

## The Exposition of Collective Trauma in Short Movie of *Bear Story*

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### Abstract

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This research analyzed the exposition of trauma in Gabriel Osorio's 2016 short film *Bear Story*. The film reflected his historical experience under Augusto Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile and told the story of an old Bear who created a mechanical diorama depicting the loss of his family due to the dictatorship's oppression. This research used a narrative and symbol analysis approach to investigate how collective and individual trauma was manifested through visual, narrative and symbolic elements in the film. Trauma was implied in the protagonist's emotional journey as he faced bitter memories of exile, torture and separation. Cinematic techniques such as the use of a soft color palette, melancholic music, and diorama mechanics as a metaphor for the process of memory and healing emphasized the psychological impact of trauma. The results of this study showed that *Bear Story* was not just a form of artistic expression, but also served as a medium of healing and historical memory for the victims and the wider community. In conclusion, *Bear Story* emphasized film as a communicative tool to rethink trauma, memory, and resistance to oppression in related sociopolitical contexts.

#### Kata Kunci:

*Bear Story, Gabriel  
Osorio, Trauma  
Kolektif*

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini menganalisis trauma kolektif dalam film pendek *Bear Story* karya Gabriel Osorio tahun 2016. Film ini mencerminkan pengalaman historisnya di bawah kediktatoran Augusto Pinochet di Chili dan menceritakan kisah seekor Beruang tua yang menciptakan diorama mekanis yang menggambarkan kehilangan keluarganya karena penindasan kediktatoran tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan analisis naratif dan simbolik untuk menyelidiki bagaimana trauma kolektif dan individual terwujud melalui elemen visual, naratif, dan simbolik dalam film tersebut. Trauma tersirat dalam perjalanan

emosional sang protagonis saat ia menghadapi kenangan pahit tentang pengasingan, penyiksaan, dan perpisahan. Teknik sinematik seperti penggunaan palet warna lembut, musik melankolis, dan mekanika diorama sebagai metafora untuk proses ingatan dan penyembuhan menekankan dampak psikologis trauma. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa cerita *Beruang* bukan hanya bentuk ekspresi artistik, tetapi juga berfungsi sebagai media penyembuhan dan ingatan historis bagi para korban dan masyarakat luas. Sebagai kesimpulan, *Bear Story* menekankan film sebagai alat komunikatif untuk memikirkan trauma, ingatan, dan perlawanan terhadap penindasan dalam konteks sosial politik terkait.

## INTRODUCTION

*Bear Story* is a 2014 animated short film directed by Gabriel Osorio (García-González, 2020; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). It received worldwide attention and won the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Film in 2016, making it the first Chilean film to win the Best Animated Short Film award. *Bear Story* is the story of a Bear who uses the medium of 3D animation to create a mechanical diorama that uses a unique and emotional visual style to tell a life journey filled with sadness, loss, and hope. The story implicitly reflects the collective experience of Chilean society under the military dictatorship, with themes of loss of freedom, trauma and the power of memory (Koh, 2021; Osario, 2014; Starrs & Békés, 2024). As a work of art, this film not only entertains but also invites contemplation through its rich symbolism and detailed visual aesthetics. The movie blends elements of traditional art and modern technology to create a memorable cinematic experience. Its dialogic-minimalist yet visually powerful narrative approach opens up diverse interpretations and makes it relevant to different cultural contexts.

Collective trauma theory describes the emotional, social, and psychological impact felt by large groups collectively as a result of traumatic events affecting a community or nation. This trauma usually results from major events such as war, genocide, natural disasters, colonialism and human rights violations (Pazderka et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2023). According to this theory,

traumatic experiences not only impact individuals, but also shape collective identities, historical narratives and relational patterns among community members. Collective trauma is often passed down from generation to generation through narratives, culture, and social policies, and has a long-lasting impact on society (García-González, 2020; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). In *Bear Story*, the Bear represents the feelings of trauma of the community during the reign of the Pinochet regime in Chile, especially the sense of trauma due to a sense of loss of families.

