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A study in domestic morality and the pitfalls of a Soviet marriage suffering from boredom, claustrophobia, adultery, & overcrowding.

Directed by Abrâm Room, a Polish Jew, assisted by Sergèi Yutkevich--who did the street & factory scenes--& Ye. Kuzis.

96 minutes in running time at silent speed (16 frames a second). The Museum of Modern Art print shown to-night runs 85 minutes.

[C A S T]

Nikołai Batakov--Kòlya, a stone mason who takes his wife for granted
Vladimir Fogel'--Vołòdya, his war-time buddy, a friend of the family
Liudmìka Semyonova--Liuda Nikołaievna, a wife bored by housework
& L. Yurenev (The Janitor), & Ye. Sokołova.

[THE STORY-LINE]

It all takes place during the time of the New Economic Policy [NEP (1921-1927)]. The printer Vołòdya arrives from the provinces to take a job in Moscow. He stays over temporarily in the room of his war-time buddy Kòlya at No. 3 Meshchanskaya St. Kòlya's wife, Liudmìka, is attracted to Vołòdya who, unlike her husband, pays her little attentions and is full of respect for her. When Kòlya leaves town on business, Liudmìka & Vołòdya fall in love. Learning of his wife's switch in affection after he had returned home from the trip, Kòlya storms out of the house. But the vexations of his roaming about the city & bad weather soon force him to return home. He sleeps on the same sofa that had previously been Vołòdya's bed. The latter, once he had become Liudmìka's husband, radically changes his behavior towards her. Liudmìka turns to Kòlya. The relations of the three occupants of the room become more perplexing. On top of everything, Liudmìka announces that she is expecting a child. Each of the two friends disclaims his responsibility & in order to eliminate doubt advises Liudmìka to have an abortion. She decides not to have the operation performed, & overwhelmed by the situation in which she finds herself leaves in order to start a new life.--Sovietskiye Hudozhestvennyye Fil'my: 1918-1935, ed. by A. V. Matcheret, Moscow: 1961, p. 230. [Translated from the original Russian text by Szymon St. Deptuła of the Department of Slavic Languages at the University of Wisconsin.]

[C O M M E N T A R Y]

Even without an opportunity to see this film, the reader may judge what a delicately balanced combination of comedy & drama it is built upon. And how rarely such a combination works! Such material, & in such realistic surroundings, has no comparable sequel in Soviet films, or elsewhere, for that matter. Soviet critics & historians have taken little pride in this offshoot of Soviet film tradition, & its contemporary reception was one of resentment rather than of satisfaction. In writing of Room's 'enemies, Tretyakov [Our Cinema: Cinema Is an International Language (Moscow: VOKS, 1928)] gave this reason for their bitter antagonism:

'Room works with many realistic objects, & his realism is all to the good, because with his anti-aesthetic effect, he routs the canonized formulas of movie romance out of their fortified positions....

'In his film [Bed and Sofa] not one of the men or women is handsome or beautiful. Woman is not even romantically displayed, & Love no longer has the look of a courtesan with polished, powdered skin, but more like a tired washerwoman with a grey, sad face--which is what love is in most cases.'

After one more realistic film Room seems to have experienced some revulsion against that style, for thereafter he indulged in extremely handsome, almost stylized film-manners. Sad to say, his positive contribution to the Soviet film ended a little more than two years after it began. His fate almost makes one take seriously the doctrine of 'formalism as artistic poison'--but I have always wondered how much help was offered him in his dilemma. Room's last realistic film, Ruts (released January 10, 1928), attacked a psychological problem as serious as that in Bed and Sofa--how a marriage can be broken by the difficulties that a new child brings into a home.--Jay Leyda, Kino. A History of the Russian and Soviet Film. London & New York (1960), p. 216.

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of Wisconsin in Milwaukee for 13 October 1961.
 A. V. Matcheret, ed., Sovetskiye Hudozhestvennyye Fil'my (1961), v. I, p. 230.

