

BALABANOV'S BANDITS: THE BANDIT FILM CYCLE IN POST-SOVIET CINEMA

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Résumé : Aleksei Balabanov, Sergei Sel'ianov et leur société de production CTB ont joué un rôle important dans la culture et la diffusion du cycle de films de bandits dans le cinéma russe. De fait, *Le Frère* (1997) et *Colin-maillard* (2005) constituent en quelque sorte les « serre-livres » de ce cycle productif et reflètent les mythes culturels de bandits russes. À mesure que la situation politique et sociale en Russie évoluait, les films, eux aussi, suivaient ce mouvement, en particulier ceux qui glorifièrent et reflétèrent cette période d'anarchie. En plaçant *Colin-maillard* dans le contexte du cycle de bandits, il devient alors possible d'interpréter le cinéma comme étant un pastiche postmoderne dans lequel Balabanov critique et parodie les films que CTB et lui ont vulgarisés, donnant ainsi à voir une fois de plus une auto-citation cinématographique pour laquelle Balabanov était bien connu.

Aleksei Balabanov's full oeuvre is now before us following his untimely death in 2013, at the age of 54. We may now assess his films, which were made during a particularly tumultuous time in recent Russian history, and may do so by considering the many auto-citations, thematic continuities and intertextual references that characterize his cinematic discourse. Balabanov had, it seems, an on-going dialogue with his audience and, maybe, with his own creative self, as he was endeavoring to find the means to represent the full complexity of the lawless decade after the fall of the Soviet Union. One of the more intriguing films is his pastiche of a cinematic cycle that he, himself, had been integral in fostering a decade earlier—the Russian bandit film. The success of his *Brother* (*Brat*; 1997) and *Brother 2* (*Brat 2*; 2000) encouraged similar films of the bandit type, including Sergei Bodrov Jr.'s *Sisters* (*Sestry*; 2001), Pyotr Buslov's *Bumer* (*Bumer*; 2003) and *Bumer 2* (*Bumer – Fil'm vtoroi*; 2006), as well as the very popular television serials *Criminal Petersburg* (*Banditskii Peterburg*; 2000-03) and *Brigade* (*Brigada*; 2002). Having helped to establish such a popular film cycle, Balabanov's *Dead Man's Bluff* (*Zhmurki*; 2005), which has been described as both a black comedy and a crime film, might be interpreted as a pastiche reflecting a very different political and social reality—Putin's law and order society. As a result, we can suggest that Balabanov valorized (*Brother*) and then disrupted (*Dead Man's Bluff*) the bandit film in Russian cinema, marking the beginning and end of this popular film cycle.

In a recent interview, Sergei Sel'ianov, the producer of most of Balabanov's films, admitted that at the time of filming *Dead Man's Bluff*, it was intended to bring to a close the bandit film cycle. "That is what we said (laughing): 'We are closing the subject of the 90's! That's it! The film *Dead Man's Bluff* is so powerful that to make a movie on this theme is now *impossible!*' Of course, this is just what we said back then, but in fact it is the case today, indeed, that audiences do not demand [to see] these '90s, [...]"¹ Bandit films depicted the lawless 1990s, as the culture in post-Communist Russia was evolving. Yet with the end of this period of banditry, the cinematic cycle became merely derivative. Just as no one can make *chernukha* films today, only *chernukha*-style films,² the original bandit films, which were the product of the political and social tumult of the time, came to be replaced by films in the style of the originals, but without the direct connection to the social reality.

Rick Altman's scholarship on film genre proves to be quite useful for this discussion. He argues that film genre boundaries are somewhat artificial and that both studios and audiences have agency in a film genre's historical development.³ "The film industry's desire to please and its need to attract consumers was viewed as the mechanism whereby spectators were actually able to designate the kind of films they wanted to see."⁴ Thus, within the gangster film genre, I will argue that the bandit film cycle is specific to post-Soviet cinema, developing over nearly a decade. Just as the 1930s American gangster film evolved out of real events to create a coherent mythology, the Russian bandit culture followed its own evolution and was reflected in films and television shows of the 1990s and early 2000s. Using Altman's terminology, the syntax of the gangster genre adopts a new set of post-Soviet semantic elements. For example, unlike the American gangster films in which law enforcement almost always punishes the criminals in the end, the Russian bandit films portray the bandit as the hero who must, through violence and criminal behavior, overcome social, political and economic barriers. I will identify specific films and one television series which mark recognizable stages in the progression of this bandit mythos. This will necessitate a historical view of the bandit culture in reaction to changes that were occurring during the presidencies of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin.

Just as relevant, Balabanov and Sel'ianov's company CTB⁵ plays an important role in this history, simultaneously refracting the bandit culture and crafting its mythology through the films that it produced. Leger Grindon argues that film cycles often are associated with one film studio and tend to last for about a decade, which is what we find with CTB.⁶ A cycle is often started with a benchmark hit, in this case *Brother*, which becomes the prototype that is imitated or resisted by other films in the cycle. Again in Altman's terminology, CTB was able to both lend a voice to the average Russian audience for mythological bandit heroes and articulate a cultural ideology embedded with social and political messages. As the Russian audiences' ritual values changed,

so too did CTB's depiction of the bandit hero—from spiritually superior killer, to avenger of national pride, to romantic hero, to tragic figure and then, finally, to an object of ridicule.

As social and political factors forced the end of the bandit culture in Russia, CTB offered a parody of the Russian bandit film full of auto-citations and intertexts. In *Dead Man's Bluff*, Balabanov recognized the end of this film cycle, and signaled the completion of a generative bandit mythology. He and Sel'ianov refracted the progression of Russian banditry in their films as it was occurring and provided some of the most representative films of the cycle. Yet, with the establishment of Putin's law and order society, the generative quality of the bandit film eventually came to a logical end.

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When talk of the Russian mafia was prevalent in the West in the 1990s, there were semantic associations with the Italian mafia, especially the version popularized by Francis Ford Coppola's *Godfather* trilogy (1972–92). The criminal activities that developed in post-Soviet Russia were very different, however, from such precursors in Italy, the United States, and elsewhere.⁷ There had been a mafia of sorts that had worked within the Soviet system as managers and supervisors looted factories and the military industry for their own personal gain. There had also been a group of career criminals who had created a shadow economy for illegal goods and services. These professional criminals had followed a code of criminal ethics under the rubric of the “thieves in law” (*vory v zakone*), a version of which was presented to Western audiences in David Cronenberg's *Eastern Promises* (2007).

As one might expect, the Russian criminal activities of the 1990s displaced most of the illegal practices of the previous decades. In the vacuum of power that emerged with the collapse of the Soviet Union, a symbiotic relationship between criminal groups, politicians and businessmen made it increasingly difficult to distinguish legal from illegal activities. Often high-level government officials were simultaneously involved in crime, politics and business, providing over time for ever more sophisticated corruption. What began as “protection” schemes, prostitution and burglary among lower-level types, evolved into human trafficking and corrupt banking practices that required the oversight and direction of individuals in positions of power.