This journal explains how *Bear Story* uses animation as a means of expression to convey social and emotional messages. The analysis includes an examination of the visual aesthetics, symbolic narrative, and historical context that influenced the film's production. The aim of this research is to explore how artworks such as *Bear Story* can bridge the gap between art and social issues, while reinforcing the status of short animation as a highly expressive medium in the world of contemporary film making (García-González, 2020; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). Moreover, the aim of this article is to examine the crucial aspects of collective trauma in *Bear Story*.

## **METHOD**

To analyze the film *Bear Story*, the researchers use qualitative method through descriptive and explorative approach by underlining meaningful moments, such as experiences, observations, histories, and visual texts. Main data of this article is taken from the scenes in the film *Bear Story* directed by Gabriel Osorio. The data is collected by doing documentation and categorization (Cresswell & Creswell, 2017). The steps of data collection includes watching the *Bear Story* film directly and categorizing the scenes and characters related to the collective trauma theory. The data analysis is done through content analysis by paying attention to the categorized data and comparing it with the suitable concepts and theories.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Bear and His Problematic Everydayness in *Bear Story*

Gabriel Osorio's short film *Bear Story* or *Historia de un Oso* is an emotional animation that depicts trauma through profound visual metaphors. The film tells the story of an old Bear who uses a music box to tell his story, including kidnapping, separation from his family, and a dark experience in the circus (García-González, 2020; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). The imagery in this film is very effective in conveying trauma through symbolism, color, and character representation. The data is listed below;

#### Data 1



#### The Music Box as a Narrative Medium for the Bear

The old Bear's music box is the visual narrative center of the film. It reflects the old Bear's memories and relives his story through mechanical puppets. The story symbolizes how trauma can cause a person to continuously replay painful memories or be unable to forget them. The design of the box, which combines metal and mechanical elements, reflects the coldness and mechanical nature of his trauma (García-González, 2020; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). For him, the music box is a way to remember bad past story and to spread that to other people. By doing so, he would like others to know that sadness and loss may always be existent though time always flies.

#### Data 2

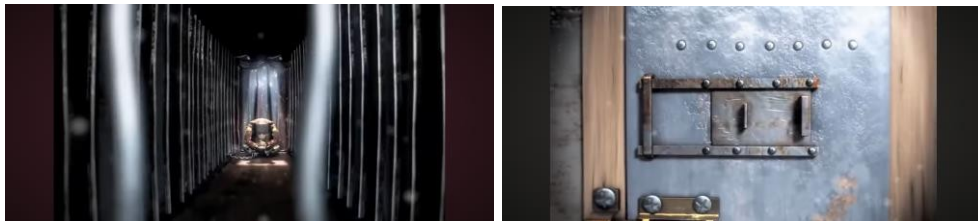




### **Cold and Monochromatic Color Palette in *Bear Story***

The film uses a dominant color palette of grey, dark blue, and black in the circus scene, creating a cold, depressing, and oppressive atmosphere. The grey and dark colors of the circus create a depressing atmosphere. The Bear is depicted as a small figure surrounded by large, oppressive circus characters, reflecting a feeling of helplessness and confinement (García-González, 2020; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). The faded yellow color contrasts with the happy moments of the Bear family, depicted in warmer colors, before the kidnapping took place.

### **Data 3**



### **Symbol of Detention through Bars and Chains**

The cage bars and iron chains are common visual elements, symbolizing physical and mental confinement. The Bear is forced to perform in a circus arena surrounded by iron bars as it is symbolizing the loss of freedom and dignity. The Bear also feels such physical and psychological confinement without knowing anything about his fault. In this scene, the Bear is always looking down as he is looking at himself who must Bear this unbearable sadness (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). He is the one that should be free, but external power makes him live the life behind bars.

