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## Theoretical Articles of the Film Expert V.E. Baskakov (1921–1999) in *Cinema Art* Journal

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### Abstract

The appeal to the Russian film studies heritage is conditioned by the need to find solutions in the construct of actual contemporary problems, which today have the status of open problems. In this correlation, our research interest is aimed at appealing to scientific heritage of one of the famous Soviet and Russian film expert V.E. Baskakov (1921–1999) in configuration of his theoretical publications on the pages of *Cinema Art* journal.

The purpose of our study is to carry out a holistic retrospective analysis of V.E. Baskakov's film studies views presented in his theoretical works in *Cinema Art* journal (1975–1999).

Research material: texts of V.E. Baskakov's theoretical film studies publications in *Cinema Art* journal. Research methods: content analysis, comparative-historical analysis, textual, hermeneutical method of understanding and interpretation of the text, theoretical methods: analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction.

The basic conceptual foundation of V.E. Baskakov's research was a multifaceted analysis of the problems of methodological knowledge in Russian film studies. The theoretical works of the film expert outlined the following topics: the state and development of Western cinematography, the specifics of its study in the context of ideological and political, as well as social dogmas of the Soviet period; the problems of Soviet cinematography, the genre uniqueness of expressive means; the importance of studying the history of world cinematography in the focus of creation of a film work; the analysis of filmmakers' creativity works; the relationships during the film production with the history and national culture; the development of Soviet and foreign cinematography theories influencing the cinema artists.

As a result of the content-analytical discourse of V.E. Baskakov's film studies positions presented in his theoretical articles in *Cinema Art* journal, several conclusions can be drawn:

- in his theoretical articles, V.E. Baskakov paid special attention to the study of the main approaches and methods of film studies analysis, trying to trace their modification in the context of political, social, and cultural construct;

- V.E. Baskakov's theoretical approaches focused more on analyzing the problems of cinematographic methodology, genre specificity, and expressive means within the study of film phenomena;

- the content of some V.E. Baskakov's articles traces the problems associated with the study of the most important phenomena in the history and theory of foreign film studies;

- the works of this film expert have clear tendency to reflect the ideology of the ruling Communist Party and orientation towards the study of the interrelations and influence of political and socio-cultural transformations on the development of cinematography;

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- V.E. Baskakov's theoretical works are characterized by the ideological analysis of historical events and trends that shaped the Soviet cinematography in different time periods and reflection of foreign cinematography.

**Keywords:** Baskakov, theoretical articles, film studies position, film expert, film studies, *Cinema Art* journal.

### 1. Introduction

Recently, the paradigm of humanities studies has been actively developing in the direction of studying various aspects in the field of film studies, based on the fundamental principle of profound analysis and understanding of scientific heritage.

The appeal to the Russian film studies heritage is not accidental, but conditioned by the need to find solutions in the construct of actual contemporary problems. The issues of the development of methodological functionality, expressive means, study of the film production deconstruction, determination of the boundaries of film study subject area are of particular importance here. Undoubtedly, the answers for many questions about cinematography and its role in the culture of society lie in a profound analysis and understanding of the scientific heritage and methodology of film studies.

In this correlation, our research interest lies in appealing to scientific heritage of one of the famous Soviet and Russian film expert V.E. Baskakov (1921-1999) in configuration of his theoretical publications on the pages of *Cinema Art* journal.

It is important to emphasize that today there are no fundamental studies related to the transformation of the theoretical conceptual views of V.E. Baskakov on the pages of *Cinema Art* journal.

The purpose of our research is to carry out a holistic retrospective analysis of V.E. Baskakov's film studies presented in theoretical works in *Cinema Art* journal (1975–1999).

Analyzing the texts of V.E. Baskakov's theoretical articles, we have made an attempt to design a systematic picture of his theoretical views and approaches to cinema art presented in the articles published on the pages of *Cinema Art* journal (1975-1999). Special emphasis was made on the consideration of the historical, social and political context, where V.E. Baskakov's theoretical concepts were formulated.

