

Language and History through Silent Film in the Foreign Language Classroom:

Teaching Russian Through the Silent Film *Bed and Sofa* (1927)

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Films are a nearly ubiquitous tool in 21st-century foreign language instruction, and their utility seems self-evident: films demonstrate body language and pronunciation, test and enhance students' listening comprehension, and provoke stimulating classroom discussions. This utility would seem to rest upon *sound* and *dialogue*, inasmuch as sound and dialogue best demonstrate the ultimate object of our instruction: language usage. What happens, though, if we *remove* sound from the equation – might *silent* cinema have a place in the foreign language classroom? In this report, I will demonstrate how silent films can facilitate the teaching of language and culture in ways that are less available to sound films. I will also speak about the teaching of historical context, which becomes all the more necessary when one uses early 20th-century silent films as teaching tools in the 21st-century L2 classroom.

During a Berkeley Language Center talk in February of 2012, Mark Kaiser and Rosella Carbotti (2012) spoke about the varied semiotic layers of film (sound, image, shot composition, etc.). Kaiser and Carbotti concluded that, when films are shown in the foreign language classroom, these semiotic layers can and *should* be discussed together. I agree with this conclusion, and would add that such discussions demonstrate vital



Fig. 1 - *Nikolai and Liudmila*

lessons about communication as such. For language students, filmic comprehension can easily become a narrow exercise focused on dialogue and subtitles. As per the suggestion of Pippa Stein (2008), our students should be made to understand that meaning is *also* produced through paralinguistic or

auxiliary modes of expression.ⁱ Silent films demonstrate as much: in the absence of sound, they foreground extra-linguistic methods of communication (e.g. bodily gesture, shot composition) and relegate speech to a subordinate, *visual* role (i.e. intertitles). Thus, for the typical 21st-century viewer, silent cinema can – in the words of Russian literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky (1990) – *defamiliarize*, or lay bare, the intermingled visual and verbal components of communication.ⁱⁱ

It is precisely this relationship between visual and verbal that makes silent cinema a remarkably flexible tool for language instruction. This became apparent to me in my first semester of teaching Russian I. My students had recently completed a vocabulary unit on domestic objects, and I wanted to test their knowledge of this material. I immediately thought of using the 1927 film *Tret'ia Meschanskaia* (literally, “Third Petit Bourgeois Street,” although the film is typically known in English as *Bed and Sofa*, the title that I will hereafter use).ⁱⁱⁱ This film chronicles the failure of a *ménage a trois* between three residents of a Moscow apartment. The protagonists are: [**fig 1**] Nikolai, a boorish husband but skilled foreman; Liudmila, his doting and unappreciated wife; and [**fig 2**] Vladimir, an old army buddy of Nikolai's, who has recently arrived in Moscow. *Bed and Sofa* is set in the mid 1920s, a period defined by the continued presence of, and struggle against, pre-revolutionary economic and social mores; consequently, the plot of the film hinges on the mutual influence of interpersonal relations and быт (*byt*, a Russian word whose meaning encompasses both “everyday life” and the material circumstances thereof, often in a pejorative sense).^{iv} The film criticizes the мещанский быт (*meschanskii byt*, or petit bourgeois comfort) that the protagonists enjoy, and this critique foregrounds – both literally and figuratively – the material circumstances of the protagonists' lives. This intense focus on objects makes *Bed and Sofa* a useful complement to elementary Russian textbooks,^v whose focus on material life is intertwined with the development of linguistic and cultural competence.

