzars.

People sit against the walls, while the musician is performing a mournful song. This spatial and temporal setting situates the protagonists' journey within a historical and cultural landscape already marked by loss and endurance, establishing a semiotic framework in which trauma and memory begin to converge.

From a multimodal perspective, the scene orchestrates linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and temporal resources to produce meaning. Linguistically, Ivan's narration introduces the kobzars' purpose: preserving the memory of national heroes and past struggles ("*Kobzars gathered in the old Cossack fortress. They sang about freedom, faith, the glorious exploits of the Cossacks*"). The presence of trauma is signaled by the phrase "*The fortress had long been a ruin, but they didn't see it,"* which emphasizes the tension between historical loss and the persistence of memory.

Visually, the contrast between the dark fortress walls and the brightness of the exit frames a symbolic passage from oppression toward continuity. Close-ups of dusty hands strumming the bandura, a national Ukrainian musical instrument, alongside tired faces, foreground the embodied dimension of memory. Gesturally, the blind kobzars convey memory through upright and bowed postures and precise hand movements on the bandura, performing the transmission of songs and stories that preserve cultural continuity.

Auditorily, the mournful tones of the bandura, combined with the rhythm of singing, communicate grief. Spatially, the ruined fortress functions as a memory site: its material decay indexes both historical trauma and the resilience of cultural traditions. Temporally, the deliberate pacing of movement and music ritualizes remembrance, allowing memory to emerge as embodied and performative.

Through this multimodal orchestration, trauma is conveyed as historical and embodied suffering in the ruined fortress and frail bodies of the kobzars, while memory is collectively enacted and preserved through song, gesture, and spatial-temporal arrangements.

Episode 2. Ivan and Bohdan *(Sanin, 2014, 00:43:10-00:44:02)*

The next episode demonstrates psychological and political trauma. Ivan and Peter came to Ivan's friend, Bohdan, who was a bandura master. Ivan discusses with Bohdan the possibility of organizing a revolt against the Soviet authority. Linguistically, the dialogue foregrounds both the urgency and tension of political action: Ivan expresses moral and emotional distress ("*my soul also aches*") and reflects on the potential of collective uprising ("*If we all rose simultaneously across the country, there wouldn't be enough commissars, police, or army*"). His frustration is sharpened by the passivity of others: "*And they say: We must hide, we must put up with it*". Bohdan expresses caution and indecision, referring to social authority: "*Oh, Ivan, we must listen to the lords*". Ivan's repeated "*I know, I know*", constructs his internalized anxiety and the constraints imposed by political oppression. The whole scene is permeated with fear, which is also facilitated by other multimodal means.

Visually and gesturally, close-ups of Ivan's face, his tense posture, steady gaze, and restrained movements communicate moral conflict and fear as the embodied impact of living under repression. These cues enact the weight of psychological trauma. Auditorily, the murmured tone of voice and subtle ambient sounds create tension, making the threat of repression perceptible and affectively experienced. Spatially, the dimly lit, secluded interior situates the dialogue in a context of vulnerability and secrecy. Temporally, deliberate pacing and pauses between the lines prolong the sense of suspended dread.

Through this orchestration, trauma is implemented multimodally through fear in the convergence of word, body, space, and sound, each reinforcing the fragile reality of life under political constraint. At the same time, the conversation

recalls the memory of suppressed resistance and the ethical burden of decisions under authoritarian power.

Episode 3. Kobzar before the Party Commission *(Sanin, 2014, 00:44:03–00:45:54)*

In this episode, the kobzar performs for a group of party officials. His song celebrating the heroic deeds of the Cossacks is deemed dull by the commission, which requests a "more cheerful" song. The kobzar defiantly sings a satirical piece condemning the communists for seizing food, for which he is violently punished by a soldier. This sequence functions as a multimodal site where cultural memory, political oppression, and embodied trauma converge.

