CONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN CINEMA

Oleksandra Kalinichenko
(Kyiv National I. K. Karpenko-Karyi Theatre, Cinema and Television University)

INTRODUCTION

Ukrainian history has numerously been marked by large-scale historical events, that could be deemed traumatic from many perspectives. In the last hundred years only, some of these landmark events were the Soviet invasion and occupation at the beginning of the 20th century, the Chornobyl disaster in 1986, and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war. Each of these unmistakably has left its scars in the national memory, thus changing the nation's identity and worldview. Such upheavals consequently have influenced and transformed Ukrainian art and cinema.

At first glance, the traces of cultural trauma may almost be invisible in the national consciousness, and, as a result, in national cinema. However, they are rooted there and continuously influence the construction of cinematic images of the present. The study of contemporary Ukrainian cinema within the context of cultural trauma is crucial for understanding the impact of historical and socio-cultural events on the country's contemporary cinema. It helps to expand our knowledge of the cultural manifestations of traumatic events and their impact on artistic creativity, which allows us to better understand the national memory, identity, and worldview of one's country and nation. Films that explore cultural traumas directly or vice versa become important testimonies and reflections of the past and present.

In this article, I will explore selected films of contemporary Ukrainian cinema through the lens of cultural trauma and how it could be represented through the audio-visual language of the cinema. To do so, I will examine the concepts of cultural trauma and psychological trauma through sociological and psychological theories and use them as tools for reading and decoding the films. I will also provide a brief overview of the history of Ukrainian cinema through the lens of cultural trauma theory. This will allow me to trace which particular images and film language have been transferred to contemporary Ukrainian cinema as a result of cultural trauma such as political repression and censorship of the Soviet Union.

THE THEORY OF CULTURAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA: HOW TO DECODE CINEMA?

The Cultural Trauma and its Manifestation in Cinema

Cultural trauma is the deep wounds inflicted on a collective group, society, or nation as a result of large-scale and painful events. These events can vary in nature and origin, from war, genocide, colonization, and natural or environmental disasters to the loss of cultural heritage and identity. Such experiences deeply affect the affected community, shaping its collective memory, identity, and worldview.[i]

Cultural trauma occurs when a society experiences an event or series of events that profoundly undermine its fundamental beliefs, values, and norms. These events challenge the social fabric, leading to a break in cultural narrative, identity, and collective memory. Worldwide examples of cultural trauma include the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the forced displacement of indigenous peoples. These traumatic events disrupt the stability of social structures, leaving individuals and communities vulnerable to long-term psychological, emotional, and social consequences.[ii] In Western psychological theory, the focus on such impactful events of the past has generated a vast body of literature on collective and cultural trauma. However, these concepts are also important for understanding Ukrainian history, as Ukraine in the 20th century experienced a huge number of catastrophes and traumatic experiences. These included World War I (1914-1918), the Civil War (1918-1920), collectivization and deportations (1929-1933), the Holodomor of 1932-1933, the Great Terror (1937), World War II (1939-1945), the Holodomor of 1947, and the Chornobyl disaster (1986). Similarly, the history of modern Ukraine has seen events that cannot but affect national identity and memory: The Orange Revolution (2004-2005), the Revolution of Dignity (2014), the annexation of Crimea (2014), and the Russian-Ukrainian war (2014-ongoing). Most of these tragic events are well-researched factually but are difficult to comprehend and to weave into the national narrative.[iii]

Cultural trauma changes the collective memory and identity of a community. A traumatic event becomes an indelible part of a shared narrative that is passed down from generation to generation. The memory of the trauma is preserved in stories, rituals, and cultural expressions, serving as a constant reminder of the pain and suffering experienced. This collective memory shapes the identity of a group, often leading to feelings of victimization, loss, or injustice.[iv] The process of healing cultural trauma begins with recognizing and honoring traumatic events, as well as examining the effects of historical trauma across the communities. Acknowledging the

suffering experienced and the injustice perpetrated is crucial to validate the experiences of survivors. Commemorative practices, such as memorials, museums, and public rituals, provide a space for remembrance and reflection, allowing individuals and communities to collectively mourn, grieve, and honor the past. Healing cultural trauma also requires empowering affected communities so that they can regain agency and control over their narrative. This includes promoting cultural revitalization, reconnection of people with their culture, supporting cultural expressions, and providing platforms for marginalized voices to be heard.[v]