I originally intended to use *Bed and Sofa* in a standalone exercise through which I would assess students' knowledge of our assigned domestic vocabulary. However, in showing a clip from the film, I discovered two things: the students were interested not just in the domestic objects they saw on the screen, but also in the characters inhabiting the world of



Fig. 2 - Vladimir and Liudmila

the film; and that the very material of the film – long, uninterrupted shots and no sound – facilitated the exercise exceptionally well. During our first encounter with *Bed and Sofa*, I asked students to yell, “*Stop!*” whenever they saw a familiar object and give us the equivalent Russian word aloud. I would then point to various other objects on the screen (pausing the film if need be) and ask students to identify them until I settled on the correct one. Returning to the same clip several days later, I asked the students to use those words in sentences that adequately described the onscreen action. Thus, this series of exercises tested students' knowledge of not only vocabulary, but of grammar as well.^{vi} With its fixed, steady shots and lack of sound, *Bed and Sofa* allowed the students to *simultaneously see and describe aloud* that which they saw on the screen. Such an activity would be more difficult with the typical sound film: its spoken dialogue and rapid shot sequences would preclude such spontaneity. In other words, the long, uninterrupted takes and absence of sound made for a open forum, a *silent space*, that students could fill with their own initiative and discourse.

Finding this silent space of *Bed and Sofa* to be useful, and encouraged by the students' interest in the story, I expanded the above exercise into a semester-long series of screenplay-writing assignments. These assignments were preceded by a variety of exercises that aimed to cultivate both the formal elements of typical screenwriting (e.g. description and dialogue) within a framework that mandated usage of specific textbook materials (e.g. the use of domestic vocabulary in descriptive passages, the use of idiomatic and conversational phrases in dialogue, etc.). Let me first detail some of these introductory exercises before moving to the screenplays themselves.

The Library of Foreign Language Film Clips (LFLFC), maintained by the Berkeley Language Center under the purview of Mark Kaiser, proved an instrumental tool in this project. *Bed and Sofa* was uploaded to the LFLFC so that I might cut it into short, three-minute episodes that would then be made individually available to my students (and retained for other instructors' future use). For homework, my students would watch a particular clip and then bring to class the Russian words for five objects, verbs, or concepts that they thought important to the scene. (I conceived of this exercise as a crowd-sourced version of the dialogue-based vocabulary tagging that language instructors perform on LFLFC clips.) The students' selections represented an intriguing mixture of pure linguistic description and filmic interpretation. For example, midway through one of our early clips, the still-homeless Vladimir strolls around the city and pauses to kick a rock into a canal. Many students selected камень (*kamen'*, or stone) as one of their five words for that scene. They noticed how *Bed and Sofa* foregrounds this idle moment, although many expressed confusion as to why the film does so.

The students' focus on камень provided an opportunity for me to put forth an interpretation: that this moment symbolizes Vladimir's disruptive entry into Nikolai and Liudmila's otherwise peaceful life. After class, I replaced inaccurate student “translations” of onscreen objects with better ones – for example, substituting площадь (*ploschad'*, or city square) for квадрат (*kvadrat*, or geometrical square). I then annotated the various entries (noting my own alterations to the class' suggestions), and put the improved lexicon on our course website for the class' future use. In an age of easily misused online dictionaries, such an exercise can help ensure students' acquisition of correct vocabulary and teach them useful vocabulary-building skills.

	По мнению Людмилы...	По мнению Николая...	По мнению Владимира...
	[In Liudmila's opinion...]	[In Nikolai's opinion...]	[In Vladimir's opinion...]
...какой Людмила человек? Почему? [...what kind of person is Liudmila? Why?]			
...какой Николай человек? Почему? [...what kind of person is Nikolai? Why?]			
...какой Владимир человек? Почему? [...what kind of person is Vladimir? Why?]			