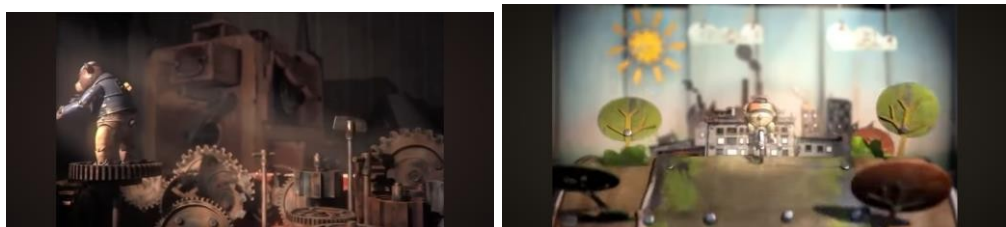
#### **Data 4**



#### **Facial Expressions of Sadness in Character of the Bear**

The Bear's facial expressions, especially his eye expressions, are the film's way of conveying pain and loss without showing any dialogue. The sad eyes, slow movements, and hunched body reflect his mental anguish. It is interesting how eyes in a film may express various things. The Bear may not know that his facial expression contains sadness (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). However, his deep trauma of being detained may always be shown without his own awareness. He may keep his pain in his deep heart, but his unconscious desire pushes it to his appearance as being shown in his face.

#### **Data 5**



#### **The Bear and His Industrial Life**

The mechanical aesthetic of the music box, with its gears and metal elements, symbolizes the loss of humanity and emotion due to trauma. The past life of the Bear family is depicted as warm and organic, in contrast to the harsh mechanical nature of the circus (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). He may live such modern life, but indeed he is alienated by that condition. It is not his fault. It is the juggernaut of modernization that made him so. He must nod to the demand of industrial society by merely seeing him as a tool for entertainment.



### **Collective Trauma and Its Inevitable Characteristics**

The term collective trauma is used synonymously with cultural trauma. Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collective group when they are subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable (Cypress, 2021; Lerner, 2022; Yuliastuti & Pasopati, 2022). Cultural trauma is not the result of an event but the effect of a sociocultural process as it is actually the result of an exercise of human agency. By stating so, collective trauma is triggered from any bad memory of the past experienced by such groups and/or communities.

Collective trauma is not only the about the loss of life, but also the loss of meaning. It is because definition has been gone and is changed by sorrow. The collective memory of togetherness is not about happiness, but how some persons may have had the same bad treatments in the past (Cypress, 2021; Lerner, 2022; Yuliastuti & Pasopati, 2022). Such trauma then also elevates existential threat to collective identity. People may admit it, but still the feeling of loss will always be present. It may also be passed on between generations through stories and memories and somehow may worsen the conditions from time to time.

There are some characteristics of collective trauma. The first is its effect in Widespread Psychological Impact. That trauma affects the mental well-being of large populations, leading to collective emotions such as grief, fear, helplessness, and a shared sense of vulnerability. It may also create further emotionally unifying senses in their impact on communities globally (Cypress, 2021; Lerner, 2022; Yuliastuti & Pasopati, 2022). The second is that such trauma may involve formation of collective memory. The traumatic event becomes embedded in the group's cultural and historical narratives. This shared memory is passed through generations, even among those who did not directly experience the event, shaping their identity and worldview. The third is reconstruction of meaning. This aspect underlines such probability that people with such trauma may engage in meaning-making processes, interpreting and symbolizing the trauma to maintain a sense of identity and continuity (Pazderka et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023; Susanto et al.,

2023). This reconstruction often includes public memorials, rituals, and education aimed at integrating the experience into the collective identity.

The fourth is that such trauma may generate other bad issues. The impact extends beyond immediate survivors to subsequent generations, influencing behaviors, cultural practices, and societal norms. These effects often include heightened sensitivity to perceived threats and a drive to prevent similar events. In this case, any kind of trauma may create further traumatic events in the future (Pazderka et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2023). This community will choose to be more protective as they already have bad experience of the past that they must not repeat in future times. The fifth is such trauma may create polarization but also shape such unity. Collective trauma can either divide or unite communities at all. Some groups use shared trauma to build solidarity, while others may experience conflict due to differing narratives, such as those between victims and perpetrators. Collective trauma may create further prolonging pain, but it will never shape exact effects in the future (Pazderka et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2023; Susanto et al., 2023). It is because collective trauma is a multidimensional phenomenon that includes psychological, social, cultural and political aspects. Understanding these characteristics is important for identifying underlying causes and developing effective solutions for affected communities.