Cinema can be interpreted in many ways, but in connection to history it could be more than the documents of the past, or the instrument for researching and reflecting on historical events, it can also be a powerful tool for commemorative practice and creating a space for living with cultural trauma, both for the authors of a particular film and for the audience. For instance, Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1992) depicts the Holocaust and the trauma suffered by the Jewish community during World War II. The film follows the story of Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist who saved over a thousand Jewish lives by employing them in his factories. Through powerful visuals and emotionally charged acting, the film depicts the horrors of the Holocaust, the loss of identity, and the collective trauma experienced by the Jewish people. Another example is the documentary *The Act of Killing* (*Jagal,* 2012) by Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn, and an anonymous director. The film delves into the events of the 1965-1966 Indonesian massacres, during which approximately 500,000 people were killed. The narrative follows former leaders of Indonesian death squads who are invited to recreate their killings in different film genres. This unusual approach allows the perpetrators to confront and reflect on their actions, providing insight into the collective trauma experienced by the victims and the legacy of violence in Indonesian society.[vi]

These are just two prominent examples from the vast world history of cinema, but there are many more. Every country and nation have reflected on traumatic events through art in one way or another and has also used it as a means of raising awareness, provoking discussion, and building empathy for the deep and lasting effects of cultural trauma. Through their stories, the films provide a glimpse into the experiences of individuals and communities affected by historical events and allow viewers to reflect on the meaning of collective memory and healing.

From Collective to Personal

In his work Poetics, from which drama and screenwriting in the contemporary sense evolved, Aristotle states: "A perfect tragedy should, as we have seen, be arranged not on the simple but on the complex plan. It should, moreover, imitate actions that excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of tragic imitation. It follows, in the first place, that the change, of

fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains, then, the character between these two extremes, – that of a man who is not eminently good and just, – yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He must be the one who is highly renowned and prosperous, – a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families."[vii] To pair it with the thought of Bessel van Der Kolk, MD, psychiatrist, and trauma research writer, in which he states that traumatic experiences leave their marks, whether on a large scale (reflected in our history and culture) or on a smaller scale, changing the lives of our families and turning into dark secrets that people unconsciously pass on from generation to generation.[viii]

From the work of Bessel van Der Kolk, MD we can follow that cultural traumas are often reflected at the individual level.[ix] Moreover, according to Aristotle, it is individual traumas that serve as the plot engine of history. So, the psychological theory of trauma can be applied to decode and analyse most audio-visual cinematic works.

Moreover, in the course of the development of the film language, specific techniques and images appeared that with time have already become a conventional and widely used symbol for depicting trauma. For instance, which techniques are used in cinema to convey the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (hereinafter referred to as PTSD)? This disorder was recognized only after the Second World War and the Vietnam War, when veterans returned from the frontline and many of them had similar symptoms and difficulties in adjusting to civilian life.[x] One of the symptoms is an influx of intrusive memories of life-threatening events in which the person was involved. Such a technique as the time loop (although it appeared for the first time in cinema in 1933 in the American film *Turn Back the Clock* by Edgar Selwyn) at some point turned into a specific technique to denote PTSD, as a symbol of the fact that a person is stuck in a traumatic event and cannot escape from its circle. Such use of time loop in film can be seen in the American science fiction action thriller film *Source Code* (2011) directed by Duncan John.[xi] Contemporary Ukrainian cinema has depicted PTSD in various films: the documentary *No Obvious Signs* (*Явних проявів немає*, 2018), and feature films *Atlantis* (*Атлантида*, 2019), *Blindfold* (*Із зав'язаними очима*, 2020), *Bad roads* (*Погані дороги*, 2020) with the short feature *Bullmastiff* (*Бульмастиф*, 2020). As these films delve into the topic of the Russian-Ukrainian war, they are rooted in reality and depict PTSD subtly through the use of color, camera angle, and character development arcs.

UKRAINIAN CINEMA HISTORY THROUGH THE LENS OF CULTURAL TRAUMA

Ukrainian cinema has a rich and complex history that reflects the country's journey, also depicting influences of cultural trauma. Ukrainian filmmakers have overcome the challenges of censorship, political repression in the Soviet Union, and the deep scars left by historical events (that naturally have affected the state of the film industry in the country). Ukrainian cinema emerged at the beginning of the 20th century, marked by a period of avant-garde artistic exploration and national awakening.[xii] However, the occupation by the Soviet Union brought with it a new era of cultural trauma for Ukraine. Under Soviet rule, the Ukrainian film industry became an instrument of propaganda, suppressing creative freedom and imposing a rigid ideological framework. Films were expected to conform to socialist realism, promote Soviet values, and downplay Ukrainian nationality.[xiii]