In our study the time limits on the basis of V.E. Baskakov's theoretical works analysis, presented in *Cinema Art* journal, are determined by the beginning of his theoretical articles publication in the journal (1975) and ending with the life and professional film study path of V.E. Baskakov (1999).

### 2. Materials and methods

Research material: texts of V.E. Baskakov's theoretical film study publications in *Cinema Art* journal.

Research methods: content analysis, comparative-historical analysis, textual, hermeneutical method of understanding and interpretation of the text, theoretical methods: analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction.

### 3. Discussion

In the course of the national cinematographic art development, the film trends and concepts underwent noticeable transformations depending on the era.

Today, film studies are facing new challenges associated with the appearance of new technologies, digital cinema, development of the Internet and new formats for watching films. Such factors directly influence the approaches and methods of cinema research.

The study of trends and conceptual views transformation in the focus of film studies of different historical stages, their evolution in correlation with the development of science and society is especially important recently, since such studies allow us to assess critically the contribution and significance of various research approaches in different historical periods, which contributes to deeper and comprehensive understanding of cinema and its role in the modern society, getting answers to problematic questions.

The research of film study trends' evolution is an important task for the scientific community, which creates the basis for maintaining the relevance and significance of film studies in a rapidly changing world and technology.

The issues of the history of cinema are reflected in the scientific texts of many researchers (Andrew, 1976; Andrew, 1984; Anosova, 1961; Aristarco, 1951; Bazin, 1971; Bergan, 2006; Braniganetal, 2015; Casetti, 1999; Dobrenko, 2008; Fedorov, 2015; Fedorov, 2016; Fedorov, 2017; Fedorov et al., 2019; Gibsonetal, 2000; Iezuitov, 1958; Kenez, 1992; Komarov, 2000; Lebedev, 1974; Levin, 1967; Livingston, 2009; McIver, 2016; Plantinga, 1993; Ryabchikova, 2014; Shlapentokh, 1993; Stam, 2000; Villarejo, 2007; Woll, 2000 and others)

Currently, many scientists are actively engaged in the research and analysis of the theoretical approaches and methods used in the film studies. The purpose of these studies is to clarify the semantic shades and the role of approaches in the analysis and interpretation of deep constructs of film productions (Alakshin, 2014; Badalov, 2011; Bogomolov, 2001; Bykov, 2001; Margolit, 2001; Medvedev, 2011 and others).

It is especially important to emphasize that such studies are contextual in nature. The analysis of the theoretical aspects of the film potential plays an important role in expanding and deepening our understanding of the cinema art, which results help to understand better the philosophical, aesthetic and cultural aspects of cinema, to reveal its versatility and numerous interpretations.

The publications of A. Fedorov and A. Levitskaya present a profound analysis of the theoretical concepts of the film studies in *Cinema Art* journal of the period of 1930-s – 2000s (Fedorov, 2022; Fedorov, 2023; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2022; Fedorov, Levitskaya, 2023; Levitskaya, 2022; Levitskaya, 2023), disclosing the film studies positions of the film experts through the lens of the retrospective analysis.

These publications reveal the film studies positions of Soviet researchers through the prism of retrospective analysis, which makes it possible to understand and interpret better the historical development of cinematography.

#### 4. Results

The results of content-analytical study of V.E. Baskakov's scientific works allow us to highlight an important trend that can be traced throughout his film studies research path: the central theme of the scientific search for a film expert was the methodological problems of film studies in different historical periods (taking into account socio-cultural and political aspects).

Thus, in V.E. Baskakov's article "Methodological problems of Soviet film studies" there is a methodological position of the film expert in the focus of bourgeois cinema, while the author very reasonably noted that "this issue was raised by K.E. Razlogov in 1975 in the article "Material, problematics, methodology" in the most acute, polemical form" (Baskakov, 1976: 84).