“The lawlessness throughout officialdom was paralleled by an increase in lawlessness on the streets,” says Stephen Kotkin, who has called the developments of the 1990s a “mega-merger” of Soviet-era ex-convicts, sportsmen, and KGB operatives who formed extortion rackets and private security forces. Yet for the most part the lawlessness of the streets grew out of low-level bandits engaged in unlicensed business, often involving the shuttling of unavailable

goods from abroad to resell to eager post-Soviet customers, small-fry entrepreneurs struggling to avoid shakedowns by state officials. Kotkin hesitates to call this “corruption,” since this presupposes the prevalence of rule-regulated behavior. In the 1990s, everyone was a violator of varying degrees and the weak were targeted for exploitation.⁸

Sel’ianov remembered that this provocative period full of uncertainty provided compelling stories for Russian filmmakers—much like the prohibition period in the United States spawned the American gangster film genre. He rhetorically asked: “How do you live when biology takes precedence? [...] The Russian people were absolutely unprepared for this kind of existence. [...] Suddenly, after such a regular, organized Soviet society, a one-party system, we got this radical freedom—it was a very difficult experiment for individuals and for society as a whole.” Suddenly everything was possible, says Sel’ianov, an unfamiliar freedom that brought out the worst in human nature. Yet, these difficult times also provided filmmakers with ready stories from their daily lives.⁹

Balabanov successfully captured this period of unchecked freedom in his stories of the 1990s bandit culture, comprised of young men negotiating the new realities of Russian capitalism. As Eliot Borenstein has claimed, this new bandit culture was predicated on the lawlessness of post-Soviet society, semi-autonomous criminals who were no longer restrained by a code of professional ethics or Soviet law. Popular culture in turn embraced this banditry, which obliterated the order, tradition and honor that the “thieves in law” had developed over decades, in order to establish a new anarchic mythos—that of the bandit.¹⁰ Balabanov’s films are a reflection of this popularity, but also an ironic commentary on it. The actor Sergei Bodrov Jr. explained in 2002 the appeal of just such a bandit hero for Russian audiences: “*Brat* [*Brother*] is a kind of primeval state. There is still no law. There is still primitive chaos all around. And then one of these people rises and says ‘This is how it’s going to be: we will protect the women, the fire, defend [our people], and kill the enemy.’ These are the first words of the law when there is no law.”¹¹

In *Brother*, Balabanov made a radical shift towards popular cinema, choosing a genre that reflected the post-Soviet chaos of the 1990s. His two previous films had been based on literary adaptations of Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka. In this bandit film, Danila Bagrov returns home after a tour of duty in Chechnya. With nothing to do in provincial Russia, he is sent by his mother to St Petersburg, where he is immediately drawn into his brother’s criminal business as a hit-man. Relying on the skills he learned as a soldier (military training that he denies to almost everyone), Danila is able to bring down an entire group of criminals. All the while, Danila maneuvers his way through a fractured society. Appearing as a self-anointed angel of vengeance, Danila recalls similar characters in American cinema such as Travis Bickle in Martin Scorsese’s *Taxi Driver* (1976), played by Robert De Niro, and Paul Kersey in Michael Winner’s *Death Wish* (1974),

played by Charles Bronson. Danila is so successful as an enforcer that by the end of the film, he hitches a ride to Moscow, seemingly having outgrown the crime business in St. Petersburg, which his brother had called “provincial” earlier in the film. Greater criminal activities seemed to await Danila in the capital.

Balabanov’s film was an immediate success, especially at Cannes where it was shown on 17 May 1997. Film critic Iurii Gladil’shchikov argued that *Brother* was a logical continuation of the Russian *chernukha* films that western audiences had come to expect, including such films as Pavel Lungin’s *Taxi Blues* (*Taksi bliuz*; 1990) and *Luna Park* (1992). These dark and depressing films had come to represent contemporary Russia with its filth, poverty, prostitution, and violence, which for western audiences logically evolved into stories about new Russians and their mafia. “Balabanov knew perfectly on which pedal to press: the festival audience, as before, wanted to get from Russia [...] the image of an immoral and wild country.”¹² By July, Russian audiences at the Kinotavr film festival already knew that Balabanov’s film was the one to beat. Although there were seven other films in the program that featured contract killers, none captured the imagination of the Kinotavr audience like *Brother*, which won both the grand prize and the award for best male actor (Bodrov Jr.).¹³ Kirill Mazur, long-time friend of Balabanov, would later suggest that *Brother* was “a deeply philosophical film” that provided “a hero of our times” that Russian audiences were craving, which differentiated it from the other bandit films of the period, those that seemed interested only in the most prurient representations of crime and violence.¹⁴

At first, western scholars were not sure how to interpret the film’s hero.¹⁵ Birgit Beumers selected the moniker of a “killer-hero” for Danila, suggesting that *Brother* debunked the myth of the Soviet hero.¹⁶ Christina Stojanova describes *Brother* as an American “gangster thriller” that had been adapted to the post-Soviet Russian reality. The film had for such critics more sociological than artistic relevance in its depiction of actual criminal structures in post-Soviet society. Reflecting Russia’s societal devastation, all of the characters in the film are divided into readily discernible friends or enemies of Danila. As Stojanova notes, Danila is continually faced with the urgent dilemma to forgive or avenge acts of betrayal, in the stark moral world of the film. This self-regulated system of justice is due to the lack of a definable authority (police, military, government) within the country. The police in particular are conspicuously absent once Danila arrives in St Petersburg, underlining the lawless nature of post-Soviet society.¹⁷

Lars Kristensen notes the overwhelming success of *Brother*, especially in video sales, and suggests that it may have been post-Soviet Russia’s most economically successful film at the time given its low production costs. It placed Balabanov and the production company CTB at the cutting edge of post-Soviet film production and also became the benchmark film of the bandit film cycle. Yet, after making his art-house *Of Freaks and Men* (*Pro urodov i liudei*; 1998),

Balabanov and CTB were in need of another financial success, especially in light of the August 1998 ruble default. The economic imperative is a plausible reason for Balabanov's return to his killer-hero in the sequel to the original film.¹⁸

In *Brother 2* (2000), Danila is in Moscow, where he is living off of his criminal proceeds and trying to become integrated into post-Soviet society. Using his military connections, he has a job and has even begun to date the pop star Irina Saltykova (played by herself). Yet, Danila's new life is disrupted by the murder of one of his military buddies Kostia (Alexander Diachenko). By this time, Russia's crime syndicate is international in scope and Danila must extract vengeance from a Chicago crime boss, who works closely with Russian and Ukrainian criminal organizations.

The mob boss Richard Mennis (Gary Houston), has been skimming off of the NHL contract of Kostia's twin brother Mitia (also played by Alexander Diachenko in a bad wig) and has criminal connections and business in Russia. Danila believes that Mennis is responsible for the killing of his friend and eventually makes his way, violently, to Mennis' office where he extracts the money that has been stolen from Mitia by threat of force. After giving Mitia his money and foiling Mennis' business plans in Russia, Danila and Dasha (Daria Lesikova), a Russian prostitute, manage to escape the Chicago police and the Ukrainian mafia in order to board an Aeroflot plane home to Russia.