Already in the 1930s, Ukrainian filmmakers learned to speak to the audience indirectly, using hidden symbols and cultural codes. Later, this metaphorical and symbol-rich cinematic movement would be known worldwide as Ukrainian poetic cinema. The most striking films of the 1930s that reflect this, of course, are those of Oleksandr Dovzhenko. His fourth film *Zvenyhora* (*Звенигора*, 1928) seemed to meet the government's objectives, but the director managed to formulate the key dilemma of the Ukrainian intelligentsia of his generation within the framework of the available plot. Professor of film studies at Brock University Bohdan Nebesio writes about this, that internal conflict between the national revival or social revolution is depicted in the film as a confrontation between seemingly opposite poles: nationalism (symbolised by the character of Pavlo) and socialism (symbolised by the character of Tymish) against the background of Ukrainian national history (symbolised by the character of Grandfather).[xiv]

In his iconic film *Earth* (*Земля*, 1930), one of the canonical images is that of an apple as a rich native land. At the beginning of the film, the viewer sees a wealth of apples in the frame: an old man lying under an apple tree, his fellow grandfather sitting on an apple stump, and a child trying to eat an apple on the grass. And it was this richness of the apple tree that played against the glorification of collectivization, which the audience immediately decoded. For example, the director Pudovkin asked the question "why was it necessary to organize a fight for a tractor[xv] if there is wealth and an excess of material goods around, when people die peacefully, having bitten an apple for their last pleasure, and there are thousands and thousands of such apples around when you just have to stretch out your hand and the luxurious gifts of nature will fall on your shoulders."[xvi]

One of the most crucial cultural traumas in Ukrainian history is the Holodomor, an artificial famine organized by the Soviet regime in the early 1930s. The consequences of this tragedy have been reflected in Ukrainian cinema, albeit with restrictions imposed by censorship. Films about the Holodomor were often censored or banned because they could expose the Soviet state's responsibility for the famine and undermine the official narrative, which is why such films mostly appeared after 1991 or outside Ukraine during its occupation by the Soviet Union. An example of such films is the documentary *The Living* (*Живі*, 2008) by Serhiy Bukovsky[xvii], where the Holodomor-genocide is woven into the plot of world events of the 1930s: the aftermath of the Great Depression in the United States, Hitler's rise to power in Germany, the extermination of Ukrainian villagers by the Stalinist regime. Also, the Canadian historical documentary *Harvest of Despair* (*Жнива розпачу*, 1984) by Slawko Novytsky[xviii] and the feature film *Famine-33* (*Голод-33*, 1991) by Oles Yanchuk explore the causes and consequences of the famine.[xix]

Censorship in Ukrainian cinema can be seen as a product of cultural trauma. Traumatic events such as the Holodomor, Soviet repression, and political instability left deep scars on Ukrainian society. The Soviet government, realizing the potential ability of cinema to shape public opinion and collective memory, sought to control and manipulate the narrative to keep power in its hands. Censorship became a tool for suppressing dissent, erasing painful memories, and promoting a distorted version of history that served the regime's interests. Films that directly addressed or challenged the cultural traumas experienced by the Ukrainian people were often heavily censored, cut, or banned altogether. The censorship of Ukrainian cinema not only suppressed artistic expression but also perpetuated a cycle of cultural trauma. By suppressing research and documentation of historical events and their impact on Ukrainian society, the authorities sought to preserve collective amnesia, preventing healing and slowing down the process of confrontation and reconciliation with the past. This deliberate suppression of cultural trauma perpetuated the sense of injustice, silencing the voices of victims and reinforcing the power dynamics that caused the trauma in the first place.

The 1960s and 1970s were the time when a new wave of Ukrainian filmmakers emerged who sought to challenge the oppressive Soviet regime through their work. These dissident filmmakers used the medium of cinema to confront and expose the traumas inflicted on Ukrainian society. However, their attempts to raise painful topics were met with severe censorship and repression. Films that depicted the Ukrainian struggle for independence, historical injustice, or human rights violations were often suppressed or destroyed. One of the most prominent examples is Ukrainian poetic cinema, in particular, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (*Тіні забутих предків*, 1965) by Serhiy Parajanov, which tells the story of a tragic love against the backdrop of Ukrainian folk traditions and cultural identity. The film faced censorship because of its poetic and symbolic representation of Ukrainian heritage.[xx]

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought new opportunities and challenges for Ukrainian cinema. After gaining independence, Ukrainian filmmakers sought to reclaim their cultural identity and explore previously forbidden topics. However, the trauma of the past remained, and censorship continued to exist in various forms. The transition period was marked by political instability, economic hardship, and attempts to control artistic expression. Filmmakers faced pressure from both state authorities and market forces, which hindered their ability to freely explore sensitive topics related to cultural trauma. At that time, the director Yuri Ilyenko created films that explored the actions of the repressive machine from different perspectives. For instance, The film *Swan Lake: The Zone* (*Лебедине озеро. Зона*, 1990) was made as a metaphor for the life of Serhiy Parajanov and the creative oppression and repression that artists of his time faced. Scholar Larysa Bryukhovetska writes about this film, that Yuri Illienko turned to the parable, to a visual, almost wordless way of expressing meaning. As the main character, a fugitive, chooses a hiding place he finds himself in the tin monument in the form of a hammer and sickle, which acquires a symbolic meaning, personifying the country called the Soviet Union.[xxi]