Linguistically, the officials' repeated demand ("*What's the point of all your songs about misfortune, about suffering? Do you have something more fun*?"), which signals ideological control and the expectation of conformity. This is while the kobzar's song ("*Oh, the Cossack died. But glory will not die, will not fall. Oh, now and forever*") performs resistance and historical memory. His satirical verses following the commission's remark (*"There is no bread, no lard. The commune took everything. No cows, no pigs, only Stalin on the wall*") foreground the risk of speaking the truth under a repressive power. The lyrics depict the miserable conditions of people suffering from the hunger imposed by the ruling party who are forced to hide from the authorities to survive. This song is the first explicit reference to the trauma connected with famine in the film.

Visually, the kobzar is depicted in a long shot from a low angle, seated on a chair at the center of the stage. His posture and tense facial expression convey strain and concentration, while his figure is illuminated by a stark white light against a dark background, giving him a spectral, almost deathlike appearance. As he sings and plays the bandura, the visual composition emphasizes both his isolation and the weight of the social realities he embodies. The lighting, posture, and the long shot of his body make his performance appear both fragile and defiant, signaling the endurance of cultural memory under conditions of oppression.

Auditorily, the interplay of the bandura's tones, the kobzar's voice, the sudden strike, and his shriek produces an affective rhythm where music and violence collide. The shriek interrupts the flow of song, transforming sound itself into a marker of trauma. This rupture makes the threat of punishment painfully present and fuses artistic expression with embodied suffering.

Spatially, positioned alone at the center of the stage, the kobzar's figure dominates the composition, emphasizing both vulnerability and the centrality of memory in the scene. Moreover, the separation between the kobzar and the officials visually constructs hierarchy and situates the act of singing within a politically charged environment. Temporally, the lingering focus on the kobzar and the abrupt interruption of his performance dramatize the political violence.

Trauma here is embodied through the physical punishment, the kobzar's vulnerable body, and the repressive presence of authority. Simultaneously, memory is performed and preserved through song and ritualized musicality, demonstrating the persistence of cultural identity under threat. In this episode, trauma and memory are inseparable. The scene shows how suffering and acts of resistance converge in an affective performance shaped by the interplay of voice and body.

Episode 4. Bohdan's bandura and Ivan's flashbacks *(Sanin, 2014, 00:44:40-00:46:09)*

This complex episode unfolds across two interwoven narrative planes. In the first, Bohdan crafts a bandura while young Peter observes, curious about the instrument and its construction. Bohdan explains that the bandura has a soul: ("*This is the soul, and its place is inside, between the soundboards. Without a soul, the bandura cannot sing, for it has no voice*"). The scene is intimate and nocturnal. Bohdan sits in soft light against a dark background, surrounded by sleeping children,

creating a space where cultural memory is quietly transmitted. A close-up of Bohdan's face, softened by a gentle smile, visually embodies the national soul, materialized through the instrument, while his gestures and careful handling of the bandura enact the persistence of historical memory.

The intimacy is disrupted by Ivan, asleep nearby, twitching in response to painful dreams. The film shifts to flashbacks showing young Ukrainian soldiers engaged in a hopeless struggle against Bolshevik troops, evoking the historical referent of the Battle of Kruty (1918)1, when student volunteers confronted the Red Army. Ivan's vision includes the brutal execution of captured soldiers with blindfolds, staged through a chilling point-of-view shot of the rifle barrel aimed directly at the viewer. The sudden black-and-white imagery, harsh musical tones, and anguished cries generate an intense auditory and visual register of trauma. These flashbacks collapse the distance between historical memory and individual perception, while Ivan's convulsions connect the suffering of the past to embodied moral anguish in the present.

Bohdan resumes his explanation to the children, recounting why the kobzars are blind and narrating a historical episode during Empress Catherine's reign, when sleeping Cossacks were attacked through betrayal. The episode alternates between lived historical trauma and the deliberate transmission of memory.