Whatever cachet Balabanov had gained with critics after *Brother* was certainly diminished after the release of *Brother 2*. Many of the same Russian critics who had praised *Brother* disliked the sequel.¹⁹ However, in reaction to several of these negative reviews, *Art of Film (Iskusstvo kino)* gathered together eighteen second-year film students who offered a very different opinion about Balabanov's sequel. Unlike those who compared the sequel to the original film, these young film students viewed *Brother 2* as an accurate portrayal of their reality, showing that the bandit mythos was evolving. These students believed that Balabanov's film successfully distilled the Soviet past into an accurate depiction of the post-Soviet present. According to the students, in the post-Soviet cultural space, cultural agents were peddling opportunity and freedom. These options were, in fact, illusory and it was suggested that art (and film in particular) must confront the fact that once the Soviet mythology and ideology were destroyed, nothing tangible was offered as a replacement. Incorporating Soviet references in the film (Chapaev's machine gun, Lenin's office and the former Lenin Museum), Balabanov established a myth of national fraternity in which your "brother" can be any survivor from this Soviet past. As a result, for Danila, the world was divided into brothers and non-brothers.²⁰

Brother 2 is an example of the functioning of genre film as described by Altman, when the ritual needs of the audience coincide with the ideological values of the production company.²¹ This simple formula of brotherhood did not require any deep reflection and was based on an uncomplicated concept that

these film students preferred when confronting the hostile post-Soviet world. More importantly, Russian society no longer desired a hero who was only spiritually superior to their Western counterparts, but one who could now go to the United States and exact vengeance on African-American pimps, a Chicago mob boss and émigré Ukrainian thugs.²² The semantic shift that had occurred from 1997 to 2000 was due to the gradual recovery in Russian national pride and a growing disenchantment with American chauvinism. Kristensen has provided data that *Brother 2* spent seven weeks as the number one film in Russia and twenty-three weeks in the top ten, pushing out Nikita Mikhalkov's 43-million-dollar *The Barber of Siberia* (*Sibirskii tsirul'nik*; 1998) from the top spot. There were other factors that made *Brother 2* into a blockbuster, including a successful soundtrack, website and video game.²³

Among western scholars, Yana Hashamova argued that Balabanov's films (*Brother*, *Brother 2* and *War* [*Voina*; 2002]) were an attempt to rehabilitate Russian national pride.²⁴ Similarly, Borenstein suggested that Russians in the 1990s, suffering through difficult economic and social conditions, found consolation in the notion that they were morally or spiritually superior to the West. Danila was not the bodybuilder hero of western action films (Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, etc.), but might be viewed as a Russian Robin Hood following his own moral standards and delivering justice where needed. Feeling inadequate when compared to the financial and military power of the West, Russians sought inspiration from a morally superior male character. Danila offered just this, alleviating national anxieties and post-Soviet humiliations: economic, military, social and political.²⁵ In *Brother 2*, Danila actually punished the West for taking advantage of Russian weakness, striking a positive chord with post-Soviet audiences.

Two years later, the on-going development of the bandit mythos was found in *Brigade*, the most successful television series in Russia, which told the story of four childhood friends who are forced by circumstances to make a life in the criminal world. Sasha Belov (Sergei Bezrukov) returns home from military service to find that perestroika has truly transformed Soviet society. In order to adapt to this new reality, Belov must abandon his plans to enter university. The 15-episode series further extrapolates the "brother mentality" of Balabanov's earlier films—Belov must rely on his childhood friends, raised within the same apartment building, in dealing with local thugs and a corrupt police department. By the end of the series, the four have built one of the most powerful criminal gangs in Moscow. *Brigade* made stars of the actors, especially Bezrukov, who in an interview with the newspaper *Moscow Komsomolets* (*Moskovskii Komsomolets*), said that the series was: "About life. About the fate of a nation and of an individual." The newspaper's introduction to the article suggested that the life referred to by Bezrukov was one particular to the Russian bandit culture of the period, with the authors noting that the actors of *Brigade* "shake the hands of

law enforcement officials and criminal authorities hold banquets in their honor. [The criminal group] of Sasha [Belov] has become a symbol of our time.”²⁶ Significantly, the series covered the years 1989 to 2000, ending just as Putin came to power. At this point the Russian bandit was a romantic hero, more than just the morally superior avenging angel Danila. Clearly, the bandit as a cultural hero was evolving in response to the changes in post-Soviet society.

If Balabanov’s *Brother* can be imagined as the sunrise of the bandit genre, then Buslov’s *Bimer* marks the sunset of the bandit in film and television.²⁷ Danila is an undisputed hero, but the bandits of *Bimer* die or go to prison, depicting the end of Russian banditry. Significantly, both the *Brother* and the *Bimer* films were produced by CTB. The production company evolved the bandit film genre in tune with the shifting economic and social landscape of the Russian bandit. Balabanov would argue that the cinema was like a mirror that refracted what was happening in Russia and CTB similarly facilitated this refraction of the real changes occurring within the country.²⁸ In particular, Buslov’s film represents a significant shift in the popular perception of the bandit. A group of friends are undone by their theft of a BMW 750IL, eventually shot and arrested in a final confrontation with police in a provincial town. Missing from Buslov’s film is the glamour of *Brigade* and the moral superiority of earlier bandits—like Danila. The recurring motif of the film is the ring-tone of Buslov’s main character Kostian or Kot (Vladimir Vdovichenkov, who also played a major role in *Brigade*), representing the fateful phone-call from his friend about their *final* criminal job. This will be the last job (or so he tells himself) before Kostian starts life anew with his wife and child in their newly remodeled apartment. Buslov’s film is a reflection of Putin’s emerging post-Soviet society in which low-level criminal business is no longer viable. In 1999, when nominated for prime minister, Putin said that law and order would be his top priority. Early in his first presidency, Putin curbed the power of the oligarchs, enacted new criminal codes, attempted to restore the prestige of the police, military and security forces and, most importantly, brought an end to the free-wheeling bandit culture of the previous decade.

Paradoxically, the popularity of Balabanov’s bandit films coincided with Putin’s unexpected rise to power. Peter Baker and Susan Glasser have reported, “For many, Danila the hit man was equated with Putin, the new tough-talking president. The newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, the country’s most popular, youth-oriented tabloid, even advertised itself using both their images. ‘Putin is *nash* [our] president, Danila is *nash* [our] brother, *KP* is *nasha* [our] newspaper,’ said its billboards around Moscow.”²⁹ Allen C. Lynch has argued that by the end of Putin’s second presidential term a substantial portion of Russian society enjoyed a comfortable standard of living within this new society. Moscow and St. Petersburg, as well as larger provincial cities such as Nizhni Novgorod, began to show signs of prosperity and “had become unrecognizable to anyone who had seen these locales in the 1990s or during the Soviet period.”³⁰

“They are petty bandits without any characterization that would allow any one of them to distinguish himself from the general type,” wrote Gerald McCausland in his review of *Bimer* in 2003. “Nor do the adventures of these four amount to anything particularly heroic.” In retrospect, this seems to be one of the important elements (and lasting qualities) of this film. The bandit culture of the 1990s had come to an end and those who had made their fortune illegally no longer could steal cars for a living. “There is no question of loyalty in this band of thieves. There is only the need for strength in numbers to win the fight for survival.”³¹ This was very much the case when there was no governmental or societal authority, when the police were as bad as the criminals, but in Putin’s Russia, petty crime would be prosecuted (even if white-collar crime flourished).