DEPICTION OF TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN CINEMA

Two main categories of films in contemporary Ukrainian cinema that reflect upon trauma can be partitioned: films, that depict historical trauma and films that represent and fixate the ongoing traumatic events. Films with the representation of historical cultural trauma are most often live-action films (rarely documentaries, consisting of found footage and archive materials). These live-action films revolve around certain historical events or figures, even mythologizations of one's biography. The main purpose is overcoming censorship, taking control of the narrative, and the return of the cultural memory. The second category deals with the ongoing events, mainly the Russian-Ukrainian war. These films[xxii] are the first response to the traumatic events and are used for exploration and fixation of war crimes and trauma on different levels: personal, national, ecological, etc.

Historical Films as a Return of Cultural Memory

Since Ukraine gained its independence, a large number of historical films have been released including *Bohdan-Zynovii Khmelnytskyi* (*Богдан-Зіновій Хмельницький,* 2006), *The Guide* (*Поводир*, 2014), *Black Raven* (*Чорний Ворон*, 2019), *Stus* (*Заборонений*, 2019), *Mr. Jones* (*Ціна правди*, 2019), *Carol of the Bells* (*Щедрик*, 2022) *Dovbush* (*Довбуш,* 2023). Naturally,

some films were more successful, others less so, but the most important thing was the return of subjectivity and cultural memory, and attempts to reclaim it through art.

Let's analyse closely historical film *The Guide* (*Поводир*, 2014), directed by Oles Sanin, through the lens of cultural trauma theory. The plot of the film is based on the story of the executed congress of kobzars[xxiii] in Kharkiv in the 1930s. Although historians have expressed doubts about the authenticity of this particular event, the film highlights many other factual historical events, as the plot unfolds in the 1932-1933s in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic during the period of industrialization, collectivization, before and during the Holodomor and the repression of the representatives of the Executed Renaissance. *The Guide* explores the lasting impact of cultural trauma on the Ukrainian people and their struggle to preserve their identity and heritage. One of the central aspects of cultural trauma theory is the recognition that traumatic events can profoundly influence the collective memory and identity formation of a group. In *The Guide*, the traumatic events of the Soviet policy of collectivization and forced Russification serve as the backdrop for the narrative. These policies were aimed at suppressing the Ukrainian language, culture, and traditions, forcing Ukrainians to conform to Soviet ideals and eroding their sense of identity. The film depicts cultural trauma through the experiences of its characters, including protagonist Ivan, the blind bandura player. Ivan's journey becomes a metaphor for the collective experience of the Ukrainian people. His blindness represents the inability to fully see and understand the trauma inflicted on the nation, while his musical talent symbolizes the power of art and cultural expression as a means of resilience and resistance. In addition, the film shows the suppression of the Ukrainian language and culture, which further exacerbates the cultural trauma experienced by the characters and the nation as a whole. The ban on Ukrainian-language publications, the prohibition of traditional folk practices, and the imposition of the Russian language and customs all serve as mechanisms of control and erasure. This suppression of cultural identity leads to a sense of cultural displacement and loss, which further exacerbates the collective trauma.

Music becomes an important aspect of the reproduction of cultural memory in the film. More than a hundred real blind people and kobzars were invited to shoot some episodes, including bandura player Taras Kompanichenko[xxiv]. Kobzars in the film performed ancient Cossack and historical songs, dumas, psalms, and cantos in the film. This allowed us not only to create a believable historical setting for the film but also to deepen our understanding of the cultural code. The visual aspect of the film also amplified the story. The cameraman for *The Guide* was Honored Artist of Ukraine, cinematographer Serhiy Mykhalchuk. The whole film is shot in cold colors, sometimes the colors seem to be borderline to black and white, or the episodes are submerged in a viscous fog. Only in the last minutes of the film does the sun fill the frames with warmth. These colors and the content of the shots also serve as a mythological interpretation of the past, emphasizing its tragedy and the fact that much remains unknown due to the Soviet Union's policy

of concealing and distorting facts. However, the ending gives hope that light can be shed on these events.

Since his debut film *Mamay* (*Мамай*, 2003), director Oles Sanin has shown how skillfully he can operate with archetypal images. The character of bandura player Ivan becomes a prototype of Ukrainian history itself, as he preserves the traditions and history of Ukraine through his music. His actions demonstrate that remembering and honoring one's cultural heritage is a way to preserve a sense of identity and resist the erasure of cultural trauma. Thus, *The Guide* emphasizes the importance of remembering and preserving cultural heritage in the face of cultural trauma.

