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Jon Cockburn

University of Wollongong, jon@uow.edu.au

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SIMMEL, NINOTCHKA, TAYLORISM, *FLÂNERIE* AND THE REVOLVING DOOR

Jon Cockburn

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ABSTRACT

Globally, productive efficiency and sensual identity appear incompatible yet both are complementary and interrelated forces. In the opening to Ernst Lubitsch's film *Ninotchka* (1939) the revolving door prefigures the film's theme of coupling efficiency with desire. Examination of this scene draws on socio-spatial concepts from Georg Simmel (1909). Discussion then moves to entry of Ninotchka (played by Greta Garbo) who paradoxically exhibits efficiency attributes of scientific management and *flânerie*, also shared by self-sufficient modern 1930s women who presented and were represented as industrious yet sensual. As a complementary model, the revolving door and Ninotchka's establishment is comparable to the broken wall traversed in Jacques Tati's film *Mon Oncle* (1958) by the dachshund Dackie, his stray friends and Monsieur Hulot. Arguably, in 1950s France, Tati's broken wall operates similarly to Lubitsch's revolving door, while structuring a different disposition toward conspicuous yet alienating "international" modernity in contrast to chaotic urban community.

Keywords: *flânerie*, Simmel, revolving door, Taylorism, Lubitsch, Tati

Flânerie, the window-shopper/store browser and the revolving door

In the following discussion, Georg Simmel's socio-spatial definitions of the form, function and operation of the bridge compared to the door (1909, 1997, pp. 170-174) are applied to examination of a scene from Ernst Lubitsch's film *Ninotchka* (1939). The complexity that the revolving door adds to Simmel's argument also links to a play of seemingly contradictory elements in the film's lead character, Ninotchka, as performed by Greta Garbo. The elements to Ninotchka's presentation are drawn together from the efficiency movement or Taylorism and *flânerie*. Likewise, the compromised function of the broken wall in Jacques Tati's film *Mon Oncle* (1958) tests Simmel's

observations on the operation of a bridge. To commence, it is important to explore and establish an understanding of *flânerie*.

The French verbs *flâné* and *flâner* are translated into English as “to stroll” and associated with the nouns *flânerie*, *flâneuse* (feminine) and *flâneur* (masculine). Unfortunately, the simple and banal translation, found in most English dictionaries, presumes of the *flâneuse* and *flâneur* acts equivalent to purposeless idling and idleness (Allen, 1990, p. 445), probably based on a literal etymology that can be traced back to 1808 (Ferguson, 1994, p. 24). Consequently, to describe or term someone a *flâneur* or *flâneuse* is to suggest that person meanders without specific agenda through the streetscape, taking in and experiencing all that the metropolis has to offer. Yet this definition is somewhat simplistic when considering descriptions of *flânerie* in mid-19th century essays by Victor Fournel (1858, 1998) and Charles Baudelaire (1859-1863, 1964), let alone later examinations by Walter Benjamin (1927-40, 2003; 1935, 2003; 1935-39, 1997) of the *flâneur* in Baudelaire’s writings. Over the last two decades, issues of *flânerie* and the possibility of identifying traces of the *flâneuse* between mid-19th century modernism and late-20th century postmodernism has been the focus of discussion by a range of cultural theorists, such as Janet Wolff (1985), Susan Buck-Morss (1986), Anne Friedberg (1991), Elizabeth Wilson (1995), Kakie Urch (1997), Ruth Hottell (1999) and Janice Mouton (2001).

It should also be noted that in the 21st century, with the advent of always-on geo-locatable mobile digital devices, the concept and practice of *flânerie* is again being revisited, and this time without gendered presumptions or restraints. In particular, Robert Luke (2006) shifts the identity and activities of the *flâneur/flâneuse* and *flânerie* to accommodate the contemporary always-on networked environment of mobile smartphones, reconfigured in the person of the “phoneur”. Adriana de Souza e Silva and Larissa Hjorth (2009) build on the concept of phonerie and the phoneur, outlined by Luke (2006), to examine formations of “hybrid-reality” in the digital and networked media enriched urban terrain popular with location based GPS-enabled mobile gamers. John Rennie Short (2012) also builds

on the above and other studies to examine and propose a reinvigorated and transitional set of *flânerie* practices taking place in globalised cities throughout the world. Short (2012, p. 121-141) pays particular attention to how *flânerie* is harnessed as a professional and personal methodology put to work in urban spaces. Short (2012) notes that in a contemporary setting *flânerie* becomes “both art and social science” (p. 136), that, in the case of the phoneur, is acted out at the intersection of “commodity culture”, “surveillance society” and personal “liberation” (p. 139-141). However, an examination of all these contributions to the study of *flânerie* would be exhausting.

Consequently, this article keeps discussion of the development and the definition of *flânerie* to the early to mid-20th century, regardless of gender, and to the following understandings. In summary, the *flâneur* or *flâneuse* is distinguished by a need to be immersed in the tangible ambience, especially spectatorial, of contemporary circumstance experienced in the metropolis, with a view to being present at its developments, technical and pleasurable. For instance, Keith Tester (1994, p. 7) proposes that: “*Flânerie* can be understood as the observation of the fleeting and the transitory which is the other half of modernity to the permanent and central self”. Yet *flânerie* is not only concerned with witnessing the contemporary, it is also motivated by a need to understand these developments and gain from them. If there is a drive to *flânerie* it is marked by a movement along an axis that at one extreme demands knowledgeable yet critically detached participation in the contemporary (Fournel, 1858, 1998) and at the other end, to borrow a term from the film theorist Leon Charney (1998, p. 5-25), extreme “drift” within the contemporary.