Those who had made their money in the 1990s and lived to tell about it were actively trying to clean up their reputations and legitimize their businesses in order to retain what they had begged, borrowed and stolen. Proof of this can be found in Lungin’s *The Tycoon* (*Oligarkh*; 2002). This film was an artistically hollow homage to the Russian oligarch Boris Berezovskii, who became one of Russia’s richest and more powerful men during the period of robber capitalism. Berezovskii was a close confidant of President Yeltsin and is said to have engineered the successful election of Putin as President. Yet, after the 2000 elections, Berezovskii divested himself of his Russian interests, moved to England and became a fierce opponent of the Russian President. It is no surprise then that most believed that Berezovskii had himself financed Lungin’s film in order to rehabilitate his image at home.³² Coincidentally, CTB had initially been approached by the film’s representatives, but in the end Lungin was selected, not Balabanov, as director, although with CTB’s Sel’ianov as one of the producers.³³

Predictably, Lungin credited *The Godfather* as one of the antecedents of his film and situated *The Tycoon* within the lineage of the American gangster genre.³⁴ In reality, this film was an apologist rewriting of Berezovskii’s violent, illegal rise to power. The need for such an extravagant (and expensive) apology was the changing political and social landscape in Putin’s Russia. As Lucy Fischer has argued, Lungin attempted to excuse Platon Makovskii’s (Vladimir Mashkov) actions as allowable within the free-market economy, in which economic license is equivalent to personal freedom.³⁵ With clear allusions to Berezovskii, Russian audiences could not help but to flock to the theater to see how their political laundry would be hung out to dry for all to see, making it one of Russia’s most successful films at the time of its release.³⁶

After such cinematic offerings, it is clear why three years later Balabanov could unapologetically offer *Dead Man’s Bluff* with the tag-line: “For those who lived through the 1990s.” Clearly, the suggestion was that anyone who had endured the previous decade’s banditry could now look back on the period, sitting in a plush theater seat, with some nostalgia and, possibly, even laugh. After all, as Altman and other film scholars have argued, genre development

is evolutionary (or cyclical) in nature by which experimentation eventually leads to reflexivity (often in the form of parody).³⁷ Providing a parody of the bandit films he helped to encourage, Balabanov offered audiences a commercial, criminal comedy with a star-studded cast of actors who had themselves survived the period in question.

One of the reasons that Balabanov could offer this pastiche in 2005 was because Russian society was improving overall. Life satisfaction in Russia had significantly plummeted between 1994 and 1998, reaching its lowest point around the time of the ruble default. These were also the years of the lowest real per capita income. Yet by 2001, life satisfaction had increased by nearly fifty percent and also had revealed a substantial decrease in the percentage of Russians reporting that they were dissatisfied with their lives. A lot of this could be attributed to an ever improving economic environment and much greater social mobility.³⁸

In broad brushstrokes, it could be said that *Brother* depicted a likable young man, forced by social and political circumstance to kill bad people. In so doing, Balabanov especially accented his character's anti-Semitism, racist attitudes and dislike of American (and Western) culture. In *Brother 2*, each one of these positive and negative characteristics was taken to almost absurd extremes. Balabanov resisted providing a *Brother 3*, which had been suggested by the popular press at one point and then was refuted in the Russian newspaper *Arguments and Facts* (*Argumenty i fakty*).³⁹ It should be no surprise then that Balabanov returned to these same characteristics and exploited them as parody, thereby providing numerous auto-citations in his postmodern spoof *Dead Man's Bluff*.

Inherent in postmodernism is a backward glance that is firmly rooted in the present: the lawless 1990s from the perspective of Putin's law and order society of 2005. Cristina Degli-Esposti has proposed that the postmodern tries to synthesize a past and a future into an imaginary present. In so doing, disruption of this act of self-reflection is created by intertextuality, bricolage, multiplicity, and simulation through parody and pastiche.⁴⁰ Linda Hutcheon has defined postmodern parody "as repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity." Hutcheon wished to separate parody from its eighteenth-century definition as a ridiculing imitation in order to posit that the postmodern parody both enshrines and questions the past.⁴¹ Fredric Jameson had assigned a similar role to the pastiche. For Jameson, the pastiche imitates a particular style, but is neutral in its mimicry, devoid of conviction. "Pastiche is thus blank parody," stated Jameson.⁴²

Dan Harries has argued that the film parody relies on and cannibalizes other filmic texts. This reworking (in the present case, *Dead Man's Bluff*) disrupts not only the viewing of previous textual systems (*Brother*, *Brother 2*, *Bimer*, etc.), but also the construction and viewing of future filmic texts related to the benchmark films of the film cycle (for example, Aleksei Uchitel's bandit

film *Break Loose* [*Vos'merka*; 2013]). Harries has proposed that film parody is inherently concerned with the historical tradition that it is ridiculing by recalling the codes and conventions of past films.⁴³ In fact, once a film genre has reached super-saturation and predictability, parody emerges in commercial cinema to extend the genre's popularity and profitability.⁴⁴

Within this definition of postmodern parody, it might be asserted that Balabanov's *Dead Man's Bluff* brought an end to the generative Russian bandit film cycle—although derivative bandit films (now viewed as schlock) are still being made.⁴⁵ When *Dead Man's Bluff* premiered in Russia, many in the audience were confused and even dissatisfied. There had been a general expectation that Balabanov might finally provide a third *Brother* film that would continue the saga of the Russian bandit hero, but instead, the unpredictable filmmaker offered a black comedy that seemed to mock and ridicule these same bandits.⁴⁶ *Dead Man's Bluff* begins in a university classroom where a professor explains basic economic principles and underlines the lawlessness of the previous decade. Balabanov then transports the audience back to the mid-1990s in order to follow the misguided adventures of Sergei (Aleksei Panin) and Simon (Dmitrii Diuzhev), two small-time bandits in a provincial town who work for the local crime boss, Sergei Mikhailovich (Nikita Mikhalkov). Asked to complete a transaction for heroin for their boss, Sergei and Simon are robbed by three thugs, who were tipped off by the corrupt policeman Stepan (Viktor Sukhorukov). Sergei and Simon eventually track the three thugs down (after killing Stepan). More bandits appear, sent by Stepan earlier in a second double-cross, resulting in more bloodshed and dead bodies than at the end of a Shakespearean drama or a Quentin Tarantino film. Having recovered the heroin, Sergei and Simon decide not to take it back to Sergei Mikhailovich, but to go to Moscow and use it as capital to get into business. The bandit game was no longer profitable, as Kaban (Yuri Stepanov) had explained earlier in the film. The new opportunities were in the capital, if you had start-up money. The film jumps forward in time to 2005. Now, Sergei and Simon are government officials, with a view from their large office of St Basil's Cathedral, Red Square and the Kremlin walls. They have used Sergei Mikhailovich's heroin to parlay themselves into oil and gas businessmen, which has led to their new roles as elected government officials – the new bandits of the Putin years.

Dead Man's Bluff has an ensemble cast, similar to those found in classic American comedic films, such as *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963) or *Cannonball Run* (1981). Each of the actors brings with him or her a persona that the film satirizes. Robert Stam (et al.) has referred to this practice as “celebrity intertextuality,” in which the actor evokes a particular genre or cultural milieu.⁴⁷ For our purposes, it is relevant to concentrate on the actors' connection to other bandit films, series or music that helped to accentuate Balabanov's parody. Diuzhev gained popular fame in *Brigade*, playing one of the lead roles Kosmos.

Balabanov admitted in an interview with Dmitrii Bykov that he selected Diuzhev based on his work on this television series.⁴⁸ Andrei Panin (the professor of architecture in Balabanov's parody) was the corrupt policeman in *Brigade*. Vladimir Kaverin (played by Panin) was the enduring villain throughout the television series, constantly after Belov and his gang.