Fig. 3 - Character matrix for scene from film

Other exercises explored the way that *Bed and Sofa* deals with character. In one exercise, students watched a five-minute section of the film, during which Vladimir returns from work with a gift for Liudmila (see **fig. 2**), and Nikolai departs for a work-related conference.^{vii} Vladimir offers to leave, lest people “start talking” in Nikolai's absence. Nikolai laughs off this suggestion, stating via intertitle that Liudmila would never be attracted to a pipsqueak like Vladimir. I provided the class with an interpretation matrix, a directed reading exercise developed by Janet Swaffar and Katherine Arens (2005).^{viii} My matrix [**fig. 3**]

focused the students' attention on what *Bed and Sofa's* protagonists think about themselves and each other. I assigned specific characters (or, within the format of the matrix, specific columns) to individual students. At the end of the clip, we compared everyone's answers and showed how different points of view would yield different descriptors for each protagonist. (As per some of the student responses, Nikolai thinks Vladimir to be *puny*, and therefore unattractive to Liudmila; Liudmila thinks Vladimir to be *nice*, especially in comparison with her husband; and Vladimir thinks of himself as *good*, insofar as he isn't sleeping with his friend's wife). I also used the matrix to direct students' attention to the filmic language that expresses point of view – for example, a close-up on Vladimir's face [fig. 4], his longing gaze directed off screen toward the unavailable Liudmila. Thus, the students' responses reflected their understanding of the various communicative devices of the scene (the shot-counter shot sequence, bodily gesture, etc.), and *imagined* a point of view, expressed *through* language and constructed *on the basis of* those visual devices.

Such exercises – variously dedicated to vocabulary building, sentence construction, point of view, and textual interpretation – served as templates for larger written assignments during the latter half of the semester. Students wrote short screenplays (containing between 150 to 400 words) for assigned clips from the movie. The screenplays contained combinations of stage directions, description, interior monologue, dialogue, and narration. Each of these categories of verbal expression proceeded from our earlier exercises, and assessed a wide variety of materials from our textbook. I allowed students to write what they wished (favoring dialogue over narration, for example), so that they might feel the freedom to interpret the scene in their own way.



Fig. 4 - Close-up on Vladimir's face

While such a writing project might be possible with a muted sound film, the silent space of *Bed and Sofa* facilitated it more effectively. The film's paralinguistic modes of communication make possible not only the *identification* of what the dialogue “should” be; its silent space also allows for *play* with the many things that the film's verbal complement *could* be. Indeed, many students wrote screenplays that were not pedantic recapitulations of the onscreen action. These works – if you'll allow me a small digression – reminded me of how, during the twilight of silent cinema, the directors Sergei Eisenstein, Vsevolod Pudkovkin,

and Grigorii Aleksandrov advocated for a *contrapuntal* usage of sound in film.^{ix} If the visible and the audible did not directly correspond to one another, then the two entities would yield an intellectually stimulating contrast, much like a juxtaposition of discrete, seemingly unrelated shots. Narrative sound film did not develop in line with these principles of avant-garde montage, but my students sensed this potential for counterpoint within the film's silent space. Indeed, many of them “filled” this space with ironic commentary upon the film itself.

The interplay of dialogue and interior monologue proved particularly enticing in this regard. Several students used a device wherein a character's “line” would include not only verbalized dialogue, but also an unuttered thought that contradicted it. This device was used most frequently for the characters of Liudmila and Vladimir, the lovelorn protagonists who, in the first half of the film, refrain from acting upon their mutual attraction and conceal their desires from Nikolai. My students thus went beyond our earlier exercises with character and point of view: their screenplays expressed the characters' untenable desires through an *inverse* relationship between speech and thought. Again, such devices model a contrapuntal relationship between verbal and visual; to use the words of Russian director Vsevolod Pudovkin, these devices did not merely *describe*, but also *communicate* an attitude or abstract concept to the audience.^x In other words, my students produced verbal materials adequate to the film's narrative while simultaneously intoning their sympathy for the film's characters who desire one thing but must do and say another.