Window-shopping, which has long been equated with a type of *flânerie*, is defined by a spectatorial drive to see an unobtainable object (Friedberg, 1991, p. 422). The *flâneur*, like the window-shopper, is set apart and remains on the exterior in search of a vision in contrast to the mass who enter the interior of the department store in search of a bargain, or in Benjamin’s opinion “to find a buyer” (Benjamin 1935, 2003, p. 10). Even if somewhat arguably, as Walter Benjamin proposed, the mammoth and largely open plan department stores of the late-19th century offered a “last promenade for the *flâneur*”

(Benjamin, 1935, 2003, p. 10). Yet regardless of the type of dense urban location the *flâneur* or *flâneuse* navigates, be it exterior streetscape or the vast partitioned and layered interior architectural space of the department store, this quality of being set apart in search of a vision is indicative of *flânerie*. Acts of *flânerie* can be seen succinctly captured in numerous examples of cinema, graphic design and visual arts.² When the *flâneur* enters the department store the window-shopper becomes the shop browser, and the phrase “just looking” is recognised as the universal catch-cry of the shopper’s internal *flânerie* (Friedberg, 1991, p. 421). As Anne Friedberg (1991, p. 421) notes, citing Benjamin (1935, 2003, p. 10), in the vast expanse of retail wandering the *flâneur*’s “perceptual patterns – distracted observation and dreamlike reverie – became a prototype for those of the consumer, whose style of ‘just looking’ is the pedestrian equivalent of slow motion”. Friedberg (1991) also makes a connection between the window-shopper’s intrigue with the spectacle of display and “cinematic spectation”, arguing that a transference or displacement of the consumer’s gaze onto the cinema screen occurred between the 19th and 20th centuries:

The window frames a tableau, placing it behind glass and making it inaccessible, and arouses desire. Cinematic spectation, a further instrumentalization of this consumer gaze, produced paradoxical effects on the newfound social mobility of the *flâneuse*. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as if in a historical relay of looks, the shop window succeeded the mirror as a site of identity construction, and then – gradually – the shop window was displaced by the cinema screen. (p. 422)

Significantly, the line “just looking around”, a slight variation on the same phrase “just looking”, is also used in the opening scene of *Ninotchka* (1939). *Ninotchka* begins its plot in Paris with three ineffectual Soviet trade envoys (Iranoff, Buljanoff and Kopalski) having just arrived with the confiscated Crown Jewels of the former Grand-Duchess Swana and instructions to sell the jewels at the highest price. It just happens that Swana, minus her Crown Jewels, is living (quite comfortably) in Paris among the exiled White Russian émigrés. Swana hears that her confiscated jewels are in Paris

and about to be sold, however through her sophisticated Parisian lover, the Count Dolga (Leon), Swana manages to stall proceedings in the French legal system. At the same time Swana has Leon distract the envoys with the attractions of Paris. Consequently, a fourth and more superior Soviet envoy extraordinary is dispatched from Moscow to Paris to look into matters and expedite the sale of the jewels. This model of Soviet efficiency is Nina Yakushova (Ninotchka). Shortly after her arrival, Ninotchka encounters the perplexing sight of a display window featuring a woman's hat. After booking into her hotel she leaves to inspect Paris and by pure coincidence asks Leon for directions. He follows her to the Eiffel Tower and then invites her to his apartment, an offer she accepts. In the apartment an overheard telephone conversation enlightens Ninotchka as to Leon's role in the stalled sale of the jewels, and their private encounter abruptly ends.

Despite Ninotchka's best efforts, the Grand-Duchess Swana's legal proceedings continue to impede the Ninotchka and Soviets efforts to sell the jewels. In the meantime, Leon persists in his attentions to Ninotchka who eventually softens. Ninotchka not only has the Grand-Duchess's jewels she now also has the Grand-Duchess's former lover, but in a moment of relaxation Ninotchka inadvertently allows Swana to clandestinely recover the jewels and stipulate terms. Subsequently, Ninotchka agrees to a quick legal and financial settlement over the dispute as to ownership of the jewels that necessitates Ninotchka leaving Leon and returning to Moscow. Leon, no longer interested in Swana, tries in vain to gain permission to enter the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, despite being back in Moscow, the envoy extraordinary maintains her friendship with comrades Iranoff, Buljanoff and Kopalski. Ninotchka also diligently continues her duty to the State. This leads to her being sent on another mission out of the USSR to save another trade envoy, this time in Constantinople and coincidentally involving the same three envoys, namely Iranoff, Buljanoff and Kopalski. On arrival, she discovers the cause of their indiscretions: Leon. Faced with the choice of having Leon perpetually corrupting Soviet foreign missions or serving her country and ideals more effectively by staying with him, she chooses the latter.