Bohdan's words articulate cultural memory and continuity, while the flashbacks reveal the violence and loss that define historical trauma. Visually, the contrast between intimate nocturnal light and stark, high-contrast battlefield imagery stresses the tension between preservation and destruction. Gesturally, Bohdan's careful handling of the bandura, Peter's attentive posture, and Ivan's spasms create an embodied mapping of memory and trauma. Auditory cues—soft narration, quiet ambient sounds, sudden screams, and discordant music—mediate between the comforting transmission of knowledge and the shock of historical suffering. Spatially, the domestic intimacy of the workshop contrasts with the vast, impersonal spaces of execution. Temporally, the slow, reflective pacing of Bohdan's instruction is punctuated by abrupt, fragmented flashbacks, echoing the intrusion of trauma into his lived consciousness.

Trauma and memory intersect and are embodied in this episode. The bandura functions as a material symbol of collective memory, while Ivan's convulsions, combined with the visual and auditory disruption of the flashbacks, make historical loss immediate. The POV of the rifle literalizes the experience of impending death, collapsing the spectator's position with that of the executed youth. In this way, the episode situates memory within both bodily experience and the affective immediacy of historical trauma.

Episode 5. Suppression of the Kobzars *(Sanin, 2014, 00:57:06-00:57:27)*

The episode begins with the voiceover of a GPU officer, reporting the latest directives from the Central Committee. The order forbids begging, requires the registration of all musical instruments with the police and GPU2, and explicitly declares the kobza and bandura musical instruments to be "dangerous, socially alien elements of Ukrainian culture," as the signs of nationalism. The bureaucratic tone of the voice contrasts

1 The historical Battle of Kruty (29 January 1918) involved several hundred young cadets of the 1st Ukrainian Military School and a student battalion from Kyiv University, who attempted to delay the advance of Mikhail Muravyov's Bolshevik army toward Kyiv. Although outnumbered and defeated, their sacrifice became a foundational symbol of patriotic devotion and youthful martyrdom in the struggle for Ukrainian independence (Yekelchyk, 2007).

2 The GPU (State Political Directorate) was the secret police organization responsible for political repression and the enforcement of state security. It succeeded the Cheka and preceded the NKVD, playing a central role in suppressing dissent, persecuting "enemies of the state," and controlling both public and private life under Stalinist rule (Nation, 2018).

sharply with the hostility of the words, framing the kobzar tradition as a threat to state power.

The scene then shifts to the marketplace, where a kobzar performs, singing to the sound of his bandura. A close-up captures the blind musician's face as he sings, marked by both vulnerability and intensity. His music creates a space of cultural memory. Around him, people in the marketplace stand silently, listening with quiet fascination, as though drawn into a collective act of memory through his song. This moment of stillness and shared attention is immediately ruptured when a military man seizes the kobzar roughly and drags him away with the words that he has "*sung enough*". At the same time, another officer pursues a fleeing kobzar, extending repression from one body to another.

The multimodal orchestration makes this collision of heritage and violence palpable. The disembodied official voice establishes the ideological framework; the visual intimacy of the close-up and the crowd's hushed stillness embody cultural memory as a living, shared experience. The abrupt physical assault interrupts both song and collective attention. Gesturally, the officers' grabbing hands contrast sharply with the passive stance of the audience, turning the kobzars' bodies into sites where state repression is enacted. Auditorily, the interplay of music and shouted commands produces a rhythm where memory and trauma collide.

Here trauma is embodied through the kobzar's vulnerable figure and musical instrument, which stand as emblems of cultural suppression. Memory briefly lives in his song and in the quiet attention of the crowd but that moment is broken by violence.

Episode 6. Children in Hiding *(Sanin, 2014, 1:17:22-1:19:40)*

This episode situates the kobzar as a witness and caretaker of the starving and displaced children. Having been deprived of food and livestock through state requisitions, the children are found hiding from GPU officers. Their father's last command directed to the elder girl was "*Take the children and run*," aimed at saving the children from starvation.