Other ironic usages of the film had a more historical tenor. For the first extended written assignment, everyone created screenplays for the same scene so that we might compare the students' diverse writing styles. In this early scene, Vladimir comes home from work and gives Liudmila an intriguing gift – a radio. (The radio can be seen resting in front of Vladimir on the table in *fig. 2*.) While what this gift is would have been obvious to the average Soviet viewer from the 1920s, my students were mostly mystified by the object. The students' written responses were various: one said that it was a Soviet iPod, model 1927; another suggested that Vladimir was actually a saboteur, and that he was asking Liudmila to help him build a bomb. Both of these examples knowingly play with history: the former invokes the divide between a ubiquitous piece of 21st-century technology and an innovative yet (especially from our modern vantage point) bulky machine from the 1920s; the latter jokingly replaces *Bed and Sofa*'s romantic plot with a revolutionary plot. Both of these students eschewed a “legitimate” correspondence between their screenplay and the visual world of the film, and instead let me in on a joke about their knowledge of Russian history.

However, these playful invocations of Soviet history also demonstrated something else to me: the degree to which those cultural materials we use for language instruction can too easily become emptied of historical context. In my case, by allowing students to respond freely to *Bed and Sofa*, I was neither challenging their preexisting ideas about Russian and Soviet culture, nor asking them to enhance those ideas in the light of the film itself. I will demonstrate my point by making reference to one student's impressive (and here, translated) screenplay, which is narrated by a portrait of Joseph Stalin that hangs on the protagonists' wall. [fig. 5]

My name is Joseph Stalin. Or am I only a portrait of Joseph Stalin? I am a calendar on the wall. I've got a cigarette and a mustache. Not only do I have a mustache, but I have beautiful eyebrows as well. But I digress. This story isn't about me. Every day, I watch Nikolai and Liudmila. They live in a small apartment, where they talk and I listen...It's morning. I can hear a train. Vladimir's train is arriving at the station. He reads a beautiful map and heads for Nikolai and Liudmila's apartment...He's not far from the apartment now...Every day, Nikolai works and Liudmila cooks him food. They always clean themselves, because they are good Russians...Now Nikolai does his exercises. He wants big muscles because all good Russians have big muscles. Then he reads the paper and smokes a cigarette. He doesn't wait for Liudmila when he eats. Liudmila loves Nikolai, but she loves me more...

My student's use of this narrative conceit seems to express one facet of her understanding of totalitarianism – that is, the regular surveillance of ordinary citizenry in daily life. To convey this idea, my student employed several devices: an insidiously self-effacing tone for Stalin-as-narrator, Stalin's panoptic knowledge of Vladimir's movements, and an evaluative assessment of the protagonists' morning



Fig. 5 - The portrait of Stalin that narrates the student's screenplay

routines. Impressive as this piece of writing is, I think that the student's reading of the scene was both *too influenced* by her limited knowledge of Soviet history, and simultaneously *uninformed* by the norms of Russian быт (*byt*, or “everyday life”). In the first place, portraits of political and cultural figures were typical accouterments of Soviet interiors, and few viewers of the time would take them as symbols of the state's omnipresence.^{xi} In the second, Stalin did not consolidate power until 1928, two years after *Bed and Sofa* finished filming; I would venture that he would not likely cut a menacing figure in the 1927 popular imagination. Now, I do not mean to criticize the student: her excellent screenplay invokes a relationship between быт, politics, and social practice that entirely keeps with the spirit of the film. (The creators of *Bed and Sofa* would, I think, be impressed.) However, I would like to suggest that such a gap between student interpretation and historical reality provides us with an opportunity, even an obligation, to discuss the historical context of the texts through which we teach language. Much as we have done for culture and literature, we might carve out a greater niche for history in the foreign language classroom, and thereby check the excesses and inaccuracies with which our students might approach the target culture.