The script notes to the film, by the screenwriters Charles Brackett, Billy Wilder, and Walter Reisch (1939, 1966, p. 1), specified that the first scene in *Ninotchka* takes place in and outside: “The Luxurious Lobby of the Hotel Clarence”, where the centrepiece to the action is a plate glass revolving door that connects the exterior shots on a Parisian Boulevard to the interior of the hotel. The film’s director, Ernst Lubitsch, was well known for the metaphorical employment of doors in numerous film scenarios, with several of Lubitsch’s biographers commenting upon Lubitsch’s use of doors as inflective devices, including William Paul (1983, p. 317-318). Consequently, the scene develops not so much as segments on either side of the revolving door, but rather as an act passing in motion through the moving door. In short, the interior-exterior locations of the scene are linked rather than divided by the door. The dual nature of the revolving door’s function framed in reference to German sociologist George Simmel (1909) was first set out and discussed in Cockburn (2001, 2005). Coincidentally, Siyaves Azeri (2015) also refers to the door’s dual function and couches examination of the revolving door via the portrayal of its function in film scenario, but Azeri (2015) addresses the revolving door and its architectural function through discussion of its inventor and the device’s similarity to concepts in linguistic theory.

Nevertheless and returning to the opening of Lubitsch’s *Ninotchka*, the first of the three Soviet trade envoys to appear in this scene is Buljanoff, dressed in drab, coarse and heavy Russian clothing. He enters from the street to gape at the hotel’s opulent foyer (Fig. 1). When asked politely by the manager if he can be of assistance, Buljanoff mutters “No, no” several times and leaves by the same revolving door. Next to enter is Iranoff dressed similarly (Fig. 2), and when approached by the manager, he replies “Just looking around”. However, Comrade Kopalski, the third member, merely completes a circuit within the revolving door, looking through the plate glass (Fig. 3). Nevertheless, via the action of the revolving door, Kopalski too is momentarily within the hotel’s splendour, before the door’s movement ushers him out again, his neck craning to take a longer look. Once all three Soviet envoys are together again outside, having viewed the splendour of the hotel lobby, all agree that this hotel is “wonderful” in comparison to their own, down-market but officially booked

accommodation in the Hotel Terminus. The Hotel Clarence's entrance and foyer, as situational backdrop to society, contain extensive allegorical possibilities.



Figure 1: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939), opening scene with the revolving door – Buljanoff enters and exits the opulent foyer of a luxurious Parisian hotel.



Figure 2: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939), opening scene with the revolving door – next to enter and exit the foyer of the Hotel Clarence is Iranoff and when approached by the manager he replies “Just looking around.”





Figure 3: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939), opening scene with the revolving door – Comrade Kopalski, the third member, merely completes a circuit within the revolving door, looking through the plate glass.

Large and busy city hotel entrances and foyers are witness to a play on the ever-shifting fortunes and misfortunes, desires and disappointments, follies, foibles, vanity and deceit that constitute their transient parade of the human condition. Seven years before the release of *Ninotchka*, themes on the mores of cosmopolitanism represented within the confines of a hotel, especially the entrance, foyer and suites, were gathered together and displayed rather melodramatically in the Academy Award winning film *Grand Hotel* (1932), directed by Edmund Goulding and also a vehicle for Greta Garbo. Likewise, a decade before the release of *Grand Hotel*, Siegfried Kracauer (1922-25, 1995) in his essay “The Hotel Lobby” had reflected on the accepting anonymity of transient proximity that modernity staged in such public yet semi-enclosed spaces. Nevertheless, when interpreting the significance of the plate glass revolving door of the Hotel Clarence it is useful to draw on concepts proposed by Georg Simmel (1909, 1997), in his essay “Bridge and Door”, in which he addressed the way different spaces, natural and built, are accessed socially. Simmel argued that the distinction between the bridge and the door, as architectural entities, lies in their relationship to natural space or the manner in which each acts to “separate the connected or connect the separate” (1909, 1997, p. 171).

Simmel (1909, 1997) also proposes that the bridge operates as a demonstration of the way humanity conceives of the separateness encountered in natural boundaries (such as opposite banks of a river), and the way in which this separateness is potentially connectable by the employment of the bridge,

although a bridge may not yet exist (p. 170-174). The door offers another configuration altogether, whereby “the door forms, as it were, a linkage between the space of human beings and everything that remains outside it” (Simmel, 1909, 1997, p. 172). The door in this sense acts as a finite boundary between the enclosed space of our own design and that of nature (Simmel, 1909, 1997, p. 172). The function of the door is to demarcate experience and social status through its operation, defining everything relatively as exterior to or within the architectural/human space. However, this is not necessarily a limiting function as the boundary of the door can be read as a form of freedom, in that as a boundary it can be removed at any time by opening the door (Simmel, 1909, 1997, p. 172). However, the door of itself retains the potential to act as a boundary. Simmel pointed out this property of the door when comparing the operation of the bridge and the door: “it makes no difference in meaning in which direction one crosses a bridge, whereas the door displays a complete difference of intention between entering and exiting” (1909, 1997, p. 173).

It was from the confines of the enclosed human space, specifically the middle-class domestic interior, that the *flâneur/flâneuse* sought freedom. The *flâneur/flâneuse* did this by exiting the domicile space and entering into the present-presentness³ of Parisian streets, arcades, *Expositions Universelles* and department stores. As Walter Benjamin observed of Charles Baudelaire’s *flâneur*:

The street becomes a dwelling for the *flâneur*; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enamelled signs of business are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to a bourgeois in his salon (Benjamin, 1935-39, 1997, p. 37).

Admittedly, arcades and department stores are entered through doors. But these doors are engineered to be hidden or unobtrusive when the arcade or department store is open, in order that all those who inquire or desire have free passage. Similarly, the later employment of electronically triggered sliding doors consisting of huge planes of clear glass created the illusion of an exterior disappearing into

the interior, and an interior expanding out into an exterior, all in perpetual movement *vis-à-vis* a well travelled bridge. The revolving door operates in this manner in the opening scene of *Ninotchka* (Fig. 2). It is neither a door nor a bridge, yet it operates as both. In its action as a revolving door it momentarily captures interior and exterior space and connects the two, only in the next instance to cut each space off from the other.