In his article, K.E. Razlogov revealed a number of problems of the Western cinematography methodology, focusing on such theoretical issues as the phenomenon of specific refraction of history through the prism of studying the foreign film studies (i.e. reliance on the principle of historicism in the process of film texts understanding); the lack of researches focused on the study of the creativity work of Soviet and foreign film makers; the study of various trends in cinematography determined by the ideological processes, tendencies of its critical comprehension in the West; the problem of aesthetic understanding of communication systems between people and their synthesis in the configuration of cinematography integrating different audiovisual forms; the nature and genres of cinematography.

Similar conceptual foundations were put forward by V.E. Baskakov from his Marxist positions focusing primarily on the following problematic issues: the need to study foreign cinematography in close connection with the processes taking place in society; methods of study of the phenomena of foreign cinematography; the need for a fundamental and deep study of Western cinema, the results of which should subsequently be presented in detailed scientific works; the importance of analyzing the creativity of foreign film makers based on research in correlation with history, philosophy, national culture; problems of nationality in relation to foreign cinematography; comprehension of the bourgeois theories of cinematography by the Soviet film experts.

The author very acutely raised the issue of understanding the ways of studying foreign cinema art. At the same time, V.E. Baskakov (unlike K.E. Razlogov, who doubted the use of critical genre of essays in order to study the theoretical aspects of cinematography) proved his position and gave reasons for that on the expediency of using the essay, taking into account one condition: it is important to adhere to the main principle, the essay should "show the public essence of what is the subject of consideration" (Baskakov, 1976: 84). According to the film expert's opinion, "superficial

essayism”, i.e. a descriptive approach to the phenomena of Western cinema, was often found in the Soviet works on the subject of cinema art of foreign countries, and this kind of process, according to the film expert’s point of view, had a disorienting effect on audiences and created conditions for replacing serious research with a kind of “fiction” (Baskakov, 1976: 84).

According to V.E. Baskakov’s opinion, there were very few publications devoted to the study of the creative works of Western masters of cinema, their art criticism and journalistic performances reflecting the main historical stages of the development of cinematography in the research understanding of foreign cinematography in the Soviet film studies of the 1970-s. In this context V.E. Baskakov noted that “serious and thorough works capable of penetrating into the ideological and artistic essence of the subject are extremely necessary; we are noticeably lacking such studies now” (Baskakov, 1976: 84).

The above-mentioned problematic issues of the theoretical fundamental field during the analysis of foreign cinematography, according to V.E. Baskakov’s opinion, could be solved only by forming a conscious orientation among the Soviet film experts to the development of the Marxist-Leninist theory of cinema. Here the film expert argued that “based on the famous statement of V.I. Lenin about the role of cinema, the classical works of S. Eisenstein, V. Pudovkin, A. Dovzhenko, B. Balash, the works of other Soviet theorists and foreign film experts of progressive orientation have been repeatedly and comprehensively tested on practice. The principles approved in them are developed in the best works of Soviet multinational cinematography, in the cinematography of other socialist countries, in search of film makers of the capitalist world who stand on the positions of realism and humanism” (Baskakov, 1979: 90).

Considering the process of cinematography development, V.E. Baskakov reasonably noted that it is the socio-political situation that determines certain changes in the nature and forms of cinematography, films act as a mirror for social and political processes, “cinema subtly and sensitively reflects the processes taking place in the social sphere..., in the cinema material one can clearly trace the fusion of traditional bourgeois myths with the new ones, left-wing extremist” (Baskakov, 1975: 91).

In addition, V.E. Baskakov reasonably believed that the relationship between the world history in general and the history of cinema in the focus of defining the boundaries of film science was clearly reflected in the importance of studying the sociological segment of cinematography, and “we set ourselves the task of creating an ideological history of world cinema to show the formation of progressive Western art, the struggle of humanistic and anti-humanistic trends, the more favorable influence of Soviet cinematography on the processes of world cinema development” (Baskakov, 1975: 92).

