# "The Contra-*Flâneur*: Self-Consciousness in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* and Brassaï's Photographs of Nighttime Paris"

By

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A Thesis
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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# Abstract

**Introduction:** *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Paris by Night* converge in a discussion that posits the existence of the contra-*flâneur,* an urban viewer whose self-conscious awareness of being looked at results in a desire to conceal their identity. Generally defined by presenting a range of experiences distilled from three literary sources: Knut Hamsun's *Hunger*, Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, and Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer.* Michael Fried's book *Courbet's Realism* and his ideas regarding "beholding," "absorption," and "theatricality" are used to substantiate the claim that the contra-*flâneur* concept underlies both works in question.

**Chapter One:** Sasha Jansen, the first-person narrator of *Good Morning, Midnight*, and examples of her self-consciousness and paranoia of being looked at. Themes of stasis and impasse. The dialectic of inside and outside, room and street. Narrative form and cinematic qualities. Fried used in discussing Edward Hopper's painting *A Summer Interior* (1919) to illustrate how Sasha's descriptions of the world conceal her identity from the reader instead of revealing it. Sasha is fully "absorbed" by another character at the conclusion of the novel, thus making her totally invisible and unknowable.

**Chapter Two:** Brassaï is a contra-*flâneur* only in an aesthetic sense. Fried's concepts discussed at length in relation to eight photographs. Underlying element of these photographs is Brassaï's desire to diminish his presence in and in front of the photograph as the photographer named Brassaï and "replace" that presence with another beholding presence, namely, the contra-*flâneur.* Various techniques employed (subjects absorbed in a task, depicted with face turned away) in order to complicate identity. Most unique method is through reconstituting himself as someone else (a drunk, a down and out wanderer) in his photographs. Conclude that Brassaï is unable to conceal his presence in his photographs as the very techniques he employs distinguish them as taken by Brassaï.

# Acknowledgments

The writing of this MA thesis has been a rewarding experience filled with countless fascinating conversations, moments of realization as well as frustration. Walter Benjamin's aphorism "genius is application" was my North Star so to speak. Though I make no claims to genius whatsoever, and the shortcomings (all of which are entirely my own) of the thesis confirm this, I feel a special satisfaction in completing such a project. Of course there are a number of people who have been central to the realization of this project. Namely, my advisor Dr. George Toles, whose long-distance correspondence always cut close to the mark, and whose intellectual creativity and generosity will long stand as characteristics for me to emulate in the future; Dr. Adam Muller, with whom I spent many enlightening hours over late breakfasts discussing the vast and intricate expanse of the metropolis, and to whom I owe a great debt for his patience, selflessness and friendship; my loving and empathetic partner, Sara Tarrant, whose unflagging support and seemingly boundless patience made the moments of frustration bearable and the moments of realization more memorable because she was there to share them with.