As a function of its mechanics, the revolving door moves to open onto the street, then becomes enclosed before opening again into the interior of the building, is again enclosed before opening once more onto the street, and so on, in a process of perpetual recurrence. The private space of travel occupied by those who pass through the door is as temporary as it is illusory. If the enclosed space of the revolving door is noticed at all, it is as impelling movement and plate glass. But this space is one that builds expectation before the unfolding vision of the direction in which the person is moving, regardless of whether that movement is toward the interior, the exterior or the space between. How is the revolving door similar to a bridge? The answer is straightforward: the revolving door functions in a commensurate manner to a bridge in that, regardless of the direction of travel, one is bound to pass someone travelling in the opposite direction.

Yet in *Ninotchka* the revolving door also operates less like a door and more like a bridge when it offers Iranoff the possibility to enter the foyer and just look around, as if entering an arcade or department store. Kopalski, caught in the motion of the revolving door, cranes his neck to look back, as one would look back when crossing a bridge rather than closing a door. And, like certain floors of merchandise in the department store, the Hotel Clarence may be expensive, but when it comes to accommodating the three Soviet envoys it is neither prohibitive nor exclusive. The architectural and social parallels between the hotel and department store are not just coincidental. In Paris the department store Magasins du Louvre, a competitor during the late-19th and early 20th centuries to the first department store Bon Marché, began its operations as a hotel to accommodate visitors to the 1855 Paris *Exposition Universelles* (Lancaster, 1995, p. 17).

Simmel concludes his essay “Bridge and Door” (1909, 1997) pointing out that it is the potential to move beyond arbitrary barriers which distinguishes the human being as “the bordering creature who has no border” (p. 174). Simmel adds that this bordering creature may use the door to “separate out”, but at the same time he or she finds a “significance and dignity only in that which the mobility of the door illustrates: in the possibility at any moment of stepping out of this limitation into freedom” (1909, 1997, p. 174). This stepping away from limitation into freedom of satisfying desire expressed through material possessions was also the promise that mass production and marketing held out to the modern consumer. The marvellous interior of the Hotel Clarence, in the film *Ninotchka*, could just as easily stand as a sign of any of modernity’s sites of consumable excess. Thus it is hardly surprising that within the opening minutes of the film its director Ernst Lubitsch employs the device of the revolving door. The door operates smoothly to establish the power of desire that flows from the *flâneur*’s act of window-shopping, browsing or “just looking around”. The three Soviet envoys follow up their collective act of *flânerie* by moving into the Hotel Clarence.

Enter the efficient *flâneuse*

Shortly after the envoys’ move to the Hotel Clarence the same forces of *flânerie* are again depicted at play when, with the effect of the window-shopper, Ninotchka having just arrived in Paris is halted in her tracks by the sight of that hat (Fig. 4):

NINOTCHKA: What is that?

KOPALSKI: It’s a hat, Comrade, a woman’s hat.

NINOTCHKA: *shakes her head*

NINOTCHKA: Tsk, tsk, tsk, how can such a civilization survive which permits women to put things like that on their heads? It won’t be long now, Comrades.

(Brackett, Wilder and Reisch, 1939, 1966, p. 25)

The act of window-shopping is undoubtedly a defining attribute of the *flâneur-flâneuse* as the

recording apparatus of present-presentness. Consequently, it is significant that Ninotchka, in her distraction at the display of modern millinery, exhibits and fulfils her role as a critically observing apparatus on the move.



Figure 4: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939), railway to hotel scene “the hat” – with the effect of the window-shopper, Ninotchka having just arrived in Paris is halted in her tracks by the sight of that hat.

Earlier in the film, the opening repartee of the three trade envoys has already established the Soviet Government as a political and ideological construct. In addition to Ninotchka’s initial act of *flânerie* and within minutes of her appearance in the film her character profiles several of modernity’s ideologies. Even before she has appeared on the Paris railway platform and before the cinema audience, Ninotchka is defined via her authority and her role as acting on behalf of the Soviet Government. Likewise, in her first and earnest reminder to her colleagues that “we are here for work all of us, let’s not waste any time”, Ninotchka pronounces her additional alignment with another major ideology of the times, “scientific management” or more precisely the Soviet variant of the efficiency movement. Soviet interest in Taylorism and scientific management in general developed following Lenin’s 1918 edict to its coarse application in the Five-Year Plans under Stalin (Lenin, 1918, 1951; Bailes 1977, 1978, 1981; Hughes, 1989; Merkle, 1980; Rogger, 1981).

Frederick Winslow Taylor and scientific management

Twenty-eight years before the release of Lubitsch's film *Ninotchka*, the efficiency movement had begun in response to Frederick Winslow Taylor's lectures and writings, particularly "The Principles of Scientific Management" (1911, 1964). Taylor's approach depended on the systematic study of working methods to locate the most efficient procedure for completing a task while maximising productivity and minimising waste (1911, 1964, p. 36). This new scientific system invested in management the sole responsibility for the study of efficiency, the codification of task instructions and task management, as Taylor so succinctly phrased it in his introduction: "In the past the man has been first; in the future the system must be first" (1911, 1964, p. 7).