### **The Bear's Trauma and Its Analysis**

This analysis shows how collective trauma is presented in the short film. Collective trauma theory says that this trauma can occur because of a significant experience or event that causes emotional, psychological and social impacts. The proof of data is analyzed through the theory as following;

In data 1, the music box plays an important role in highlighting the theme of trauma experienced by the main character, a Bear. The music box serves as a symbol of the fond memories Bear has with his family and it indeed symbolizes memory of loss. The resulting melody reminds Bear of happy times, but also highlights the deep sense of loss that comes with separation. In this way, the music box creates a contrast between past happiness and present sadness, emphasizing the



theme of trauma that the Bear is experiencing. The melody of the music box conveys complex emotions, showing the suffering of the Bear and his feelings towards his family (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). As the music box plays, audience can feel the depth of emotion the Bear is experiencing. It is indeed a combination of nostalgia and sadness. This allows the audience to better understand and empathize with the trauma the character is going through.

The music box also functions as a narrative device, telling the story of the Bear without much dialog. The mechanical performance of the Bear playing the music box provides a visual depiction of his life and traumatic experiences. In this way, the music box becomes a link between the happy past and the painful present, reinforcing the theme of trauma (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). The music box symbolizes trauma and loss, but it also contains an element of hope. The melody reminds the Bear that despite his current difficult circumstances, the love and memories of his family are still there, giving him hope for the future. This shows that while trauma can be devastating, it is also possible to find happiness again.

The music box in *Bear Story* is a powerful symbol that connects the personal trauma of the Bear with the broader collective trauma experienced by communities. It serves as a reminder of the past, a tool for storytelling, and a beacon of hope. The music box's ability to evoke emotions and convey complex narratives without words makes it a central element in the film's exploration of trauma and resilience (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). The audience is invited to reflect on their own experiences and the importance of preserving memories, even in the face of adversity. The music box becomes a universal symbol of the human spirit's ability to endure and find hope amidst trauma.

In data 2, colors in *Bear Story* are used symbolically to support the emotions and themes of the story. Color plays an important role in the film in creating atmosphere, distinguishing the real world from the fantasy world, and conveying the emotions of the characters (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014; Zhafirah et al., 2025). In the real Bear world, the color palette is quite dull

and gloomy, dominated by shades of gray, brown, and dark blue. This depicts the sadness, loss, and oppression felt by the Bears, and symbolizes the personal trauma that director Gabriel Osorio experienced with his family under Chile's military dictatorship.

In contrast, the color palette of the fantasy world inside the mechanical box created by the Bear is brighter and warmer, with red, gold and yellow. These colors symbolize happiness, good memories, and the desire for freedom (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). The difference between these two palettes creates a sharp visual contrast, emphasizing that the real world is full of suffering, while the fantasy world reflects hope and an escape from the dark reality. Through this play of colors, the *Bear Story* not only tells a story without dialogue but also manages to create a deep emotional connection with the audience. Color becomes a visual language that enhances the film's narrative and connects the universal themes of loss, love, and the fight for freedom.

The use of color in *Bear Story* is a powerful tool that enhances the film's emotional depth and narrative impact. The contrast between the dull, gloomy colors of the real world and the vibrant, warm colors of the fantasy world highlights the Bear's inner struggle and his longing for a better life. This visual language helps the audience understand the Bear's emotions and the broader themes of trauma and hope (Barraza et al., 2022; Muñoz-Chereau, 2018; Osario, 2014). The film's color palette serves as a universal language that transcends cultural and linguistic barriers, making the story accessible and relatable to a wide audience. The widened use of color in *Bear Story* is a testament to the power of visual storytelling in conveying complex emotions and narratives.

In data 3, bars and chains are used as key symbols to depict the oppression, loss of freedom and trauma experienced by the main character, a Bear. The bars, seen in the circus enclosure where the Bears are forced to be part of the show, reflect both physical and psychological restriction (Fenoll, 2018; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017; Zhafirah et al., 2025). This element reinforces the theme of incarceration which is not only literal but also metaphorical, representing the repressive conditions experienced by individuals or groups in the context of political history.

In particular, the film is an allegory to the experiences of director Gabriel Osorio's family during the military dictatorship in Chile, where individual freedoms were often taken away.