We might best achieve this goal, I believe, by conducting language-oriented textual analysis within a comparative framework. Based upon my own classroom experiences, it seems that historical context is typically introduced into the L2 classroom through two means: short readings in the L1 (which are often provided by the textbook itself), or brief lectures from the instructor (which often take place in the L2). These methods are useful, of course, but they ask little of the foreign language student, who becomes a passive recipient of the instructor's knowledge and textbook materials. Furthermore, students might interpret that information in a narrow way, thinking it applicable solely to the cultural or literary texts at hand. I believe that a more meaningful engagement with history in the L2 classroom would ultimately possess two qualities: it would be more *investigatory* than *explanatory*, and it would endeavor to read history *out of* texts rather than merely overlaying it *on top* of them. In other words, we might teach students to *recognize* history in both content and form. By conducting close readings of thematically related texts from different time periods, students would develop fluency in the cultural codes of different eras.^{xii} Ultimately, I believe such a comparative approach would help students better navigate those historical texts which they will eventually encounter on their own, outside of the L2 classroom – including (but certainly not limited to) silent films, which assume a great deal of contextual knowledge on the part of their audience.

To this end, over the course of my BLC fellowship semester, I compiled a variety of materials that, in conjunction with *Bed and Sofa*, will help introduce history

into Russian language instruction in a more meaningful way. The texts (or selections thereof) all provide a window onto Russian and Soviet быт (“everyday life”), a topic which, as I’ve already stated, figures prominently in both *Bed and Sofa* and the typical elementary Russian textbook; this coincidence of content allows for smooth integration into the existing Russian language curriculum. By performing directed comparative readings of multiple texts from this compilation, Russian students will be able to construct a more authentic framework for the social and historical factors that have shaped быт and the rhetoric surrounding it. My ideas about the comparative framework have again been informed by Swaffar and Arens' work with interpretative matrices. **Fig. 6**, a materials matrix, represents a small selection of the written and cinematic documents that I have used in my project (and in my language teaching). The vertical axis of the matrix is divided into increments of historical time. *Bed and Sofa*, for example, is placed in the top, “1917-1920s,” since its events take place in 1926, in the thick of an era frequently known by the acronym NEP (New Economic Policy).^{xiii} The horizontal axis of the matrix is governed a variety of textual categories: “film,” “literary document,” and “official document” are but three potential types. Horizontal and vertical navigation of the matrix will yield different comparative readings with different purposes: if we move vertically, we will gain a sense of how representations of everyday life evolve in time; if we move horizontally, we will see how the theme of быт is treated by contemporaneous actors from a variety of positions within Soviet society.

Years portrayed	Fictional documents	Cinematic documents	Other documents
1917-1920s (remaking society, NEP)	-Zoschenko, "The Crisis" (mid 1920s)	- <i>Bed and Sofa</i> (mid 1920s) - <i>Heart of a Dog</i> (mid 1920s)	-Lenin, "Will the Bolsheviks Retain State Power?" (1917)
30s-40s (terror, Stalin, WWII)	-Bulgakov, <i>The Master and Margarita</i> (mid-to-late 1930s)		-Brodskiy, "In a Room and a Half" (post WWII)
50s-60s (the Thaw, Khrushchev)		- <i>Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears</i> (late 1950s)	
70s-1991 (stagnation, Gorbachev, Perestroika)		- <i>Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears</i> (mid 1970s)	-Rubinshtein, "Communal Pulp Fiction" (late 70s / early 80s)

Fig. 6 - Materials matrix

Let me provide you with an example of horizontal movement and explain its utility. Watching *Bed and Sofa*, modern students could easily misinterpret Nikolai and Liudmila's living conditions: they might think the apartment uncomfortably small, even though it seems to exceed the average per-person square footage of