According to Taylor and fellow efficiency engineer Frank B. Gilbreth, the effect of the application of scientific management would be substantial elimination of redundant effort and misuse of materials (Taylor, 1911, 1964; Gilbreth and Gilbreth, 1953). The desired outcomes were a significant increase in productivity, exponential increase in profits for the employer and significant wage increases for employees who were completing considerably more work in the same set of hours as under the prior inefficient methods (Taylor, 1911, 1964, p. 15-16). As a result of higher productivity, not only could employees expect an increase in wages but also, given that significantly more was being accomplished over the same time frame, workers could also expect the hours of work per day to be reduced.

In the USA, the Society for Promoting Efficiency was formed in January 1912, and its membership, meetings and public lectures were regularly reported in the *New York Times*. For instance, a selection of 16 notices on the efficiency movement, published in *The New York Times* between January 1912 and April 1914, is listed in the references to this article. The efficiency movement in general attracted wide participation, especially between 1912 and the late 1930s. Efficiency engineers and managers focused largely on four areas: improved industrial productivity, improved work conditions and wages for both men and women employees, the improvement of public utilities and services, and the improvement of industrial health and safety through the

application of efficiency principles. It should also be noted that in the 1920s, in both the USA and the USSR, statements and publications appeared canvassing the possibility of harnessing efficiency principles to lessen the strictures of industrial and domestic work for women. Primary documents and secondary commentary on this point can be found in numerous texts, particularly those by or on Christine Frederick, Frank and Lillian Gilbreth in the USA and the female Bolsheviks Alexandra Kollontai and Inessa Armand in the USSR (Devinat, 1927; Frederick, 1920; Gilbreth and Gilbreth, 1953; Kollontai, 1977; Stites, 1978).

Taylor's two thirds, Lenin and Ninotchka

One of the appeals of Taylor's principles was that it offered the managers of industry and labour a set equation on which to build productivity and profit expectations. Taylor (1911, 1964) argued that with the adoption of scientific management practices, an increase in productivity could be achieved in the ratio of two thirds above that realised under older more inefficient methods (p. 95; p. 102; p. 136). This ratio of efficiency and its variants, 2:1, 3:1, 4:1 and even 5:1, became one of the central myths of scientific management, particularly as it was popularised in Russia. The allure of this Taylorist ratio can be detected as early as 1913 in the writings of Lenin (1913, 1967, p. 60-61), when he attacked Taylorism by asking the rhetorical question, "What is this 'scientific system'? Its purpose is to squeeze out of the worker three times more labour during a working day of the same length as before". Lenin's initial negative disposition toward scientific management largely reflected opposition to this American idea amongst French and German trade unions. However, by March 1914 Lenin had re-evaluated his opposition and changed to promoting the Taylorist ratio as the groundwork for a proletarian future:

The Taylor system – without its initiators knowing or wishing it – is preparing the time when the proletariat will take over all social production and appoint its own workers' committees for the purpose of properly distributing and rationalising all social labour. Large-scale production, machinery, railways, telephone – all provide thousands of opportunities to cut by three-fourths the working time of the

organised workers and make them four times better off than they are today. (Lenin, 1914, 1967, p. 97-99)

Four years later, in April 1918, and shortly after the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917, Lenin promoted Taylorism as an essential component in “the immediate tasks of the Soviet Government”, albeit in Socialist terms:

The possibility of building Socialism is conditioned precisely upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organization of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism. We must organise in Russia the study and teaching of the Taylor system and systematically try it out and adapt it to our purposes. (1918, 1951, p. 470-471).

In the light of Lenin’s response to scientific management, it is not so surprising that when Ninotchka steps onto the railway platform in Paris in 1939, as the singular most recent example of Soviet efficiency, she enters frame according to the Taylorist ratio, to replace three prior, inefficient Soviet models. However another consideration also informs Ninotchka’s characterisation. It is the uneasy relationship in the Soviet Union between consumer desire pejoratively interpreted as a Western and capitalist value and the Soviet communist emphasis on socialist utilitarianism. As early as the mid 1920s Soviet designers associated with the constructivist avant-garde agenda were grappling with the tension between their productivist and collectivist ideals and re-framing consumer desire as a communist value (Kiaer, 2005). Introduced by Lenin in early 1921 and running until shortly after the mid-1920s, when it was incrementally dismantled, the New Economic Policy heightened the ideological dilemma for those supporting socialist production and opposed to capitalist consumer desire (Kiaer, 2005, p. 17-28; Nove, 1992, p. 78-158). Yet Lenin’s New Economic Policy was recognition of the need to rapidly and effectively stimulate economic and industrial development in a manner that supplied satisfaction and a sense of socialist fulfilment, via a new range of collectively produced consumer goods. The competing ideological tension between Eastern Europe’s socialist production and Western Europe’s consumer desire continued into the Stalinist period, especially in the

cult of the shock worker or Strakhanovite and the access they reputedly had to luxury and material rewards (Siegelbaum, 1988; Bedeian and Phillips, 1990). Lubitsch, in his film *Ninotchka*, highlights, rather emphatically, Soviet tensions between industry and luxury when Ninotchka plays them out shortly after her introduction and then more subtly throughout the film.