The black-and-white palette, accompanied by slow, mournful music, underscores the fragility of the scene, while the trembling of Ivan's hands signals both physical exhaustion and the emotional toll of responsibility. The story of children being reduced to gathering acorns to survive juxtaposes innocence with the violence of state power, framing hunger as a corporeal and symbolic assault on life. The kobzar's attempts to console ("*Don't cry, little Cossack, endure*") reflect a cultural register where resilience and masculinity are invoked even in the face of loss.

This fragment captures the paradox of heritage: it survives only in fleeting gestures of care and speech, yet remains constantly threatened by violence. The kobzar, blind and perceptive, becomes both a figure of endurance and a fragile vessel of memory.

Episode 7. The murder of Orysia *(Sanin, 2014, 1:25:06-1:27:18)*

In this episode, Ivan returns to his beloved woman Orysia's house and finds it half-destroyed and empty. Disturbed, he begins to touch the scattered belongings on the floor. Each object he grasps triggers a vision: the torn necklace he once gave her recalls a scene of Orysia being violently beaten by a GPU officer; the cigarette, shown in close-up, evokes the smell of his sworn enemy and a flashback to their earlier encounter; and the military button with a star conjures the sound of Orysia's screams as officers drag her toward a well, where she is thrown after her brutal mistreatment. Her desperate clawing at the door and her bloodied face appear in sharp close-ups. The sequence culminates in the collapse of Ivan himself, with his expression distorted, falling to his knees, and his anguished cry of "*Orysia*" as he stretches out his arms. At

this moment, the film overlays her remembered smiling image in traditional attire with the vision of her violent death, heightening the dissonance between memory and loss.

Auditorily and visually, the scene creates a dense multimodal texture. Ivan's tactile gestures, the close-up shots of objects, and the alternation between idyllic and violent images embody trauma as fragmented memory. Each sensory trigger—touch, smell, sound—collapses past and present, producing a hallucinatory experience where trauma is relived. The silence of spoken language makes the cries, camera angles, and distorted facial expressions the carriers of meaning.

Trauma appears as violent rupture, invading Ivan's perception through intrusive visions of Orysia's brutal death. His distorted face, trembling hands, and collapse mark the bodily character of this trauma. Memory, by contrast, emerges through tactile and sensory triggers: a necklace, cigarette, and button become conduits of recollection. However, memory is fragmented. On the one hand, Orysia's smiling figure in national attire embodies cultural continuity and on the other, her bloodied, screaming body embodies violent erasure.

In this episode, trauma is both psychological and bodily, stemming from political violence: Ivan's personal grief over Orysia's brutal death is inseparable from the violence enacted by the GPU. Memory is embodied and fragmented, unfolding through Ivan's tactile and perceptual interactions with objects that trigger recollection.

Episode 8. The Destruction of the Kobzars *(Sanin, 2014, 1:46:35-1:49:50)*

This episode condenses the film's central meaning: kobzars, as carriers of cultural memory through song and the bandura, are deemed to be a threat to Soviet ideological control and are targeted for eradication. Shot in stark black and white, the sequence shows GPU officers luring the kobzars into a mountain ravine to kill them with explosives. Ivan is singled out for cruel humiliation, tied to a telegraph pole recalling Christ's crucifixion, symbolizing the Ukrainian people under Soviet oppression. Amid this violence, a flashback interrupts: Ivan and Peter in a fortress, joyfully gazing at the sun, with soft, uplifting music as Ivan tells Peter, "*Do you know why flowers always turn to the sun? Because flowers also have eyes. They believe that the dawn will come*". This memory of light and hope sharply contrasts with the present, intensifying the emotional weight of the trauma. When Peter calls him "father" and unbinds him, an officer seizes the boy. Ivan uses a bandura string to strangle the attacker, transforming the instrument from an emblem of heritage into a weapon of resistance. Peter escapes, clutching the bandura as a treasured artifact, while the kobzars hear sirens warning of imminent death. Ivan and his enemy struggle and plunge into the abyss, coinciding with the mass execution of the blind kobzars, who stand in silence awaiting the explosion.