Chains may symbolize a more personal and internal restraint. In the movie, chains physically bind the Bear, restricting its movements and forcing it to submit to the will of the circus master. This illustrates how trauma and oppression not only physically about shackles but also instills a deep sense of powerlessness. The symbol of chains can also be interpreted as an emotional burden that the Bear continues to carry, reflecting the agony of separation from a beloved family (Fenoll, 2018; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). Visually, the bars and chains, combined with dark colors, especially in the circus scenes, create a heavy and depressing atmosphere. However, when the Bear escapes and creates a clock case that tells his story, the bars and chains are no longer part of his fantasy world. It depicts the hope for physical and emotional freedom and the struggle to regain a lost life. In this way, the bars and chains serve as a powerful metaphor for trauma and liberation, which is the emotional core of *Bear Story* (Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017; Yuliastuti et al., 2021).

The bars and chains in *Bear Story* are powerful symbols that represent the oppression and trauma experienced by the main character. They serve as visual metaphors for the physical and psychological constraints that the Bear endures, reflecting the broader themes of imprisonment and the struggle for freedom. The film's use of these symbols invites the audience to consider the impact of oppressive systems on individuals and communities (Fenoll, 2018; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). The Bear's eventual escape from the circus and the creation of the music box signify a journey towards liberation and healing. This transformation highlights the resilience of the human spirit in overcoming adversity and the importance of preserving hope and memory in the face of trauma. The bars and chains in *Bear Story* are not just visual elements but also emotional anchors that deepen the film's narrative and resonate with the audience on a profound level (Koh, 2021; Osario, 2014; Starrs & Békés, 2024).

In data 4, the Bears' facial expressions convey emotions and play a major role in telling the story without any dialog. Through subtle animation details, the Bears' diverse facial expressions convey a range of emotions, from deep sadness to longing and hope. In the opening scene, the Bear's face is shown with a stern expression, with teary eyes and lips curled downwards, depicting the trauma and loss experienced due to being separated from his family (Fenoll, 2018; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). This is emphasized by the slow movements and lethargic posture, giving rise to an atmosphere of sadness.

There is an expression of warmth and nostalgia on Bear's face as he shows us his mechanical box. His kind eyes and the small smile on his face tell of fond memories that will live on forever through the story behind the box, but he is still overwhelmed with sadness because it is just a shadow of his past (Blehm, 2024; Keyan et al., 2024; Osario, 2014). In the scene where he escapes from the circus, the Bear's expression changes, showing tension, courage, and determination to fight against oppression. Each change in facial expression is carefully designed to establish a deep emotional connection between the audience and the characters. *Bear Story* is successful in utilizing facial expressions as a medium of communication reflects the power of animation as a visual art form (Fenoll, 2018; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). The Bear's facial expressions not only tell his personal story but also express the sense of loss and conflict felt by many people in situations of oppression. The film successfully builds a universal story without words through highly emotional animation, with the Bear's facial expressions being the center of the film's message.

The facial expressions in *Bear Story* are a crucial element that conveys the emotional depth of the characters and the narrative. Through subtle and nuanced animation, the film effectively communicates complex emotions such as sadness, longing, and hope without the need for dialogue. The Bear's facial expressions serve as a window into his inner world, allowing the audience to empathize with his experiences and understand the profound impact of trauma (Fenoll, 2018; Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017). The film's ability to evoke such strong emotions through facial expressions alone is a testament to the power of visual storytelling. This

approach not only enhances the film's narrative but also makes it accessible to a global audience, transcending language barriers and cultural differences. The Bear's facial expressions in *Bear Story* are a powerful tool that connects the audience to the universal themes of loss, resilience, and the human spirit's capacity to endure and find hope amidst adversity (Blehm, 2024; Keyan et al., 2024; Osario, 2014).