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# Introduction

1930s Paris was a different city from the avant-garde, expatriate nexus it had been in the decades prior to the stock market crash of 1929. Many Americans had left Paris to return home to salvage what they could from decimated fortunes. But such a change was merely an incidental alteration in terms of the transformations Paris has endured over the centuries. Arrivals and Departures. Of course Paris remained—Montparnasse, Montmartre, Clichy, Gare St. Lazare, the horse track at Auteuil, the houses of illusion, bustling cafés, *bals mussettes*, the narrow cobblestone streets, the museums, the cemeteries. The Seine still meandered past what once was the site of the ancient Roman military outpost of Lutetia: known now as the Isle de la Cité. *La Coeur* of the city. Jean Rhys and Brassaï both found themselves near here, on the Left Bank—and it is this fervent zone of Paris that underlies much of their creative output. *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Paris by Night,* the first a work of narrative fiction and the latter a collection of black and white photographs, converge in this thesis in the central motif of a self-conscious urban viewer that in important and discernable ways contrast the paradigmatic Parisian urban figure of the *flâneur*. I have termed this figure a contra-*flâneur*. These two texts ask the reader/viewer (what will also be referred to as a beholder) to examine the nature of the perspectives presented, and more importantly the nature of the relationship between Sasha and the world depicted in the text, Sasha and the reader of the text, and in Brassaï's photographs, the relationships between photographer and his photographic subjects, and between photographer and the viewer(s) of his photographs. Essentially, self-consciousness, an uncomfortable and even debilitating awareness of being looked at, lies at the heart of the contra-*flâneur* in the two works in question. This element of self-consciousness implies another kind of urban viewer, distinct from the easy-going *flâneur*, that is not immediately apparent in either *Good Morning, Midnight* or *Paris by Night*, but is "identifiable" by the first-person narrator's and photographer's *self-conscious desire for invisibility*. This desire ultimately results in Sasha Jansen and Brassaï attempting to complicate and conceal their identities from the reader/viewer by employing representational and photographic techniques that specifically address the always implied presence of a tension between narrator and reader, photographer and the subject(s) he has chosen to photograph. In other words, they both keep the beholder at a distance that is sufficient enough to obscure their identities in mist.

However, and this is an important distinction, the determining forces behind Sasha's and Brassaï's individual desires for invisibility are very different. Sasha's self conscious desire for invisibility is fueled by a deeply entrenched fear of and paranoia about humanity that compels her to seek refuge from the "cruel eyes" of the world. Consequently, her perspective is very narrow and selective. Even though the forcefulness of her consciousness, what I refer to as Sasha *flinging* her perspective at the reader, does imply that she reveals certain aspects of herself to the reader, the details are consistently vague and partial. The flinging consciousness is a smoke screen behind which she conceals her deepest self. In other words, it is a mask that covers up the fact that she turns her face away from the reader. In contrast, Brassaï's contra-*flâneurie,* his desire for invisibility is born not out of fear, but out of an intrinsic, one might say philosophical belief that he is not in any way superior to the subjects and objects he photographs. He is a contra-*flâneur* only in an aesthetic sense. He wants to minimize any obviousness, any possibility of being accused of flinging *his* perspective at the viewer. His fundamental attitude of respect and humility for the people, streets and objects in the Parisian world he was inspired to photograph confers upon his photographs (though they seem to be moments distilled from the experiences of a Baudelairean dandy-*flâneur*), the subtle presence of a nameless viewer who is someone other than Brassaï. His childlike curiosity and unsentimental respect for the world and people he photographed are well articulated in a phrase he borrowed from his literary mentor Goethe, and repeated throughout his artistic career: "Gradually objects have raised me up to their own level".

All this talk of what Sasha Jansen and Brassaï may have felt and why may seem to some readers far too subjective and insubstantial. I assure these readers that this vague language will be clarified through the theoretical framework I have employed. However, a certain amount of vagueness is unavoidable, as the figure of the contra-*flâneur* does not appear in either of the texts to be examined in an overt manner. Instead this figure emerges as a result of certain narratological characteristics and specific representational/ photographic techniques that address the always present but not necessarily obvious tension, even confrontation, between the first-person narrator and reader, the photographer and the subject/object depicted in a photograph. The theoretical framework I employ in presenting my argument regarding the presence of a contra-*flâneur*, the self-conscious desire for invisibility found in *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Paris by Night,* is borrowed from Michael Fried's insightful book *Courbet's Realism.* Fried's imaginative critical engagement with the paintings of the 19th century French realist Gustave Courbet, presents the fascinating argument that underlying Courbet's work is his unconscious attempt to diminish his presence as a "painter/beholder" *in and in front of his paintings.* Fried's argument stems from the always implied presence of what he refers to as the "painter/beholder" in front of the canvass. This concept is applicable to readers and viewers of Rhys and Brassaï, though in different configurations, as "narrator/author/beholder" and "photographer/beholder". Though less central to the first chapter on Rhys, Fried's compelling argument regarding the dynamic between the "painter/beholder" and various paintings and Courbet's attempt to diminish, even erase, his presence in the artistic work is very useful when discussing Brassaï's photographs. Fried's ideas regarding "beholding", "theatricality" and "absorption" are central here and crucial to my exploration of the fictional narrative and black and white photographs included in this thesis insofar as they, like Courbet's corpus of paintings, are deeply concerned with *being seen.* However, I do not want to go into these concepts in great detail here as they will be more fully discussed in the following chapters.

