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New Year's Trees: Empire and Commercial Cinema in Putin's Russia

This presentation takes as its text the "Elki" or "New Year's Trees" series of commercial Russian films produced by Timur Bekmambetov and Bazelevs studio. These blockbusters have been some of the most financially successful domestic films in the last several years, grossing over $100 million collectively ("Samye kassovye fil'my"), with four installations and one spin-off. These films produce ideas relating to Empire and Postmodernism in the contemporary Russian cultural context.

The first set of ideas concerns the construction of a new Russian Empire both within and outside of these films. Within the diegeses, ideas of national unity are communicated through interlocking episodes that are set in a variety of major and provincial cities across Russia. Characters from different cities connect with each other via cellular telephones or social media to accomplish common goals. Outside of the diegeses, several marketing campaigns shower attention on these same cities to garner fan support, either through specialized premiers in each city or shooting footage of fans that is later included in the film.

The second set of ideas touches on the relationship of these films to postmodernism, and, specifically, the postmodern concept of the death of the author (Barthes). Although Bekmambetov holds ultimate control over the final text, these films are composed of several vignettes, each filmed with its own production and acting teams. Since many of the plots for the vignettes grow out of the results of fan contests, it becomes increasingly difficult to point to a single author or even a discrete group of authors.

Barthes, Roland. "Death of the author." *Aspen*, no. 5+6 (Fall-Winter 1967). Print.
"Samye kassovye fil'my." *KinoPoisk*. KinoPoisk, n.d. Web. 15 July 2015.
<www.kinopoisk.ru/box/best_rus/view_all/1/>.<http://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/687193/>.