Taking into account the socio-cultural situation, the trends in the cinematography development in the 1970-s related to the social and political processes taking place in the world, there was a need for the emergence of film productions of a new format in the USSR, an alternative to the bourgeois cinema.

In this context V.E. Baskakov emphasized that “today it is impossible to consider the phenomenon of the Soviet cinema, the phenomenon of the cinema of the entire socialist community outside of its real connections with the world cinematographic process. Just as socialism today affects the entire world development, so the cinema of socialism, its ideological and artistic potential, affects the world cinema – both directly and indirectly... It is quite obvious that many artists are painfully and inconsistently looking for an alternative to the bourgeois art; the fact that it has reached a dead end, for the most part, they feel quite acutely now” (Baskakov, 1976: 84).

Ideologically grounded V.E. Baskakov’s point of view in the framework of this topic is presented in his other article – “Tasks and prospects for the development of Soviet cinema science” (1975), in which he insisted on the need to create film productions reflecting the communist ideals and values, denoting the main meaning and significance of such pictures of socialist cinema art in the possibility to enter “into an acute struggle with petty-bourgeois private property layers in people’s minds, spreading the historical significance of the birth of a new person fighting for the socialist way of life and thinking of the Soviet people” (Baskakov, 1975: 90). According to the author’s deep conviction, only such films had the ability to form Marxist-Leninist worldview among the various segments of the population aimed at acute ideological struggle with other people’s ideological influences.

It is obvious that, relying on the attitudes and canons of the Marxist-Leninist ideology prevailing in the USSR, V.E. Baskakov in his theoretical works tried to focus attention on the

importance of using the potential of the established ideological position in the development of film studies as a science, at that, he clearly indicated that “cinema is a powerful force actively participating in the harmonious development of ideological, moral and cultural enrichment of the individual, in the communist education of the masses. At the same time, the cinema, being in the hands of monopolistic capital and its ideological apparatus, deforms people’s consciousness. It is this feature of screen art that determines the importance of cinema in the modern ideological struggle” (Baskakov, 1975: 101).

According to V.E. Baskakov’s opinion, in the period of communism construction the cinema had a huge ideological force, and the use of this powerful weapon in the interests of the party and society was the main task. The film expert believed that only careful analysis and critical reflection would help to improve the film industry and make it a powerful tool for shaping the ideology and values of the communist system. It is the active support and development of cinematography with a focus on the communist ideals and principles that will create a strong and influential means of cultural propaganda and education of the masses. V.E. Baskakov argued that “we must study the cinematic process in all its manifestations deeply, from the Marxist-Leninist positions, and then help to improve it” (Baskakov, 1975: 90).

Analyzing V.E. Baskakov’s film studies of the Soviet period, it is impossible to ignore the position put forward by the film expert regarding the outline of significant problems in the development of the Soviet cinema in the 1970s.

The most critical among them are the following:

- issues related to the mass character of cinema and its ideological aspects. Cinema is a powerful means of mass communication, and it is necessary to analyze carefully its impact on the society and culture;

- politicization of the world cinema. Cinema has always been and remains a reflection of political, social and cultural processes. It is necessary to study deeply and comprehensively how political motives and influences are reflected in the cinema, and how this affects the worldview of the audience;

- evaluation of the “new” theories of cinema put forward in the West by the film experts with a left-radical orientation;

- development of a complex of the most complicated issues related to the Soviet directing school, the school of cinematography, the acting school, the inventive solution of the film, etc., the lack of serious scientific works covering these issues (Baskakov, 1975).