Visually and auditorily, the episode amplifies the interplay of trauma and memory. The black-and-white cinematography strips away any warmth, framing the massacre as both historical record and symbolic statement. Ivan's crucifixion pose and Peter's cry of "father" encode suffering and intergenerational continuity, while the bandura string embodies the paradox of cultural artifacts as vessels of memory and tools of resistance. Sirens and the flashback music create an affective dissonance, mirroring destruction and resilience. Spatial contrasts further reinforce this duality: the ravine as a site of collective sacrifice versus the fortress flashback, where Ivan and Peter's joyous gaze at the sun signifies hope and continuity.

Here trauma appears in its most radical form—the physical eradication of the kobzars staged as both execution and crucifixion, where embodied suffering and communal silence mark the destruction of cultural carriers themselves. Memory persists in fragile gestures. Peter's escape with the bandura signals the survival of heritage, while the flashback overlays

violence with hope, projecting continuity into the future. In bringing these elements together, the episode crystallizes the film's central thesis: Ukrainian cultural identity, violently suppressed, nonetheless endures through embodied remembrance, symbolic transmission, and the fragile moments where memory resists erasure.

In this episode, trauma is both physical and collective: the kobzars' massacre embodies state violence and the suppression of cultural bearers, while Ivan's crucifixion-like suffering unites personal and communal trauma. Memory is corporeal and symbolic, enacted through Peter's preservation of the bandura, flashbacks, and the transformation of cultural artefacts into instruments of resistance, ensuring the continuity of heritage despite violence.

Discussion: Constructing trauma and memory in contemporary Ukrainian cinema

Contemporary Ukrainian films negotiate trauma and memory through complex intersections of history, embodiment, and national aesthetics, and *The Guide* exemplifies this process. Across the film, trauma emerges as an embodied phenomenon enacted through tense posture, convulsions, and corporeal suffering, while memory persists in the careful transmission of songs, instruments, and gestures.

Trauma is consistently represented through the body. Ivan's tense posture, restrained gestures, and fixed gaze signal an internal psychological conflict, while his collapsed stance and trembling hands materialize the accumulated weight of repression. Trauma structures how Ivan perceives and inhabits the space, functioning as an embodied mode of relating to the world. His constrained movements and moments of physical breakdown demonstrate the sedimentation of historical violence in the body, shaping perception and action. This perspective resonates with Merleau-Ponty's (1962) understanding of the body as the primary site of perception and meaning-making. It is further illuminated by Fuchs' (2012) concept of body memory, according to which past experiences persist as unconscious bodily habits that guide present action. In *The Guide*, trauma appears as bodily tension and sensory overload, revealing how historical violence operates in the present through embodied memory.

Later scenes—such as Ivan's crucifixion-like ordeal and the massacre of the kobzars—extend trauma beyond the individual body, transforming personal suffering into somatic markers of collective violence. Bodily suffering, ritualized song, and the careful preservation of the bandura converge to exemplify Caruth's (1996) notion of trauma as latency: trauma persists across temporal and social boundaries, linking individual experience to collective historical memory.

Memory is enacted through multimodal expressions of cultural heritage. The bandura functions as a material archive of history, while songs and traditional attire embody continuity with past traditions. Cultural memory is preserved through ritualized performance, in which music and objects enact resilience. These practices demonstrate memory as both cultural transmission and embodied experience. From Assmann's (2011) perspective, such ritualized enactments operate as mechanisms through which emotionally charged experiences are preserved and circulated across generations. In this sense, *The Guide* functions as a mnemonic medium, enabling memory to retain its affective force within the collective consciousness.

Across the film, individual and collective experiences of trauma and memory converge. Ivan's grief over personal loss intersects with the historical trauma of the Ukrainian people, while Peter's safeguarding of the bandura enacts the continuity of cultural tradition. Through these embodied practices, memory emerges as performative, mediated through music and objects that bridge generations. This multimodal construction reinforces the ethical and emotional dimensions

of cultural resistance and resonates with Rothberg's (2009) concept of multidirectional memory, which emphasizes the dynamic circulation of traumatic narratives across historical moments and social contexts.