the time.^{xiv} Let us take another text from the 1920s row of the materials matrix, Mikhail Zoschenko's "The Crisis" – a short 1925 satire on communal living. The protagonist of this tale wanders through Moscow, seeking a place to live. He's finally offered a spot in the bathroom(!) of a communal apartment, where he's told that "Окон...хотя и нету, но зато дверь имеется" ("There're no windows – but then, there is a door"). This, I should mention, is a useful example of the conjunction *зато* (*zato* – "but then" or "on the other hand") that students learn in first-year Russian. Juxtaposing "The Crisis" and *Bed and Sofa*, students will likely reach two desirable conclusions: first, that Nikolai and Liudmila live in relative comfort for their time (in that they have a larger private apartment and many more material possessions than Zoschenko's hapless protagonist); and second, that Zoschenko's comic phrase, "...But then, there is a door," is not just a punch line, but also a truth about Soviet быт: doors and other genuine partitions are a luxury in communal life. Not even Nikolai and Liudmila can give Vladimir a separate room, as underscored by Nikolai's evident happiness that his room screen, meant to provide Vladimir with a measure of privacy, "will come in handy." This horizontal juxtaposition thus yields insights that might not emerge were a student to read these texts in isolation. The comparison provides a more nuanced understanding of 1920s быт and the rhetoric surrounding it.

Vertical comparisons can be similarly instructive. Early on in *Bed and Sofa*, the apartment manager enters our protagonists' living space and throws a knowing glance at Vladimir's possessions, stating that their guest has been registered as a resident without the right to living space as such.^{xv} Such narrative moments – in which an outsider, often a Soviet official, enters and assesses a Soviet citizen's nominally private space – can be found in other, later films and literary works. For comparison's sake, one could watch scenes from the 1988 film *Heart of a Dog*, which is likewise set in the middle of the 1920s. In an early episode, the well-connected Professor Preobrazhensky scoffs at the attempt of a housing committee to move additional people into his luxurious eight-room flat. To this we might append the beginning of the chapter "The Naughty Apartment" from Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* (unpublished in the author's lifetime): in the late 1930s, during the height of the Stalinist terror, bourgeois hangers-on living in a communal apartment are visited by a policeman and then summarily, mysteriously disappear. (It is understood via euphemism that these individuals are being sent to labor camps for "re-education" and/or killed.) The film 1979 film *Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*, which spans three decades, would round out the comparison: in the late 1950s, having secured a housesitting gig for a wealthy professor, two female students sing and dance through his impressive apartment, and promptly begin arranging a soiree. Near the film's conclusion, set in the mid 1970s, a good-natured but oafish character affects the

imposing air of a KGB agent so that he might acquire access to the apartment of his friend's estranged lover. In isolation, these texts would explore conventional linguistic and cultural material (the language of euphemism and authority, how speech reflects social standing, etc.) However, when these texts are juxtaposed to one another in the L2 classroom, students will construct a more historically nuanced understanding of быт. First, they will come to understand the historically and socially variable tolerances of luxurious and bourgeois lifestyles in the Soviet Union; and second, they will see how the stock episode of a Soviet official entering domestic space can be treated comically, gravely, parodically, euphemistically, or perfunctorily, depending upon historical factors, the text's intended audience, etc.

Let me close by pointing out a common trait that exists across all of these silent film screenplays, interpretative matrices, and historically-inflected textual comparisons: they are all very much like games. They have rules that circumscribe play without prescribing an outcome, yet still afford the players with space for strategy, initiative, and interpretation. In this sense, these game-like exercises are not unlike the broader world of language teaching itself: the L2 classroom is defined by both the centripetal pull of instructor-prescribed language norms and the students' centrifugal resistance, whether witting or unwitting, to those very norms. The holistic curriculum for which I have advocated above engages with both of these countervailing yet productive forces, insofar as it would not only compel students to develop informed strategies for navigating the silent spaces within texts, across time, and between cultures; it would also give them the freedom to ponder (and posit!) the many ways in which language, culture, and history are inevitably connected, in both the L2 and in their own day-to-day lives.