Besides his references to *Brigade*, Balabanov used many actors from his own earlier films, providing a direct connection to the *Brother* films. Sergei Makovetskii played the role of Belkin in *Brother 2*, the Russian businessman who ordered the hit on Danila's friend. In *Dead Man's Bluff* Makovetskii is an imbecile and petty gangster. Sukhorukov, another Balabanov favorite, was *the* brother in *Brother* and *Brother 2*. Audiences would certainly remember that Danila's brother was sent home from St. Petersburg at the end of the first film and told to join the local police, which was visually confirmed in the sequel, his police hat and uniform were visible as he ate his dinner, before going to find Danila in Moscow. An attentive viewer could then extrapolate that Stepan in *Dead Man's Bluff* is a continuation of this theme—the bandit, turned dirty cop that Sukhorukov plays to perfection. Although only briefly in the film, Kirill Pirogov (the Executioner in *Dead Man's Bluff*) played Il'ia in *Brother 2*, providing travel documents and other connections for Danila and his brother. Anatolii Zhuravlev had a minor role in *Brother*, but plays one of the three imbecilic bandits who steal the heroin in Balabanov's parody.

Aleksei Serebriakov, the doctor making some illegal white powder, had played a number of roles as a social degenerate, but most recently, had appeared in *Anti-Killer: Anti-Terror* (*Antikiller: Antiterror*; 2003) an action film sequel that dealt with dirty cops, organized crime and Chechen militants. Andrei Merzlikin, Sergei Mikhailovich's assistant, had played Dimon in *Bimer* and would reprise the role the following year in the sequel. Garik Sukachev, playing one of the bandits, was a well-known singer, songwriter and filmmaker. The front-man for groups like *Brigade S* (*Brigada S*) and *The Untouchables* (*Neprikasaemye*), Sukachev cultivated in the 1990s the image of a "thief in law." He would later soften that image, but at the time of *Dead Man's Bluff*, Sukachev could still trade on his own "criminal" persona. Even Aleksandr Bashirov, who is killed within the first few minutes of the film, brought with him a cinematic connection to Rashid Nugmanov's *Needle* (*Igla*; 1988) with Viktor Tsoi—one of the first Soviet films to address the issue of illegal drugs and organized crime in the Soviet Union. The fact that so many of the actors featured in this film had appeared in bandit films previously, only added to the parodic quality of Balabanov's pastiche.

Violence, criminality, racism and nationalism were all considered to be trademarks of Balabanov's early films, especially by Western critics of *Brother*, *Brother 2* and *War*. It should be no surprise that Balabanov then took these to extremes in *Dead Man's Bluff*. Among the bungling thieves of the heroin is Eggplant, played by Grigorii Siatvinda, whose father was from Zimbabwe and

whose mother was Russian. The character Eggplant is constantly referred to as an “Ethiopian” even though he has no accent and persistently responds that he is “Russian” (Siatvinda, himself, grew up in Tiumen, Russia). In fact, of all of the petty gangsters, Eggplant seems to be the most intelligent and yet is dismissed simply because of the color of his skin. After memorable moments from earlier films, like when Danila made the “black-asses” pay the conductor for their tram ride in *Brother*, it seems purposeful that Balabanov provides a black character for derision, highlighting the ignorance of the other criminals.

Violence in *Dead Man’s Bluff* also reaches comical proportions. It has been reported that fifty liters of blood was used during filming. Costume designer Tat’iana Patrakhal’tseva remembered that she was constantly washing the actor’s clothes that were covered in blood splatter and Vladimir Pliatskovskii recalled that no matter how much blood was used, Balabanov always wanted more.⁴⁹ Within even this theme of violence, however, there are important cinematic references. For example, there is a possible homage to Michael Cimino’s *The Deer Hunter* (1978).⁵⁰ In Cimino’s film, there is a controversial scene in which the Viet Cong force American prisoners (Robert De Niro and Christopher Walken) to play Russian roulette. The scene was meant to represent the random violence that is associated with war, but many took specific offense to this scene either because they felt that it was contrived (there was no actual proof that the Viet Cong had forced prisoners to play Russian roulette) or because it was an insult to the Vietnamese people (the Soviet delegation walked out of the 29th Berlin Film Festival).⁵¹ In order to underline his own use of cinematic violence as art, Balabanov, possibly, recreated this scene briefly with Sergei playing a game he calls *Dead Man’s Bluff* (*Zhmurki*) or what is better known in America as Russian roulette. In this scene, both Koron (Makovetskii) and Bala (Zhuravlev) lose the game to Sergei with their brains splattered on the refrigerator behind them. For a filmmaker who had been accused of excessive violence, a reference to *The Deer Hunter*, which won five Academy Awards, including Best Picture, would provide yet another ironic, postmodern quotation.

Visually, Balabanov was making reference to perestroika *chernukha* cinema: a recognized collection of Russian films from the late-1980s through the 1990s that depicted the darkest, bleakest aspects of post-/Soviet life; confronting social issues that previously had been taboo subjects for the Soviet film industry. *Chernukha* and bandit films became intertwined in the mid-1990s and Balabanov’s *Brother* is now representative of both the visual and thematic qualities of both. Balabanov’s visual vocabulary deserves significant discussion beyond the parameters of this article, however, it is important to briefly raise the issue here. Seth Graham has called *chernukha* films naturalistic with a concentration on dirty, crowded apartments, littered courtyards, urban streets, police stations, prisons, and hospitals; represented within an atmosphere of cruelty and physical violence. Poor film quality and production values resulted in dark, poorly lit and, often, tinted films, developing

into an unintended visual style, which Balabanov referenced in *Dead Man's Bluff* and even more intentionally in *Cargo 200* (*Gruz 200*; 2007). Graham has called it a “concentrated visual incarnation of de-Sovietization.”⁵²

Balabanov selected film locations in Nizhnii Novgorod and Tver’ for *Dead Man's Bluff*, two provincial cities where he could approximate the visual texture of a disintegrating post-Soviet society. Specifically, Balabanov filmed within an area of central Nizhnii Novgorod with some of the oldest remaining wooden structures that were in various states of ruin. Since the release of the film, many of these wooden homes have been completely abandoned or demolished. Interior scenes were filmed within cramped apartments in a state of severe deterioration; reminders of post-Soviet *byt* (everyday life depicted in *chernukha* films) prior to a means for “western renovations.”

Criminality is further referenced visually through the costumes, including track suits, leather jackets, raspberry (red or forest green) sport coats, thick gold chains and bad haircuts, which are all associated with the 1990s and the bandits who often wore them. Sergei Mikhailovich ironically displays the typical tattoos of a “thief in law.” The two young bandits, Sergei and Simon, eventually surpass Sergei Mikhailovich, mirroring what actually occurred in the 1990s as bandits disrupted the criminal codes of professional criminals of the Soviet era.

Another visual cinematic reference is made to Buslov’s *Bimer* and the heroes who are undone after stealing a BMW 750iL. Balabanov’s inter-textual reference is found in prolonged scenes with Sergei and Simon driving wildly around Nizhnii Novgorod in a rather dilapidated BMW. Each time they jump into the car and speed away, a similar soundtrack from Balabanov’s earlier films is repeated, emphasizing visually and aurally a simultaneous reference back to *Brother* and *Bimer*. The prolonged shots of the BMW nearly replace the visual aesthetic of an empty tram car (a Balabanov signature) although twice the BMW and a tram are briefly captured in the same frame. In all of this are found the visual remnant of *chernukha* films that are themselves part of Balabanov’s cinematic parody.