The film's ability to communicate trauma and memory relies on the interaction of multiple semiotic modes. Visual composition, sound design, dialogue, and symbolic objects converge to create a layered semiotic field in which viewers encounter trauma as both perceivable and performative. Point-of-view shots, close-ups of strained faces and hands, and recurring motifs—such as the bandura or archival fragments—invite audiences into the affective experience of history. Music intensifies these experiences, functioning both as lament and continuity, while auditory ruptures and silences mark moments of violence. Spatial arrangements, from ruined fortresses to dim interiors, anchor memory in recognizable sites, and temporal techniques such as flashbacks and prolonged pauses heighten the affective density of suffering.

The convergence of these resources is crystallized in the massacre of the kobzars. Here, bodily violence, mournful song, and the preservation of the bandura interweave to convey trauma and memory simultaneously. Trauma reaches its most radical form in the destruction of the bearers of culture, yet memory survives through embodied, symbolic, and material channels, linking historical suffering to enduring identity.

In the Ukrainian context, such strategies expose the fragility of national identity under systemic oppression while simultaneously affirming its resilience. Folk music and embodied ritual function as performative strategies of survival, embedding cultural identity in sensory and aesthetic forms. While resonating with broader Eastern European traditions of representing state violence and erasure, Ukrainian cinema differentiates itself by foregrounding corporeality and ritualized memory as central to national resilience.

At the same time, the film addresses the epistemic challenge of representing trauma: historical violence is fragmentary, often unspeakable. Through its multimodal strategies, *The Guide* compensates for these silences, producing experiential truths that are felt as much as understood. Cinema becomes a site of affective and ethical engagement, where audiences are invited to confront the legacy of violence beyond textual representation.

The Guide signals a shift in Ukrainian cinema from symbolic portrayals of trauma toward embodied and experiential forms of memory-making. Within Eastern European memory cultures, contemporary Ukrainian cinema tends to foreground corporeality and ritualized memory, employing multimodal performance to articulate national resilience and reclaim silenced histories.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that embodiment and multimodality serve as central aesthetic strategies for representing trauma and memory in contemporary Ukrainian cinema, exemplified by *The Guide*. The film integrates multiple semiotic modes into a multimodal polyphony, where trauma and memory are represented as lived experiences. Trauma is conveyed physically in tense postures, trembling hands, and violent suffering, transforming psychological and moral conflict into corporeal form. The body becomes a medium of historical knowledge, making trauma visible and emotionally resonant.

Memory emerges through cultural and historical transmission, enacted via performance, ritual, and material objects. Songs, gestures, and the bandura function as memory bearers that sustain identity under systemic pressure. The bandura, in particular, embodies cultural continuity: simultaneously it is a musical instrument, an archive of suppressed histories, and a mnemonic tool linking personal testimony to collective remembrance. These multimodal enactments preserve

memory and rethink it as part of Ukraine's ongoing struggle for cultural resilience.

The film's expressive power derives from the interaction of visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and temporal modes. Camera composition and chiaroscuro interiors embed bodies within history; auditory cues punctuate emotional intensity; gestures and spatial arrangements anchor suffering in recognizable cultural landscapes; and temporal disruptions collapse the distinctions between past and present. Through this multimodal orchestration, memory appears simultaneously fragile and enduring.

The Guide situates itself within national and broader Eastern European traditions of representing violence and loss, although it distinguishes Ukrainian cinema through its emphasis on corporeality and ritualized memory. By showing how trauma is embodied and memory performed across multiple modalities, the film demonstrates that cultural survival relies on enacted practices. These findings illuminate how contemporary Ukrainian cinema positions itself as a medium of remembrance, contributing to the preservation and reinforcement of national identity through embodied aesthetic strategies.

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