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- Stein (2008) details her inspiring explorations of how paralinguistic and auxiliary modes of communication can be integrated into classroom instruction in chs. 3 and 6.
- ii The idea of “defamiliarization” (*ostranenie*) was first developed by Shklovsky in the 1917 article “Art as Device” (*Iskusstvo kak priem*). (For an English translation of this article, see Shklovsky [1990], p. 1-14.) Shklovsky contends that we take our surroundings for granted – that we perceive them reflexively, automatically, that is, without *truly* seeing them. The purpose of art is to disrupt, distort, and thereby *extend* that moment of perception. For Shklovsky, this is art's most important function: to defamiliarize the world, to make us *see* the world rather than merely “recognize” it. In Shklovskian terms, the absence of spoken dialogue in silent cinema will “disrupt” the 21st-century student's “automatized” perception of filmic language, “defamiliarizing” the act of (oral) communication that is taken for granted in sound films.
 - iii For a history of *Bed and Sofa's* production and reception, as well an extensive summary and interpretation of the film's plot, see Graffy (2001).
 - iv For a detailed conceptualization of *быт* and its historical valencies both before and during Soviet times, see Boym (1994), especially ch. 1. On the attempts of authors, artists, and other cultural figures to reforge *быт* in the wake of the 1917 Revolution, see Kiaer (2005), especially chs. 1 & 2.
 - v At Berkeley, we typically use *Nachalo* (2001) for first-year instruction, although domestic vocabulary is a common unit in most Russian textbooks (to say nothing of textbooks for other national languages).
 - vi The Russian language has six morphological cases that reflect grammatical meaning: for example, the word *книга* (*kniga*, book) will decline as *книгу* (the accusative case) when it is the direct object of a verb. The sentence «Людмила читает книгу на кровати» (“Liudmila is reading the book on the bed”) would require the use of three cases: nominative (*Liudmila*, the grammatical subject of the sentence), accusative (*kniga* => *knigu*, the direct object), and prepositional (*krovat'* => *krovati*, the location of the action).
 - vii I should mention that the exercise I speak of here was performed by a Slavic 2 class in the spring of 2012 – my colleague Lily Scott graciously allowed me to teach in her stead when she was out of town. While this provided me with the chance to tinker with the way that I framed and introduced the written portion of the assignment, this exercise was conducted similarly to its original incarnation from my own Slavic 1 instruction during the 2009-10

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- academic year.
- viii See, in particular, chapter 4 of Swaffar & Arens (2005) for an account of how interpretative matrices can be used in the foreign language classroom.
- ix See, for example, the directors' famous 1928 "Statement on Sound," translated in Taylor & Christie (1988), p. 234-5.
- x See "On the Principle of Sound in Film," translated in Taylor & Christie (1988), p. 264-7.
- xi Of course, domestic portraits of political figures would acquire a different, more genuinely menacing symbolic import in post-Stalinist film, but my point about the student's over-reading of the Stalin portrait still stands: images of other, more neutral figures also line the apartment walls and serve other, less political and/or totalitarian symbolic functions. For example, a portrait of the Russian Civil War hero Semyon Budyonnyi can be seen behind Nikolai as he completes a series of weightlifting exercises. This portrait not only suggests that Nikolai's morning routine is informed by his army training; it also provides a context for Nikolai's friendship with Vladimir, who, as we soon learn, served alongside Nikolai during the Civil War.
- xii Indeed, silent film viewing all but requires the cultivation of just such skills: students must shed the apparatus by which they make sense of modern sound cinema, and instead focus on those modes of meaning-making to which 1920s audiences would have been more attuned.
- xiii Here we must engage with two different historical questions: the historical moment *represented within* the document, and the historical moment *in which the document was produced*. These are two distinct variables, each with its own potential pedagogic function. I gesture toward this in the paragraph on vertical navigation of the materials matrix.
- xiv While each resident of communal apartments was by law allotted 8.25 square meters of living space (жилплощадь, *zhilploschad'*), in practice many had closer to 5.9 or even (in the case of worker apartments) 4.9; see Graffy (2001), p. 42. By this measure, Liudmila and Nikolai seem to be doing quite well.
- xv See previous footnote.