Maybe the most provocative assertion in the film is Balabanov’s parodic response to accusations of his ultra-nationalism and anti-Semitism.⁵³ Anthony Anemone has pointed out that while *Brother* displayed “no lost love for Americans, Jews or Caucasian/Chechens” the sequel was “xenophobic and, especially, anti-American.”⁵⁴ One of the subtle ways in which Balabanov may have played with this issue was with the displays of Sergei’s exuberant (false) religiosity. Each time Sergei is within sight of an Orthodox Church, he devoutly crosses himself. But his deep religiosity in no way hinders him from killing and robbing other (presumably Orthodox) Russians. This, in fact, was an important issue for Balabanov – the bestial behavior of Russians in a society devoid of moral restraint. He raised this issue in other films (*Of Freaks and Men*, *Cargo 200*, *Stoker* [*Kochegar*; 2010] and *I Also Want* [*Ia tozhe khochu*; 2012]), in which

he also made reference to Russia's feigned religious devotion. As for claims of his anti-Semitism, Balabanov offered in *Dead Man's Bluff* a lawyer in a yarmulke, who provides Sergei and Simon with heroin for a suitcase of money. The sarcasm in this brief scene is too obvious even for the most virulent critics. As always, Balabanov's satire can be taken two ways by audiences. Anti-Semitic audiences will agree with the depiction of a Jewish lawyer dealing in money and drugs, meant to weaken the Orthodox Russian people. Jewish audiences would likely be appalled by a further example of this historic slander and the repetition of an unfounded taint on the Jewish character.

In a similar vein, Anemone also argued that Balabanov's early films (*Brother, Of Freaks and Men, Brother 2* and *War*) criticized Russian moral bankruptcy and examined vigilante justice within a State that had proven itself unable to offer minimal security and social justice. "Balabanov's films all reflect the raging anarchy of post-Communist Russian life, the desperate desire of many ordinary Russians for simple solutions to complex problems, and the power of nationalist discourse in contemporary Russian culture."⁵⁵ This quote could easily be applied to *Dead Man's Bluff* as well; the raging anarchy of the 1990s affords for a suitcase full of heroin to be stolen and then used as capital (simple fix to a complex problem) that eventually allows two provincial bandits to become political deputies in Putin's new law and order government. As Anemone noted in the earlier films, *Dead Man's Bluff* criticizes Russia's moral bankruptcy and lack of social justice by depicting the artless transition of petty criminals into the post-Soviet political system.

Aleksandr Shpagin, film scholar and Russian television producer, understood *Dead Man's Bluff* as "a heart-felt farewell to the Russian cinema of bandits about which critics complained for so long."⁵⁶ Similarly, film critic Stanislav Zel'venskii argued that since Balabanov had begun the romanticizing of the Russian bandit in *Brother*, he also had the right to bring it to a close in *Dead Man's Bluff*.⁵⁷ What neither articulated is that the best bandit films reflected the evolving political and social landscape within Russia; Balabanov, Sel'ianov and CTB just so happened to anticipate and to reflect the evolution of the bandit mythos in post-Soviet cinema, even when there was nothing else that could be offered but a pastiche of the 1990s.

* * *

In conclusion, Balabanov first struck a nerve with audiences when Russians longed for a hero to emerge from the chaos of the post-perestroika period. Balabanov's Danila displayed the type of moral superiority and inner fortitude that made Russians believe that they could once again "defend their fire, protect their women and kill their enemy" (as Sergei Bodrov had put it), even as they felt completely powerless in their real lives. As Evgenii Margolit wrote in 2004,

Danila lived a life without doubt or fear and was able to clearly separate “our [people]” from “not our [people].” With a weapon in his hand, he re-introduced justice into the world.⁵⁸ Danila would evolve into a national hero when he went to America to exact revenge for the murder of one of his brothers, reflecting Russia’s own dissatisfaction with American chauvinism. It also marked the end of the idealization of life in America that many Russians had nurtured in previous decades.⁵⁹ This new sense of national pride is demonstrated in Danila’s recitation of the Soviet children’s poem, “This is my Homeland, I love everyone on the planet,” as he climbs the fire escape to confront the corrupt American businessman, as well as the final song of the film soundtrack: *Departing Letter* (*Proshchal’noe pis’mo*) also known as *Goodbye America!*, which further articulates this post-Soviet disenchantment with the American ideal. The line, “You’ll still answer, scum, for Sevastopol,” said by Danila’s brother to a prostrate Ukrainian émigré-mafia-tough-guy just before he shoots him twice, received the greatest reaction from Russian audiences; Danila’s “All of your America is finished” also remains an enduring quote from the film.⁶⁰ As Vasili Stepanov remembered, *Brother 2* was less a sequel to the first film and more a nationalistic film made to answer public demand. *Brother 2* was shown on a government television channel, on an official government holiday, while in the streets were hung banners that stated: “Danila is my brother. Putin is my President.”⁶¹

With the stabilization of the Russian economy, these bandits became romantic figures—especially in the *Brigade* series. No longer just morally superior to their non-Russian counterparts, Sasha Belov and his friends were now “the good guys” in a society that had been turned upside down. As Putin solidified his law and order stance, bandit films began to reflect the twilight of this particular lawless era. In *Bimer*, Kostian is just about to transition into legitimate business, but his brothers call him for one last job. This final job ends in the death or arrest of all but one of the bandits. As Putin further asserted his power over the Russian oligarchs, *The Tycoon* could no longer convince Russian audiences that someone like Boris Berezovskii or his alter-ego, Platon Makovskii, was “the good guy.” The oligarchs were not romantic heroes—Danila Bagrov or Sasha Belov made good—as much as some may have wanted to portray themselves as such. In fact, the Russian oligarchs were not bandits in the true sense and could not share in this romantic mythos.

By the time that Balabanov made *Dead Man’s Bluff*, the bandit culture of the 1990s could only be parodied. Simon and Sergei trade their lives as provincial bandits for the new reality as Russian political figures in Moscow—the place for a new type of (bureaucratic) banditry. Ironically, this film is supposedly one of Putin’s favorites.⁶² Aleksei Medvedev, who read the original screenplay by Stas Mokhnachev, confirmed that Balabanov’s main goal seemed to be to expand on the comic qualities. “In each frame he insists on the fact that this is in no way a real story of the recent past, but a spunky genre film.”⁶³ Balabanov most certainly

understood that he could no longer make a serious bandit film in 2005. This political evolution was also reflected in *Bimer 2* released the following year. Four years after his arrest, Kostian is a different man, in a country that has changed significantly. He must adapt to this new social and political landscape. All of these films, including Bodrov's *Sisters*, were produced and/or distributed by CTB—although this does not include the television series previously mentioned.