As representative of Stalinist communism and its interpretation of Taylorism, *Ninotchka* is doubly ideological as efficiency movement commissar and potential *flâneuse*, when on her arrival and in her stride to the Hotel Clarence the sight of a fashionable Parisian lady's hat stops her. In short, *Ninotchka*'s observable, measurable, rational Soviet self is apprehended by the spectacle of her potential being, one that is intrigued by the "confronting" and "phantasmatic power of the commodity object" (Kiaer, 2005, p. 90), specifically this particular à la mode hat. Among others, Mike Featherstone (1991) has noted the relationship of the consumer's sense of being to the impact on commerce of the efficiency movement. Writing on the body in consumer culture, Featherstone (1991, p. 172) in reference to the distinction between calculated productive capacity and consumerism draws attention to the social transitions ushered in with the late 19th century and early 20th century. In particular, Featherstone points to the accumulative effect on industry and commerce created by 19th century department store expansion and early 20th century scientific management that "dramatically increased productive capacity" (1991, p. 172). The subsequent consequence of this considerable proliferation in consumables at competitive prices was that: "Workers who had become used to the rhetoric of thrift, hard work and sobriety, had to become 'educated' to appreciate a new discourse centred around the hedonistic lifestyle entailing new needs and desires" (Featherstone, 1991, p. 172). Featherstone (1991) not only aligns department stores with scientific management in the shaping of hedonistic lifestyle and modern consumerism, he also reminds us of the role popular entertainment and communications played:

In the 1920s the foundations of a consumer culture became established with the new media of motion pictures, tabloid press, mass circulation magazines and radio extolling the leisure lifestyle, and

publicising new norms and standards of behaviour. (p. 172)

Unremarkably, Lubitsch's characterisation of Ninotchka tells us of popular knowledge and impressions held by the Capitalist West of the Communist East. Yet an investigation of the doubling ideology that Ninotchka represents cannot be limited to interpretations contemporary with the film's release, the poverty of which is exemplified by reviewers such as Frank S. Nugent for *The New York Times*. In a notice published on 10 November 1939, Nugent, demonstrating the limitations of popular journalism, simply cast the hat as a symbolic object in the breaking down of the Communist East before the lure of the Capitalist West, when he wrote that:

Paris in the Spring being what it is and Melvyn Douglas, as an insidious capitalistic meddler, being what he is, Comrade Ninotchka so far forgot Marx, in Mr Lubitsch's fable, as to buy a completely frivolous hat ... (1939a, p. 27)

Nugent restated his initially limited interpretation in *The New York Times* on 19 November 1939. However, this time Nugent did include passing reference to Stalin's Five-Year Plans:

Mr Lubitsch has wondered, and his cast has been willing to wonder with him, what would happen to a humourless, practical, five-year-plannish special envoy (feminine presumably) from the Soviet who is sent to Paris in the Spring on a jewel-selling mission and encounters, amid the other incandescent marvels of a capitalist civilisation, a debonair fellow answering to the general description of Melvyn Douglas. (1939b, p. x5)

Similarly, Franz Hoellering, in *The Nation* on 25 November 1939, drew attention to the capitalist-communist binary as the film's fixed interpretive polemic when observing: "Instead of being efficient, the commissars fall for the charm of Paris and the pleasures the capitalist world offers to its wealthy children" (p. 587). Dismissal of the film's plot as bland statement on ideological contest became orthodoxy and was again employed in 1983, although with more sophistication, when William Paul

described the film in his biography on Lubitsch:

It is Ninotchka herself who establishes an ideological meaning for the hat when she remarks on first seeing it, "How can such a civilisation survive which permits their women to put things like that on their head?" As an afterthought she adds, with great certainty, "It won't be long now, comrades," as if the hat were a key item in the battle between capitalism and communism. (1983, p. 208)

The above critics and the biographer's simple ideologically interpretations of the film fail to take into account the complex intersection of influences working upon the representational agency of conventional Hollywood narrative cinema, let alone those at play in global consumerist desire. However, the film also points to values that were intentionally or otherwise amplified by the film's director and writers. It is necessary to briefly background these sub-texts as they do inevitably animate the appearance of the mechanical-*flâneuse* in whom co-exists the mutual and complementary display of efficiency movement attributes and *flânerie*. The concept of the mechanical-*flâneuse* began to form in the personas of specifically cosmopolitan types of the *flâneuse* during the late 19th century, in response to new opportunities for employment with large retail firms and in corporate administration. This type of employment gave women relative self-sufficiency and new authority, let alone visibility, that had not been available to earlier generations, and this new visibility had a noticeable impact on fashion and entertainment.

The transition of *flânerie* into the mechanical (in the sense of "precision in action") occurred after 1911 and across genders in the wake of interest in the efficiency movement's promotion of Taylorism. The impact of Taylorism on the workplace of women and expectations of their employers gave rise to the re-articulated development of the late 19th century *flâneuse* as mechanical-*flâneuse*. Whether referring to representation or reality, the term mechanical-*flâneuse* does not imply an essential identity that is fixed in time or place. The mechanical-*flâneuse* is best understood as a set of characteristics that formed, coalesced, diverged and then re-formed in a variety of patterns and combinations stretching across two continents, numerous economic and political systems, and an

equal number of language groups (Cockburn, 2005, 2015). As the efficiency movement spread so did the defining qualities of the mechanical-*flâneuse*, to become trans-Atlantic, particularly as a model of modern woman represented in cultural output, such as cinema. Sabine Hake (1992) has acknowledged that as early as 1919 Ernst Lubitsch was aware of the impact that scientific management efficiency principles were having on society, as depicted in various scenes in his film of that year *The Oyster Princess* (1919). Hake's analysis concentrates on analogies of industrial processing in the preparation by servants of the Princess for social presentation (1992, p. 84-87). However, equally significant in the film is a scene depicting the Oyster King attended by a detachment of uniformly dressed, spaced and seated secretaries each taking down minutes, some using typewriters. Either way Lubitsch's representations were well in advance of Siegfried Kracauer's essay "The Mass Ornament" that includes his observations on the Tiller Girls as a demonstration of the impact of Taylorism (1927, 1995, p. 75-86).