As mentioned in the previous section, political censorship has become a kind of cultural trauma in Ukrainian culture. It is precisely because of this trauma that the specific and metaphor-rich cinematic language of Ukrainian poetic cinema emerged. This cinematic language has also become an important component, and in the time of independent Ukraine, some directors have turned to it, while rethinking it in the contemporary context. In addition, under Soviet rule, history was silenced or distorted, which led to the trauma of oblivion. Let's turn to the film *Toloka* (*Толок*а, 2020) by Mykhailo Illienko to see how the allusions to poetic film language represent the trauma of forgetting and, at the same time, the return of cultural memory.

In *Toloka*, Mykhailo Illienko (*The Seventh Route*, *Fuzhou*) adapted a ballad by Taras Shevchenko, a renowned Ukrainian poet, known simply as Kobzar, whose art became synonymical with Ukrainian culture. The plot of *Toloka* covers almost 400 years of Ukrainian history and recreates the most significant events, including the Cossacks era, the Soviet occupation, World War II, and the Chornobyl disaster. At the centre of the plot is a woman named Kateryna and her house. Each historical event, that could be deemed as a trial, destroys Kateryna's house. But she stubbornly, like hundreds of generations of Ukrainians, raises it from the ruins again and again. In a letter (which was written back in 2004, long before the release of the film) to the Greek director Fotos Lamprinosos, Mykhailo Ilyenko told him about his idea, explaining also the film's title: "If the house was burned down by lightning, careless children, a jealous neighbor, a drunken older brother, a witch, the Chornobyl accident, or destroyed by a raid of nomads, Tatars, Lithuanians, Crimeans, Muscovites, White Guards, or Nazi invaders, the survivors have a chance to quickly build a house and survive using materials that are always nearby, always available. This is exactly what Kateryna does: although warned of the inevitability of the execution, she builds the walls of her house again and again, just as millions of Ukrainians have done throughout their history. Kateryna saves not only her home, but also those whom it has sheltered and preserved from winter cold, famine, wars, fires, revolutions, and floods. The film could be called *The Life of a House* because the person moulded the house, and the house moulded the person — their life, habits, soul, tolerance, wisdom, stupidity, humour, songs, and history. Over the course of its existence, the toloka has outgrown its domestic framework and turned into a natural phenomenon that can compete with hurricanes, floods, and wars."[xxv]

The film, like representatives of poetic cinema, is full of symbols and archetypal images. The house symbolizes Ukraine itself, while Kateryna is the image of a woman guardian. And the process of toloka itself is an image of the cohesion of Ukrainian civil society. In its imagery and plot structure, *Toloka* resembles Dovzhenko's *Zvenyhora*, where large-scale historical upheavals are conveyed through hints and individual symbols. However, *Toloka* is also an antidote to the oblivion of history.

Once Upon a Time in Ukraine: Alternative History as a Narrative Tool for Overcoming Cultural Trauma

In the fourth chapter of the book *The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence Void Visualization*, the author of the essay *Vengeful Fiction: (Re-)Presenting Trauma in Inglourious Basterds (2009)* Dania Hückmann reads Quentin Tarantino's war film *Inglorious Basterds* (2009) through Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer's concept of revenge, which they outlined in Studies in Hysteria (1895). Hückmann states, that the reaction of a victim to trauma has a fully 'cathartic' effect only if it is an appropriate reaction, such as revenge. But language serves as a surrogate for action; it can be used to relieve the affect almost as effectively. She also writes: "In the context of the psychoanalytical theories about revenge outlined thus far, a fantasy of revenge is always contrasted with acting upon it, because the former is open to revisions. Film may serve the same function as a "surrogate for action," which Freud and Breuer attribute to language." Therefore, Dania Hückmann sees the alternative history in Tarantino's film, where Hitler, Goebbels, and the Nazi leadership die in flames, as an act of revenge that is necessary to live through the trauma of the Holocaust.[xxvi]

This tool could also be considered in a broader sense, namely as a narrative practice. In psychology, narrative structures are considered by many researchers to be an important factor in ordering, organizing, and modeling mental reality. Each new event in a person's history receives its interpretation, which is determined by the previous course of events. And if a certain total interpretation is positive, then a person develops a positive attitude toward his or her experience, biography, and life in general.[xxvii] As Viktor Frankl writes, a personality reveals itself in its biography, it reveals its unique essence only to biographical explanation, without being subjected to direct analysis. Ultimately, biography is nothing more than an explanation of the personality in time.[xxviii]