In data 5, the conflict between machines and life in the movie reflects deeper themes about the interaction between technology and human experience, especially in the context of loss, trauma, and the search for meaning. In the movie, the machine can be seen as a symbol of a system that limits individual freedom. The main character, Bear, is trapped in a machine-controlled routine (Ganai et al., 2024; Morrison & Morrison, 2024; Osario, 2014). This shows how technology can control a person's life and remove the human element. The machine also represents the character's helplessness towards a situation determined by external forces. Bear's life outside the machine shows the emotional aspects and interpersonal relationships. As Bear reminisces about his family, the audience is shown a very human side of his life, with loss and love at the core of his experience (Blehm, 2024; Keyan et al., 2024; Osario, 2014; Zhafirah et al., 2025). This contrasts with the rigidity and insensitivity of the machine.

The main conflict of the movie is the Bear's struggle to break free from the shackles of the machine and return to a more meaningful life. This reflects the modern dilemma of people being trapped in routines dictated by technology and losing touch with human emotions and relationships. The Bear's journey to break free from the machine's influence also represents the healing process after trauma (Ganai et al., 2024; Morrison & Morrison, 2024; Osario, 2014). As the Bear confronts his painful memories and attempts to rediscover his identity, he overcomes the limitations of technology and gains hope for humanity's recovery and search for the meaning of life.

The conflict between machines and life in *Bear Story* is a profound exploration of the tension between technology and human experience. The film uses the machine as a metaphor for systems that constrain individual freedom and

dehumanize experiences. The Bear's struggle to escape the machine's control represents a broader struggle for autonomy and emotional connection in a world increasingly dominated by technology (Ganai et al., 2024; Morrison & Morrison, 2024; Osario, 2014). This conflict highlights the importance of preserving human emotions, relationships, and the search for meaning in the face of technological advancements. The Bear's journey towards liberation and healing serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the need to maintain a balance between technological progress and human values. The film invites the audience to reflect on their own relationship with technology and the importance of staying connected to the deeper aspects of their humanity (Blehm, 2024; Keyan et al., 2024; Osario, 2014; Zhafirah et al., 2025).

The clash between machines and life in *Bear Story* not only illustrates the tension between technology and humans, but also highlights the importance of confronting trauma to achieve emotional freedom. The movie invites to reflect on the impact of technology and the importance of staying connected to the deeper aspects of humanity when facing life's challenges. Moreover, the film's portrayal of the Bear's struggle against the mechanical circus routine serves as a powerful metaphor for the modern human experience (Blehm, 2024; Keyan et al., 2024; Osario, 2014). As technology advances, there is a risk of becoming trapped in routines that prioritize efficiency over emotional well-being. The Bear's journey to break free from this mechanical existence and reconnect with his memories and emotions is a crucial point in maintaining humanity (Osario, 2014; Silonar, 2017; Yulastuti et al., 2021). The film suggests that by confronting and processing traumas, human beings can find the strength to overcome the constraints imposed by technology and rediscover the richness of human experiences. This message is particularly relevant in today's fast-paced, technology-driven world, where it is easy to lose sight of the things that truly matter, such as love, family, and personal freedom (Koh, 2021; Osario, 2014; Starrs & Békés, 2024). *Bear Story* encourages audience to pause and consider the balance between technological progress and emotional health, emphasizing that true freedom comes from within and is nurtured through meaningful connections and the preservation of human spirit.



## CONCLUSION

*Bear Story* depicts the experience of a Bear who is separated from his family due to the oppression of an authoritarian regime. The film illustrates how, in the context of collective trauma, violence and injustice experienced by an individual or group can leave deep scars that affect not only the immediate victim but also the entire community. The film illustrates the far-reaching impact of trauma on a community, with the loss and suffering of the Bear becoming a symbol of the collective suffering of the entire community. This creates a sense of helplessness and makes it difficult for victims to escape the memories of the atrocities they experienced and the Bear's inheritance of trauma can be seen as an expression of the intergenerational transmission of collective trauma. Although the Bear in the film appears to live a solitary life, the process of remembering and replaying the events shows that old wounds remain unhealed and persistent, shaping the Bear's identity and worldview. The film also shows how collective trauma serves as a reminder of a dark history that must be kept in mind to prevent it from repeating itself. At last, *Bear Story* highlights the importance of recognizing and understanding collective trauma in society, and how these memories and wounds affect not only individuals, but also broader social dynamics.

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