Returning to Lubitsch's 1939 film and as already noted, Ninotchka arrives in Paris as the Taylorised functionary of the Soviet State, the efficient one in place of the inefficient three. Her scientific management credentials are quickly established over the course of ten minutes of film from the rail platform scene, to the encounter with the "hat", to arrival at the Royal Suite in the Hotel Clarence, her summation of the state of negotiations over the sale of the confiscated jewels and her departure to inspect the technical achievements of the city. Through this movement from arrival to purposeful sightseeing, the moment of particular significance is Ninotchka's distraction by the hat. It is at this early point in the film that Ninotchka's potential for *engagé* as an efficient Soviet commissar now adopts *flânerie*. Ninotchka's disposition, to purposefully *flâner*, is evident and it will progressively augment her mechanical attributes as exemplary efficiency movement commissar. Incrementally, as the plot unfolds, Ninotchka emerges as mechanical-*flâneuse*. The combination of scientific management efficiency with *flânerie* is metaphorically prefigured by the action of the revolving door in the opening scene of the film *Ninotchka*. Revolving doors often trap two very different people in their movement regardless of whether they are heading in the opposite or same

direction. Ninotchka, it is implied, entered the luxurious Hotel Clarence via the revolving door and she did so as the efficient commissar. In the movement of the door, regardless of the direction travelled, Ninotchka would have been momentarily linked to the opulence of the hotel's cosmopolitan interior and smoothly functioning modern Paris on the hotel's exterior while glimpsing both at the same time. She would enter and exit that revolving door numerous times before her final departure for Moscow.

The revolving door and the broken wall

In Lubitsch's film, cosmopolitan Paris and collectivised Moscow starkly contrast the social and ideological terrains of things and sensuality. Their respective ideological and national borders, as competing physical and sociological spaces dividing Capitalist West from Communist East, are barriers in keeping with Simmel's observation (1909, 1997, p. 172) on the power inherent in closing a door: "Precisely because it can also be opened, its closure provides the feeling of a stronger isolation against everything outside this space than the mere unstructured wall. The latter is mute, but the door speaks". Yet Lubitsch's Paris, in *Ninotchka*, also stands as the paradoxical equation of old 19th century sophistication combined with new 20th century modernism. In contrast, his Moscow is regimented modern efficiency that on a scale of sensual sophistication, judging by the way it accommodates its citizens, is anything but efficient. In short, the cities in Lubitsch's film lie on either side of the ideologically closed door, but with the film's Soviet protagonists hope for the future dependent on the ideological and sensual door revolving just as much as it may open and close. However, despite *Ninotchka*'s loss of Paris on return to Moscow, the metaphoric movement of Lubitsch's revolving door continues as the description of the general outlook held onto by the film's characters and by its plot as it develops toward its romantic and ideologically accommodating conclusion in Constantinople. Ironically, during final production and editing in early to mid-1939 the urgency of this theme was underlined by the rapid slide into irrelevance of the popular front against Fascism. By the time the film was released in October 1939 Adolf Hitler had plunged Europe into war and it was necessary to insert an inter-title at the film's commencement indicating the plot's

location in time before war was declared.

Nineteen years later, with memory of the defeated Nazi menace all but faded and the impact of Cold War American consumerism more than prevalent, in France, Jacques Tati released his film *Mon Oncle* (1958), a comedy on post-war reconstruction.⁴ In Tati's film the lead character Monsieur Hulot finds his accommodating but chaotic indolent urbane lifestyle in conflict with that of his sister, brother-in-law and nephew Gérard, the Arpel family. The Arpels live in an ultra-new, labour-saving, electronic-device-governed house in a recently built suburb. Early in the film, Tati shows the audience a broken wall, or hole-in-the-wall, traversed in both directions by the uncle, Hulot, the stray dogs and their dachshund friend Dackie and presumably Hulot's nephew, Gérard. This pathway acts to separate yet connect the old community-centred urban precinct, where Hulot lives, from the new modernist projects and boutique suburban architecture on the periphery that includes the Maison Arpel *à la mode* American "International Style" (Bellos, 1999, p. 206-207, p. 212; Hilliker, 1998, p. 71). As a device, the broken wall implies the eventual erasure of the "old" urban with its sense of community under the alienating clinical functionality of the "new" modern (Fig. 5). In the rhetoric of *petit-bourgeois* capitalism the destruction of older heritage districts by rapacious developers, who rebuild in brutalist architectural form, is often cited as a signifier of modern "progress". But, toward the final scene in *Mon Oncle*, just as the physical plurality offered by the old architectural spaces of the cosmopolitan inner (in contrast to the homogenised metropolitan outer), disappears under demolition, not all is lost. Throughout the film, Gérard's relationship with his uncle, when required to mind the boy, is one of shared although often accidental involvement in "conspiracies of mischief" at the expense of motorists in traffic jams, the ordered symmetry and function of the Arpels' garden, and the *détournement* of unwitting pedestrians into collisions with street signs (Bellos, 1999, p. 268-277; Hilliker, 1998, p. 70-71). The sites of these conspiracies of mischief traverse the cosmopolitan urban, modern outer suburban and the zone of entropy in between that separate the former from the latter.