In 2020, the film *Once Upon a Time in Ukraine* (*Безславні кріпаки*, 2020) directed by Roman Perfilyev was released in cinemas. The film is set in 1844. Escaping from the persecution of the Emperor of Japan, the samurai Akayo enters the territory of Ukraine. By chance, he meets the young Taras Shevchenko. They unite for their own purposes: Akayo seeks revenge for his

master, and Shevchenko wants to save his beloved from the serfdom. One can see two allusions to Quentin Tarantino's work: in the title (*Inglourious Serfs[xxix]/Inglourious Basterds*) and in the use of martial arts by main characters, which often results in violent scenes (as in *Kill Bill: Volume 1*, 2003). The film's aesthetics also lean toward Tarantino's films: bloody fight scenes, bright colors, and the use of alternative history. The director Roman Perfilyev said that he came up with the idea for the film during the Revolution of Dignity, when Ukrainian artists began to depict the classics of literature in modern setting (for instance, the series of illustrations *Shevchenko's Quantum Leap* by Oleksandr Grekhov[xxx]). It was then that he imagined Taras Shevchenko as a samurai. It was since the Revolution of Dignity that the canonical figures of Ukrainian culture, which in Soviet-era art were depicted as long outdated and fossilized, seemed to come to life and become a symbol of a new Ukrainian identity.

Looking at Inglorious Serfs from the perspective of narrative practices and Freud's revenge theory this film seems to be a therapeutic rethinking of history. On the one hand, it shows such events as serfdom, which left a trace of trauma in Ukrainian cultural memory. However, at the same time, it endows an alternative figure of Shevchenko with the knowledge and skills (oriental martial arts) to carry out a Freudian act of revenge. Such a narrative seems to change the way we look at history, taking power away from the traumatic event and returning the power over history to the hands of its bearer.

Documentations of War

Since the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014, and with the full-scale invasion in 2022, documentaries, videos, and most of the audio-visual images capturing the war and the following crimes have become important documents of events. They also play an important role in capturing and transmitting the experiences of people affected by the war, as well as shedding light on the cultural trauma that society has suffered. Moreover, the Russian-Ukrainian is becoming the most documented war in history.[xxxi] The team of International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival Docudays UA has created Ukraine War Archive – a unified database containing digital materials and registered evidence of war crimes against Ukraine, with the involvement of a broad network of both Ukrainian and international partners, which of now has approximately 6,8 millions of uploaded files, which cover civilian resistance against the Russian army, as well as the destruction, violence and other crimes committed in Ukraine by the aggressor.[xxxii]

Film critic and programmer of the Docudays UA Festival Yulia Kowalenko discusses the nature of war documentaries, and documentaries at all – how every shot, every cut, every character in the frame, and every comment are ultimately the result of the author's choice. This

leads to the conclusion, that the documentary is a process of reduction reality according to the author, and with this, it is someone's choice: what is important to tell, and what can be left in the shadows. This process is always quite political – and more than ever when it comes to war. Yulia states: "This should mean that every even documentary film about the war is not an objective panoramic cast of reality, but rather is someone's political will to tell one or more of the possible stories about the war, cutting away others."[xxxiii]

In the last nine years, Ukrainian filmmakers have created a great amount of short and feature-length documentaries, capturing the war, reflecting on the topic, and with this exploring the themes of cultural trauma and its impact on the Ukrainian people. From exploring the trauma on the collective level (*Train Kyiv-War* (*Поїзд Київ-Війна*, 2020), *20 Days in Mariupol* (*20 днів у Маріуполі*, 2023)), or on the personal level (*Alisa in Warland* (*Аліса в країні війни*, 2015), *The Earth Is Blue as an Orange* (*Земля блакитна, ніби апесильсин,* 2020*)*, *I Did Not Want to Make a War Film* (*Я не хотіла робити фільм про війну*, 2022)) — to challenging the cinematic language, trying to find new forms to reflect on the topic (*This Rain Will Never Stop* (*Цей дощ ніколи не скінчиться*, 2020), *Iron Butterflies* (*Залізні метелики*, 2023), *Divia* (*Дівія*, in development)).[xxxiv] Ukrainian documentaries about the war often delve into the historical context of the conflict, creating a backdrop for understanding cultural trauma. They explore the roots of the war, the complex geopolitical dynamics, and the historical narratives that have shaped Ukrainian identity. By contextualizing the war in a broader historical context, these documentaries illuminate the deep cultural trauma experienced by the Ukrainian people.