These bibliographies & program notes are compiled & edited by Szymon St. Deptuła for members of the Film Circle to whom Bed and Sofa was screened privately in the Recital Hall of the Fine Arts Building on the uptown campus of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee on Saturday, 3 August 1963, at 8 p.m.

A controversial treatment of love, jealousy, & morality in crowded post-war Moscow; "a vaudeville sketch ricked out in Russian dress"; a sociological comedy of manners with Freudian & Marxist overtones "aimed at shocking male sexual complacency & the female acceptance of abortion" & adultery; a film credited with influencing the spirit & plot of René Clair's Sous les Toits de Paris (1929).

Original source of the story: F. Komanov. Scenario by Viktor Shklovskij & Abrâm Room.

Décor by Vasili Rachal's & Sergèi Yutkevich. Photography by Grigori Giber.

Directed by Abrâm Room assisted by Sergèi Yutkevich.

Produced by the Moskovskaya Fàbrica & released by Sovkino, Moscow, on March 15, 1927. 7 reels; 2025 meters.

Original Russian title: Trèt'ia Meshchànskaya but it was also shown in the USSR by the alternate title of Lyubòv' Vtroyòm [L'Amour à Trois]. Known in France as La Rue Troisième Mechtchanskaïa, in Germany as 3. Mestchanskaja-Strasse, in Poland as Mikośc we Troje, & in English as Bed and Sofa, Triangle Love, & In the Cellars of Moscow.

Banned in Britain in 1934.

To-night's print (in 6 reels) comes from the Scientific Research Institute in Moscow via the Museum of Modern Art Film Library in New York.

[C A S T]

Nikołai Batašov--Kòlya, a construction worker bored with domesticity
Vladimir Fogel'--Vokòdya, his old friend, a printer just arrived from the provinces
Liudmika Semyonova--Liùba, Kòlya's brooding wife, resentful of her humdrum husband

[C O M M E N T A R Y]

In contradistinction to the work of the [Russian] left-wing directors, whose principal interest lies in technical methods of construction & expression of content, the characteristic of the right-wing is the sociological purpose of their productions. Predominant in this group is Abrâm Room, who is a psychologist director interested in the exposition of the interplay of emotions between an intimate group of persons. He is inclined to approach the narrative situations in his films through the reactions of the participants, bringing their inner thoughts to the attention of the spectator by a careful photographic selection of their small, possibly insignificant, outer actions. He suppresses the environment of the narrative, except where it can emphasise the human relationship, & employs external objects only when they are of direct consequence to his characters. It will be seen that in this detail, Room is in direct contrast with the methods of the left-wing. His direction is extremely simple & straightforward, relying almost entirely on the acting talents of his cast & narrative material for emotional effect. Each of his films has carried a strong sociological content, of personal, domestic, & contemporary importance. From a psychological point of view, Room seems primarily absorbed in the psychological & physical attitude of men towards women. This was the thematic basis of his best-known film, the notorious Bed and Sofa, which has met with approval in most countries, though it was refused public exhibition in Britain even after certain deletions had been effected.--Paul Rotha, The Film Till Now (1930; 1949), pp. 239-240.

Bed and Sofa and Village of Sin have been highly praised in Western countries where they have been shown; in the Soviet Union, however, they were severely criticized as not representing the true Soviet viewpoint. It is in these diametrically opposed reactions to the same films that the divergence between Soviet & Western culture can be seen most clearly. To the Soviet critics, both films appeared to deal with accidental rather than fundamental aspects of city & country life; & it is the norm rather than the deviation that Soviet art seeks to portray--above all, the positive & creative forces in the country.--Joseph Freeman, "The Soviet Cinema." In Voices of October (1930), pp. 248-249.

Shown to members of the class in "Memorable European & American Films" (Series XI) on Friday evening, 13 October 1961, at 7:45, on the downtown campus of the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee (Room 102, Science Hall, 623 W. State Street).