In the article “Cinema Art of Socialistic Realism and Falsification of Sovietologists” V.E. Baskakov showed special interest in the issue of artistic and ideological specifics of the Soviet cinema in the unity of new forms and content of the socialist revolution; to the study by foreign cinematographers of the structural and content segment of works inseparably associated with the reflection of the USSR historical path, socialistic construction. Here the author very reasonably indicated that “progressive foreign cinematographers... clearly saw the fundamental difference between the aesthetics of revolutionary Soviet cinema and bourgeois aesthetics. This position is typical for the authors of the first books about the Soviet cinema – Leon Mussinak, Georges Sadoul, Jay Leida, for the theoretical works of Umberto Barbaro, Jean Lods... All these critics and film theorists understood perfectly well that they were promoting not only a certain new aesthetic value, although each of them, as a professional, was well aware of how great the contribution of Soviet cinematographers to the structure of cinema, to the formation of its language was. But they understood that they were dealing with completely new, different art...” (Baskakov, 1977: 40).

Discussing the patterns of the Soviet cinema interpretation by the bourgeois theory, V.E. Baskakov identified and justified their features and trends for the period of the 1970s.

Criticizing the positions of bourgeois critics and film theorists, V.E. Baskakov argued that they are “in direct connection with the demands of bourgeois propaganda relentlessly glorifying the “values” of bourgeois culture and constantly putting forward new and new anti-communist myths” (Baskakov, 1977: 41). In this context, V.E. Baskakov drew the attention of *Cinema Art* journal readers to the fact that the works of Western film experts distorted or falsified the essence of the Soviet cinema art, there was no real correlation with the events taking place in the USSR and the world, the historical aspect, the most important differences between the Soviet aesthetics of the revolutionary cinema art and the bourgeois cinema were not reflected.

According to V.E. Baskakov’s opinion, this kind of process is “an attempt to isolate the revolutionary form of the works of the Soviet cinema art founders from the revolutionary content

expressed in them, as if to “aestheticize” their creativity. The strategy of such bourgeois theorists... is to break the ties that unite the creativity works of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dovzhenko, Vertov with the socialist culture of the 20s – 30s and today in order to eliminate the class political content from their art, to present their films as just a partial experiment in the field of cinema” (Baskakov, 1977: 41); “ignoring the entire periods of the Soviet cinema development, often exceptionally productive” (Baskakov, 1977: 41).

In this regard, continuing his reflections about the interpretation of the Soviet cinema art by the bourgeois film studies, V.E. Baskakov identified two basic trends, the semantic content of which was as follows: the first trend was all sorts of “confused, pseudoscientific, “aesthetic” reasoning detached from the context of the Soviet society life, the second was tendentious assumptions in the spirit of reactionary bourgeois propaganda” (Baskakov, 1977: 41).

At the same time, V.E. Baskakov evidently noted that Western screen “largely accumulates those ideological phenomena that are typical of the bourgeois ideology as a whole: extreme forms of anti-communism, myths tested by the propaganda apparatus about the inexhaustible possibilities of “consolidated” society, traditional and new philosophical idealistic trends (existentialism, Freudianism, neo-Freudianism), and also left-wing extremist and Machism trends...” (Baskakov, 1977: 41).

In many of his theoretical articles of different years V.E. Baskakov (Baskakov, 1975; Baskakov, 1976; Baskakov, 1977) turned to the analysis of the cinematic heritage of the recognized Soviet film directors S. Eisenstein, A. Dovzhenko, V. Pudovkin, L. Kuleshov and others. According to V.E. Baskakov’s opinion, “this is a huge historical and theoretical wealth, representing a very interesting legacy...” (Baskakov, 1975: 92).

Thus, the subject of theoretical scientific research of the film expert V.E. Baskakov throughout his professional career includes a very wide cinematic landscape.