In the context of how Ukrainian documentaries capture the ongoing trauma, let's look closely at the films *No Obvious Signs* (*Явних проявів немає*, 2018) by Alina Gorlova and *War Note* (*Зошит війни*, 2021) by Roman Lyubiy. Ukrainian war documentaries often use personal narratives as a means of conveying the cultural trauma experienced by individuals. In *No Obvious Signs,* Gorlova explores in detail the life of a woman who returned from the war and struggles with PTSD and panic attacks as she tries to return to civilian life. Through her story, the film presents a multidimensional perspective, capturing the psychological, emotional, and physical effects of war. This personal approach allows the audience to connect to the event emotionally and to understand the cultural trauma more deeply. On the other hand, there is a more collective approach, when the director tries to create a more collage-type of picture, featuring many voices and experiences. Such approaches could be seen in *War Note,* as the film consists of the found footage materials: personal videos from the phones, camcorders, cameras, and GoPros of Ukrainian soldiers are woven into a surreal journey to the frontline of the war with Russia. Through the editing, Roman Lyubiy depicts one year of life in the state of war. Visual images play a crucial role in war documentaries such as *War Note*, highlighting the destruction and devastation caused. Such documentaries show the physical impact of war on cities, infrastructure, and landscapes. These images not only serve as evidence of the cultural trauma inflicted on

Ukraine, but also evoke the feelings of loss, displacement, and confusion experienced by people. Despite depicting cultural trauma, Ukrainian documentaries about the war also emphasize the resilience and resistance of individuals and communities. They demonstrate acts of courage, unity, and determination in the face of adversity. For example, the film *War Note* highlights the strength, resilience, and even humor of Ukrainian soldiers on the front line, while *No Obvious Signs* captures the psychological resilience of the main character. Such images counterbalance the depiction of trauma, offering a sense of hope and resilience amidst cultural destruction.

CONCLUSION

By analyzing films from the perspective of cultural trauma, we can perceive and interpret them not only as works of art but also as a mechanism for revealing and reflecting on painful memorable events. This allows us to better understand the emotional and psychological depth of films and helps to shape our consciousness about important historical experiences and their impact on us as individuals and society as a whole. The study of contemporary Ukrainian cinema in the context of cultural trauma has a significant impact on the development of cinematic art and the expansion of our worldview. It helps us to deepen our understanding of historical processes, to reveal the positive potential of art in revealing traumatic experiences, and to foster a dialogue between nations past and present. In addition, the study of films that highlight cultural trauma can have practical implications in the context of healing and recovery from traumatic events. They can become a means of expressing pain and finding a way to overcome it, which contributes to the healing process and strengthening of society.

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[ii] Ibid.
[iii] "Cultural Trauma in Modern Foreign Historiography: Concept and Method", Ukrainian Institute of National Memory ("Культурна травма у сучасній зарубіжній історіографії: концепт та метод", Український інститут національної пам'яті), accessed October 17, 2023, https://old.uinp.gov.ua/publication/ogienko-vi-kulturna-travma-u-suchasnii-zarubizhnii-istoriografii-kontsept-ta-metod
[iv] Alexander, Jeffrey C., Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, And Piotr Sztompka. "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma."
[v] "What is Cultural Healing?", Youtube, accessed October 20, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l1o7ls7JnxA
[vi] Paris, Y. (2022). "Perpetrator Trauma as a Possible Solution for Cultural Trauma: The Case of Joshua Oppenheimer's The Act of Killing (2012) and The Look of Silence (2014)". Analecta Política, 12(22), 1-26. doi: http://dx.doi. org/10.18566/apolit. v12n22.a02

vii Aristotle, "Poetics", XIII, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm

viii Bessel van der Kolk M.D. "The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma" (Penguin Books, 2015), 1-7.

ix Ibid.

x Ibid, 7-22.

xi Michael Elm (Author), Kobi Kabalek (Editor), Julia B. Kohne (Editor) "The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence Void Visualization" (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 108-125

xii "Essays on the Ukrainian Cinema History". Edited by V. Sydorenko (*chairman)* and others; Institute of Contemporary Art Problems of the Academy of Arts of Ukraine - Kyiv: Intertochnology, 2006. ("Нариси з історії кіномистецтва України". Редкол.: В. Сидоренко (голова) та інші; Інститут проблем сучасного мистецтва Академії мистецтв України. — Київ: Інтертехнологія, 2006 - 864с.), 53-77

xiii Ibid, 117-165.

xiv Nebesio Bohdan, "The Silent Film Trilogy of Alexander Dovzhenko" ("Німа кінотрилогія Олександра Довженка") trans. from English. Stanislav Menzelevskyi, Kyiv: Oleksandr Dovzhenko National Centre, 2017. 200 pp. (in Ukrainian)

xv Tractor in the film is perceived as a symbol for industrialisation and progress.