Figure 5: Screen capture from *Mon Oncle* (1958), left to right: Old urban as cosmopolitan inner – broken wall (hole in the wall) as bridge between two zones – Maison Arpel à la mode American “International Style” as outer suburban modernist zone.

During a greater part of the film, as a consequence of the family’s ultra-modern lifestyle, Gérard is estranged from his father who is trapped in the ideology of post-war modernism as luxury, one that was detached and alienating and prevailed between the late 1940s to the late 1960s. However, in the final scene Gérard and his father move out of the family car to wave off the departing Hulot, and for the first time hold hands as they set in motion a prank first learned by Gérard in the care of his uncle, but now carried out by father and son (Fig. 6). The car as signifier of their ultra-modern lifestyle is at this moment reduced to just another item in the urban terrain, convenient to hide behind rather than to be lost within (Hilliker, 1998, p. 70-71).



Figure 6: Screen capture from *Mon Oncle* (1958) – Final scene, the “conspiracies of mischief”, father and son play the whistle trick.

Metaphorically, like a person in a revolving door, the conspiracies of mischief depicted in *Mon Oncle* enter and exit exclusive spaces with the same fluid rhythm as the revolving door. However, regardless of where they occur, each conspiracy runs counter to the concept of order and structure inherent as governing value in modern efficiency. In *Mon Oncle*, the concluding presumption is that eventually

the accretions of old urban social experience are doomed, but in the final scene of *Mon Oncle* chaotic *détournement*, not uncommon in the old urban flux of social encounter, seeps into the modernist “new” despite its best efforts to remain closed off. Modernist efficiency with its privileging of regulated and measurable minimalism of form and behaviour must now accommodate, rather than exclude, its socially, economically and emotionally disorderly “other”.

Conclusion

The revolving door in the opening of *Ninotchka* and the broken wall in *Mon Oncle* operate at one and the same time as bridge and door, while physically being neither. Similarly, in both movies the architectural devices of revolving door and broken wall go beyond their simple function as architecture to subtly set up, in emotional and spatial terms, each film’s diegetic and thematic content. In doing so, each device profoundly sets in motion the complex considerations these films have come to encapsulate, that cosmopolitanism is neither the exclusive function of the sophisticated, sensuous and mischievous urbane, nor the planned, calculated and efficient sub-urban nor for that matter any equal proportion of each. In short, the revolving door’s action of perpetual entry and exit stands as analogy to the fluctuating relationship between ideology and sensuality. This relationship of opposites, ideology and sensuality, also pass and makes passes like travellers on a bridge. At one moment they travel in opposite directions, at another in the same direction and often they are on opposite sides of the bridge staring straight back at each other. Consequently, if cosmopolitanism is anything it is the continual play of these qualities in the terms dictated by ungovernable circumstance and situation.

NOTES

1. This is a revised version (2015) of a paper originally based on a PhD thesis (2001) chapter and delivered at the Cosmopolitanism and Place: The Design of Resistance Conference, Centre for Social Theory and Design, University of Technology, Sydney, October 21-22, 2005. The 2005 conference paper is cited in Kramer and Short (2011) and Short (2012).

2. For instance: Honore Daumier's satirical 1862 lithograph *Nadar elevating photography to the height of art*; Gustave Caillebotte's 1877 painting *Rue de Paris: Temps de pluie*; August Macke's 1914 painting *Hat Shop*; Vertov's lens in the 1929 film *The Man with a Movie Camera*; the blasé gaze of Gaston Monescu/Monsieur Laval (Herbert Marshall) in Lubitsch's 1932 film *Trouble in Paradise*; the 26 September 1942 cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* depicting a uniformed female Red Cross worker catching a glimpse of a fashionable hat in a shop window; Cleo's movement through Paris in Agnes Varda's 1962 film *Cleo from 5 to 7* and Amélie's description of a Parisian street where she is guiding a blind man, in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's 2001 film *Amélie*.

3. Charney (1995, p. 285) uses the phrase 'present presence' to describe awareness of the heightened sensation of rapidly shifting circumstances that informed the 'temporal experience of modernity'

4. For analysis of Tati's films, see Tati, Bazin and Truffaut (1958, 2002); Bellos (2001); Hilliker (1998); Kinser (1992); Ross (1994).

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939), opening scene with the revolving door – Buljanoff enters and exits the opulent foyer of a luxurious Parisian hotel.

Figure 2: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939), opening scene with the revolving door – Next to enter and exit the foyer of the Hotel Clarence is Iranoff and when approached by the manager he replies “Just looking around.”

Figure 3: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939), opening scene with the revolving door – Comrade Kopalski, the third member, merely completes a circuit within the revolving door, looking through the plate glass.

Figure 4: Screen capture from *Ninotchka* (1939) – Railway to hotel scene “the hat” – with the effect of the window-shopper, Ninotchka having just arrived in Paris is halted in her tracks by the sight of that hat.

Figure 5: Screen capture from *Mon Oncle* (1958) Left to right: Old urban as cosmopolitan inner – Broken wall (hole in the wall) as bridge between two zones – Maison Arpel à la mode American “International Style”.

Figure 6: Screen capture from *Mon Oncle* (1958) – Final scene, the “conspiracies of mischief”, father and son play the whistle trick.

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