In a recent interview, Sel'ianov responded to a question about the existence of censorship in Russian filmmaking. Sel'ianov argued that there is only self-censorship now, usually for economic reasons. In this response is found further evidence of why we may now interpret *Dead Man's Bluff* as a significant film in the evolution of the bandit film cycle. Sel'ianov stated: "Now, for example, audiences do not want to watch films about bandits. Not because someone has forbid it. Simply [the cinema audience] doesn't want it."⁶⁴ The point that Sel'ianov made is that the bandit film cycle evolved with the times until it became derivative. As a result, Balabanov could not justifiably provide audiences with *Brother 3*, which explains why *Dead Man's Bluff* was a parody.⁶⁵ As Altman has noted, film genres are engaged in lateral communication. The stability of a film cycle is momentary as countervailing economic, social and political concerns lead to constant cinematic reconfigurations and reformulations.⁶⁶ The first decade of Putin's law and order government brought an end to the lawlessness, curbed the oligarchs' political influence and, eventually, gave rise to a new type of bureaucratic corruption. In 2005, as Balabanov endeavored to simulate this recent past, he turned to parody in order to enshrine and to question the banditry that he himself and his production company had at one time valorized.

Balabanov, Sel'ianov and CTB played an important role in the cultivation and propagation of the bandit film cycle in Russian cinema. In as much, *Brother* and *Dead Man's Bluff* act as bookends for this productive cycle. As the political and social situation in Russia evolved, so too did the films that glamorized and refracted this period of lawlessness. Finally, by placing *Dead Man's Bluff* within the context of the bandit cycle, it is then possible to interpret the film as a postmodern pastiche in which Balabanov critiqued the films that he and CTB had popularized—once again providing a cinematic auto-citation, for which Balabanov was so well-known.

NOTES

1. Frederik Kh. Uait, [Frederick H. White], *Brikolazh rezhissera Balabanova* (Nizhnii Novgorod: DEKOM, 2016), 232.
2. As the entire Soviet film industry collapsed in the mid-1980s, a new model of filmmaking emerged that was shaped by market pressures including greater freedom of expression, managerial decentralization and self-financing. As the major Soviet film studios were restructured, independent studios emerged and offered films that engaged the social dangers that had been taboo subjects for Soviet films: prostitution, drugs, crime and other socially significant issues. These films depicted the darkest, most austere aspects of life and were shocking for Soviet audiences who had been raised on films that were mainly optimistic and without conflict. Eventually, these bleak films were designated as “*chernukha*” depicting both the darkness of content and of the film quality as production values were low (*chern* = black in Russian). Since the 2000s Russian filmmakers including Balabanov have made visual and content references to these *chernukha* films, especially when depicting the Soviet 1980s.
3. Rick Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” *Cinema Journal* 23.3 (Spring 1984): 6-18. Also see Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1999).
4. Altman, “A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre,” 9.
5. The production company name “CTB” was created on the spur of the moment and is not an acronym. One of the reasons that Balabanov and Sel’ianov supposedly liked this pseudo-acronym was because it could be “CTB” in either Russian or English. Therefore, I will refer to it as CTB – not as STV or CTV as is sometimes erroneously done.
6. Leger Grindon, “Cycles and Clusters: The Shape of Film Genre History,” in *Film Genre Reader IV*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, [1986] 2012), 44.
7. This section is a summary of several different sources on the Russian mafia, including: James Finckenauer and Elin J. Warnigh, *The Russian Mafia in America: Immigration, Culture and Crime* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998); Robert I. Friedman, *Red Mafiya: How the Russian Mob Has Invaded America* (New York: Warner Books, 2000); Scott Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia’s New Mafiya* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
8. Stephen Kotkin, *Armageddon Averted: The Soviet Collapse 1970-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 128–29.
9. Uait [White], *Brikolazh rezhissera Balabanova*, 232.
10. Eliot Borenstein, *Overkill: Sex and Violence in Contemporary Russian Popular Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 201–205.
11. Bodrov provided this view in May 2002 while on a panel discussion for *Art of Film (Iskusstvo kino)*. As quoted in Peter Baker and Susan Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin’s Russia and the End of Revolution* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, [2005] 2007), 73.
12. Iurii Gladil’shchikov, “Siuzhet dlia nebol’shogo ubiistva,” *Itogi* 23 (1997). As quoted in Kuvshinova, “Biografiia,” in *Balabanov*, ed. L. Arkus, M. Kuvshinova and K. Shavlovskii (Saint Petersburg: Masterskaia «Seans», 2013), 8.

13. Kuvshinova, "Biografiia," 10-11. According to Kuvshinova, there was particular animus for Balabanov from Garik Sukachev and his film crew, who were debuting their own bandit film *The Crisis of Middle Age* (Krizis srednego vozrasta; 1997). Possibly this is the reason for Sukachev's inclusion in *Dead Man's Bluff*—an ironic recognition of this odd, confrontational moment at the beginning of the bandit film cycle.
14. Uait [White], *Brikolazh rezhissera Balabanova*, 56.
15. It is quite interesting to re-read many of the initial responses to *Brother* offered by western scholars: Birgit Beumers, "To Moscow! To Moscow? The Russian Hero and the Loss of the Centre," in *Russia on Reels. The Russian Idea in Post-Soviet Cinema*, ed. Birgit Beumers (London: I.B.Tarius, 1999), 76-87; David Gillespie, *Russian Cinema* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2003), 152-53; Anna Lawton, *Imaging Russia 2000: Films and Facts* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2004), 128-30.
16. Beumers, "To Moscow! To Moscow? The Russian Hero and the Loss of the Centre," 83-87.
17. Christina Stojanova, "Cinema in the Free-Market Realm: Strategies for Survival," *Kinema* (Spring 1999): <http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/article.php?id=212&feature> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
18. Lars Kristensen, *Post-Soviet Russian Cinema: The Case of Aleksei Balabanov* (MPhil Thesis. University of Glasgow, 2003): 25; 28-29.
19. For example, see the negative reviews discussed in Kristensen, *Post-Soviet Russian Cinema*, 30: Antonina Kriukova, "Neputevoi 'Brat-2.' Sikvel Alekseia Balabanova ne opravdal nikakikh ozhidanii," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (17 May 2000); Lidiia Maslova, "Morganaticheskii brat," *Kommersant'*, 84 (13 May 2000); Leonid Pavlik, "Pravda – v gruboi sile?," *Trud* (17 May 2000); Elena Veselaia, "Komp'uternaia bylina," *Moskovskie Novosti* 19 (16-22 May 2000); Roman Volobuev, "Godzilla Bagrov vozvrashchaetsia," *Izvestiia*, (13 May 2000).
20. Evgenii Gusiatsinskii, "Brat zhil, brat zhiv, brat budet zhiv," *Iskusstvo kino* 3 (March 2001): <http://kinoart.ru/archive/2001/03/n3-article7> [accessed 10 February 2017].
21. Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," 15.
22. For more on how Russian men were seemingly rendered powerless by the collapse of the USSR and only regained some semblance of "masculinity" through violence, especially violence against a Western enemy, see Borenstein, *Overkill*.
23. Kristensen, *Post-Soviet Russian Cinema*, 28-29.
24. Yana Hashamova, "Aleksei Balabanov's Russian National Hero: Fantasies of Wounded National Pride," *Slavic and East European Journal* 51.2 (2007): 295-311.
25. Borenstein, *Overkill*, 189-94.
26. Marina Velikanova and Irina Bobrova, "Skazka pro belogo byka," *Moskovskii Komsomolets*, 27 October (2002): <http://www.mk.ru/old/article/2002/10/27/202555-skazka-pro-belogo-byka.html> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
27. This is not to suggest that no other films or television serials contextualized this period, but that these later projects were just that—a contextualization of a time in the recent past. Balabanov's and Buslov's films were not looking back and depicting a reality from some temporal distance.
28. Nelli Protorskaia, "Rezhisser dolzhen byt' nemnogo glupovat'," *Tribuna* (2 April 2002). This was at one point reposted on [AlekseyBalabanov.ru](http://alekseybalabanov.ru), but when verified on 10 February 2017 that link was dead.