xvi Foka Maria. "The Suggestion of Subtextual Meanings in the novel "Earth" and in the Film of the Same Name by Oleksandr Dovzhenko" (Марія Фока. "Сугестія підтекстових смислів у кіноповісті «Земля» та в однойменному фільмі Олександра Довженка"), accessed October 22, 2023, https://lnam.edu.ua/files/Academy/nauka/visnyk/pdf_visnyk/29/11.pdf

xvii "Director Serhiy Bukovsky about the film *The Living*" ("Режисер Сергій Буковський про фільм «Живі»"), Docuclub, accessed October 22, 2023, https://docuclub.docudays.ua/story/-rezhisea-sergiy-bukovskiy-pro-film-zhivi/

xviii Holodomor Museum, Google, accessed October 22, 2023, https://holodomormuseum.org.ua/en/film/harvest-of-sorrow/

xix Larysa Bryukhovetska. "Hidden Films: Ukrainian Cinema of the 1990s" - Kyiv: ArtEk, 2003 (Лариса Брюховецька. "Приховані фільми: Українське кіно 1990-х" - Київ, Видавництво «АртЕк», 2003), 73-77

xx "Essays on the Ukrainian Cinema History". Edited by V. Sydorenko (*chairman)* and others; Institute of Contemporary Art Problems of the Academy of Arts of Ukraine - Kyiv: Intertochnology, 2006. ("Нариси з історії кіномистецтва України". Редкол.: В. Сидоренко (голова) та інші; Інститут проблем сучасного мистецтва Академії мистецтв України. — Київ: Інтертехнологія, 2006 - 864с.), 195-267

xxi Larysa Bryukhovetska. "Hidden Films: Ukrainian Cinema of the 1990s" - Kyiv: ArtEk, 2003 (Лариса Брюховецька. "Приховані фільми: Українське кіно 1990-х" - Київ, Видавництво «АртЕк», 2003), 65-73

xxii Mainly documentaries, although before full-scale invasion there were released live-action films, that depict the ongoing war: *Cyborgs: Heroes Never Die* (*Кіборги. Герої не вмирають*, 2017), *U311 Cherkasy* (*U311 Черкаси*, 2019), *Bad Roads* (*Погані дороги*, 2020), *Reflection* (*Відблиск*, 2021), *Klondike* (*Клондайк*, 2022), *Butterfly Vision* (*Бачення метелика*, 2022).

xxiii Ukrainian bard who sang to his own accompaniment, played on a multistringed bandura or kobza.

xxiv "Taras Kompanichenko: The Guide and Sanin, Budnyk and Tkachenko, Kobzar's Heritage and His Own Contribution" ("Тарас Компаніченко: "Поводир" і Санін, Будник і Ткаченко, кобзарська спадщина та власний внесок"), Youtube, accessed October 27, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hmn5FiHM0mA

xxv "Foreword to the film *Toloka*" ("Передмова до фільму «Толока»"), Google, accessed October 29, 2023, http://archive-ktm.ukma.edu.ua/show_content.php?id=268

xxvi Michael Elm (Author), Kobi Kabalek (Editor), Julia B. Kohne (Editor) "The Horrors of Trauma in Cinema: Violence Void Visualization" (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 90-108

xxvii "Narrative psychotechnologies". Chepeleva N.V., Smulson M.L., Shylovska O.M., Hutsol S.Y.; edited by Chepeleva N.V. - K.: Glavnyk, 2007 ("Наративні психотехнології". Чепелєва

Н.В, Смульсон М.Л., Шиловська О.М., Гуцол С.Ю.; за заг. ред. Чепелєвої Н.В— К.: Главник, 2007. — С.144. (Серія «Психол. інструментарій»)), 17

[xxviii] Viktor Frankl, "Man's Search for Meaning", Beacon Press, Boston , 2021, 3-15

[xxix] The direct translation of the title *Безславні кріпаки* is *Inglourious Serfs.*

[xxx] "Shevchenko's Quantum Leap", Google, accessed November 1, 2023, https://uatv.ua/en/shevchenkos-quantum-jump/

[xxxi] "From drone videos to selfies at the front, Ukraine is the most documented war ever", Google, accessed November 1, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/08/02/1191557426/ukraine-war-news-coverage

[xxxii] Ukraine War Archive, Docudays, accessed November 4, 2023, https://ukrainewararchive.org/eng/

[xxxiii] "Filming the War: The Art of Mapping the Routes Politically", Google, accessed November 4, 2023, https://www.kinotabs.com/en/reviews-filming-the-war/

[xxxiv] Of course, this list is only the tip of an iceberg. For more documentaries covering the topic of Russian-Ukrainian war, please see the list: https://boxd.it/gGszW