The basic conceptual foundation of V.E. Baskakov’s scientific research was a multifaceted analysis of methodological problems in film studies. The theoretical works of the film expert disclose the topics related to the state and development of the Western cinema, the specifics of its study in the context of ideological and political, as well as social dogmas of the Soviet period; the problems of Soviet cinematography, genre originality of expressive means; the importance of studying the history of world cinema in the focus of creating a film production; the analysis of the creativity of film makers; the relationship with history and national culture in the process of creating film productions; the development of theories of Soviet and foreign cinema that influence the film artists (Baskakov, 1975; Baskakov, 1976; Baskakov, 1977; Baskakov, 1979; Baskakov, 1981; Baskakov, 1982).

The semantic content of the texts of V.E. Baskakov’s theoretical works indicates that he was one of the ideologically typical researchers in the field of film studies, the results of whose scientific studies make it possible to understand the Marxist approaches to the methodological aspects of the cinematography analysis and its role in the culture.

## 5. Conclusion

As a result of the content analysis of V.E. Baskakov’s film study positions presented in his theoretical articles in *Cinema Art* journal several conclusions can be drawn:

- in his theoretical articles, V.E. Baskakov paid special attention to the study of the main approaches and methods of film analysis, trying to trace their modification in the context of political, social, cultural construct. The position of the film expert clearly reflected the desire to study the degree of modification in perception and interpretation of the cinematic art in various historical epochs and the impact of these processes on the film studies development.

This issue was raised especially acutely during the periods of significant social and cultural changes and transformations in the USSR, when cinema played an important role in shaping public opinion and ideology. V.E. Baskakov carefully studied the Soviet period identifying the peculiarities of approaches to the cinematography analysis, engaged in comparative analysis of the film studies methodology in our country and abroad, which contributed to the identification of film studies trends and peculiarities of the film studies development and applied approaches to the cinematography study in different cultural contexts;

- V.E. Baskakov’s theoretical approaches focused more on the analysis of the Soviet cinematographic methodology problems, genre specifics and expressive means in the framework of the cinema phenomena study;

- a number of V.E. Baskakov's articles trace the problems associated with the study of the most important phenomena of the history and theory of foreign film studies. In these works, special emphasis is placed on the study of: specialized theories based on the application of private techniques in film studies borrowed from psychology, philosophy and sociology; attempts to combine approaches and methods within one film theory originally developed within the framework of various concepts; the contribution of Marxist researchers who turned to the analysis of foreign cinema problems;

- in the works of V.E. Baskakov, there is a clear tendency to reflect the ideology of the ruling Communist party. The author has repeatedly referred to the ideological dogmas and resolutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR in his publications, focusing on the analysis of the semantic content of official documents and the degree of cinematography development according to the dominant party positions. Using the ideological directives, the film expert analyzed how the film productions corresponded to the tasks and goals put forward by the government. Strongly marked ideological component, which was typical for the Soviet era, was traced in the texts of film studies articles of that period. The author actively used the ideological aspects for the analysis and interpretation of cinematography, which allowed him to fit the cinema art into the framework of communist values and tasks.

- the main research direction focused on the study of the interrelationships and the influence of political and socio-cultural transformations on the cinema development is traced in the theoretical works of V.E. Baskakov. The author devotes his studies to the analysis of correlations between the historical processes and the cinematography development. V.E. Baskakov approached the study of this topic comprehensively, studying not only the internal manifestations of cinematography, but also its relation to social phenomena and ideology.

- V.E. Baskakov's theoretical works are distinguished by strongly marked ideological analysis of historical events and trends that shaped the Soviet cinema in different time periods, and reflection of certain cinema phenomena in the scientific works of the Soviet film experts and cinematographers-practitioners.

- one of the important topics in V.E. Baskakov's theoretical publications was the definition of the problematic field of the Soviet film studies.

It was about the need for profound analysis of the social, political and cultural processes impact on the worldview of various segments of the population; about the study of the cinema influence degree on the development of the society and culture; about the importance of analyzing the foreign and Soviet cinema theories; about expanding the range and number of publications devoted to the study of the creative works of Western masters of cinema, the history and theory of the cinema development; about the distortion of the Soviet cinema art essence in the foreign film studies.

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