29. Baker and Glasser, *Kremlin Rising*, 73.
30. Allen C. Lynch, *Vladimir Putin and Russian Statecraft* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2011), 70–71.
31. Gerald McCausland, “Petr Buslov: *Boomer (Bumer)* (2003).” *KinoKultura*, 2 (October 2003): <http://www.kinokultura.com/reviews/R103bumer.html> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
32. Roger Ebert, “Tycoon: A New Russia,” *Chicago-Sun Times* 12 September 2003, now reposted at <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/tycoon-a-new-russian-2003> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
33. Noted in Kuvshinova, “Biografiia,” 85. Mazur also noted in the interview mentioned above that Balabanov had taken too long considering the project and that Berezovskii’s people decided on Lungin, not waiting for Balabanov’s final decision.
34. For example, see: Ekaterina Barabash, “Retenziia na fil’m Oligarkh. Posledysh.” *Film.ru* (18 September 2002): <https://www.film.ru/articles/posledysh> [accessed on 10 February 2017]; Viktoriia Nikiforova, “Krestnyi otets ili geroi truda?” *NEWSru.com*, Delovaia khronika (17 December 2001). This was at one point posted on www.NewsRu.com, but when verified on 10 February 2017 that link was dead.
35. Lucy Fischer, “Pavel Lungin, *The Tycoon [Oligarkh]* (2002).” *KinoKultura* 7 (January 2005): <http://www.kinokultura.com/reviews/R1-05oligarkh.html> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
36. Ebert, “Tycoon: A New Russia.”
37. Altman, *Film/Genre*, 21–22.
38. Paul Frijters, Ingo Geishecker, John Haisken-DeNew and Michael A. Shields, “Can The Large Swings in Russian Life Satisfaction be Explained by Ups and Downs in Real Incomes?” *Scandinavian Journal of Economics* 108.3 (2006): 445.
39. Iuliia Shigareva, “Alekssei Balabanov: «Brata-3» ne budet!».” *Argumenty i fakty*, no. 10 (1115) (2002): <http://www.aif.ru/archive/1626042> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
40. Cristina Degli-Esposti, ed., *Postmodernism in the Cinema* (New York: Berghahn Books, 1998) 4–5.
41. Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 26–27; 126.
42. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, [1991] 2003), 17.
43. Dan Harries, *Film Parody* (London: British Film Institute, 2000) 7–9.
44. *Ibid.*, 121.
45. As an example, Uchitel’s recent film *Break Loose* (2013) was originally billed as a cinematic continuation of the *Brother* and *Bimer* films, but most blog posts do not agree with this assertion of the film’s generative quality, but rather understand the film as a parody or even “schlock.” The *Brother* and *Bimer* films depicted their present-day reality and became markers for the evolution of bandit culture, while *Break Loose* tries to reimagine a period now two decades in the past. See <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/613621/> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
46. Kuvshinova, “Biographiia,” 98–101.
47. Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and Beyond* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 207.

48. Dmitrii Bykov, "Alekssei Balabanov: Kochegar – schistlivyi chelovek. Poka ego doch' ne ubili." *Sobesednik*, no. 41 (26 October 2010): <http://sobesednik.ru/interview/aleksei-balabanov-kochegar-schastlivyi-chelovek-poka-ego-doch-ne-ubili> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
49. Kuvshinova, "Biografiia," 101.
50. In my discussion with Sel'ianov of this film, he confirmed that both he and Balabanov had watched *The Deer Hunter*, but he could neither confirm nor deny that this was a direct and intended cinematic quote. "If I knew that Alekssei had intended this, I would tell you, but I just don't know..."
51. For more on this incident, see the official website of the Berlin International Film Festival: https://www.berlinale.de/en/archiv/jahresarchive/1979/01_jahresblatt_1979/01_Jahresblatt_1979.html [accessed on 10 February 2017].
52. Seth Graham, "Tales of grim: Seth Graham on the dark side of Russian cinema." *The Calvert Journal* (18 January 2013): <http://calvertjournal.com/comment/show/57/chernukha-little-vera-cargo-200> [accessed 10 February 2017]. Also see Seth Graham, "Chernukha and Russian Film," *Studies in Slavic Cultures* 1 (2000): 9–27.
53. Nancy Condee has suggested that Balabanov's nationalism in films *Brother*, *Brother 2*, *War*, *Dead Man's Bluff*, *It Doesn't Hurt* and *Cargo 200* is part of a larger emancipation of Russian cinema from the influence of Hollywood. She understands Balabanov's brand of nationalism as "anticolonial abroad (against Hollywood)" and "colonial at home (against the 'peripheral ethnicities')." Nancy Condee, *The Imperial Trace: Recent Russian Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 235.
54. Anthony Anemone, "About Killers, Freaks and Real Men. The Vigilante Hero of Alekssei Balabanov's Films," in *Insiders and Outsiders in Russian Cinema*, ed. Stephen M. Norris and Zara M. Torlone (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 129.
55. *Ibid.*, 138.
56. Aleksandr Shpagin, "Newly Sprouting Seedlings in the Rustling Field of Domestic Cinema," trans. Vladimir Padunov, *KinoKultura*, 10 (October 2005): <http://www.kinokultura.com/articles/oct05-kinotavr.html> [accessed on 10 February 2017].
57. Stanislav Zel'venskii, "Gde ia ne budu nikogda," *Seans*, nos. 27-28 (June 2006): <http://seance.ru/n/27-28/perekrestok-2/balabanov/gde-i-ne-budu-nikogda/> [accessed 10 February 2017]
58. Evgenii Margolit, "V osade," in *Balabanov*, 167.
59. For example, see Vassily Aksyonov, *In Search of Melancholy Baby*, trans. Michael Henry Heim and Antonia W. Bouis (New York: Random House, 1985), 12–19.
60. Kuvshinova, "Biografiia," 74-77.
61. Vasilii Stepanov, "Priidi ko mne, brate, v moskov," in *Balabanov*, 192
62. Alekssei Medvedev, "Nichego ne izmenilos," in *Balabanov*, 219.
63. *Ibid.*, 220.
64. Lednev, Alekssei and Mariia Ledneva, "Interv'iu: «On liubil sil'noe, otkrovennoe vyskazyvanie, radikal'noe deistvie». Sergei Sel'ianov ob Alekssei Balabanove. Chast' 2," *Russkii reportier* 48.326 (5 December 2013): <http://rusrep.ru/balabanov2> [accessed on 10 February 2017].

65. Some might argue that Balabanov's *Stoker* is also a bandit film, but in fact, it grew out of the filmmaker's disappointment that he had not been able to bring to the screen Waclaw Sierozewski's "Khailak," which had inspired his unfinished film *River (Reka)*. In pre-production, Balabanov had had difficulty in determining a specific date in the 1990s for the action of *Stoker* so that the designers could select the appropriate clothing, cars and locations. All of this suggests that even though *Stoker* involves similar criminal themes, it really should not be included within this bandit designation as a clear representation of the lawless 1990s. See Kuvshinova, "Biografia," 89-90; 131-36.
66. Altman, *Film/Genre*, 195.