But what is, who is, this contra-*flâneur*? Before moving into a studied consideration of the contra-*flâneur* as represented in *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Paris by Night* it is necessary to more fully explore and explain what I feel are the parameters and characteristics of the contra-*flâneur* concept and the nature of contra-*flâneurie* in outlining the potentials for experience that are folded into the contra-*flâneur*, not all of which will be directly relevant or applicable to Sasha Jansen or Brassaï and their particular forms of contra-*flâneurie.* By doing so, I hope to avoid establishing Sasha Jansen as inherently characteristic of the contra-*flâneur*, as her marginalized existence and experience in the city is significantly informed by impoverishment, depression, paranoia, stasis, and alcoholism. These characteristics are hers, though she shares in a kind of twentieth-century mentality, one could say consciousness, that other fictional characters display to a greater or lesser degree. As such, Sasha's characteristics are not normative. They do not underwrite, nor are they fundamental to, the *definition* of the contra-*flâneur* concept. Instead I suggest that there is a broad range of "appetites" that make up the palette of urban dwellers whose attitude regarding society is mitigated to varying degrees by alienation, disaffection and a need for disassociation. Internal conflict, peculiar obsessiveness, biting social commentary, satire, self-contradiction, independence, irrationality, and perhaps, in the most extreme cases, insanity, may play a part in the contra-*flaneur's* range of experience. I am thinking of the hyper-conscious and perpetually famished narrator of Knut Hamsun's *Hunger,* the Underground Man in Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground,* and the ultra-virile narrator of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, to name but three. Of course there are other authors who come to mind: Kafka, Joyce, Celiné, Baudelaire, and Poe.

Knut Hamsun's *Hunger,* the first-person narrative account of a young man's agonizing life of impoverishment, intellectual/artistic frustration, starvation, misfortune and gradual degeneration into what at times are intense feelings of vile bitterness, self-loathing and hatred of humanity, paints a vibrant portrait of the potentials for experience available to the contra-*flâneur.* The nameless narrator, unlike Sasha Jansen, regularly unleashes his anger, bitterness and hatred on those around him. While Sasha fantasizes about the day she will unleash the metaphorical wolf that walks beside her on those she *assumes* (rightly or wrongly) harshly and unjustly criticize her, the nameless narrator of Hamsun's novel acts out, in fact lashes out, often irrationally, in anger and indignation.

For example, one afternoon the narrator finds himself sitting on a park bench. As he contemplates the nature of God, his worn out shoes, the newspaper article he is unable to write, an old man sits down near him at the other end of the bench. The narrator's attention becomes fixed upon this old man and particularly on an old greasy newspaper he holds in his hands. The narrator immediately begins to construct strange fantasies about the newspaper and its contents. Suddenly, offering the old man a cigarette that he does not possess, he engages the old man in conversation. To the narrator's great relief, the old man declines the cigarette and inspired by the success of his deception, flings himself into a series of fabrications and lies revolving around a non-existent individual named J.A. Happolati, the fictitious landlord of the narrator's fictitious address at St. Olav's Place, No. 2. The old man, who we learn is blinded by cataracts, is a former tenant of St. Olav's Place and affably and interestedly pursues the personal details of this J.A. Happolati. The narrator quickly becomes perplexed and impatient at his interest. He says to the reader: "The little goblin's unsuspecting simplicity made me foolhardy; I would stuff him recklessly full of lies; rout him out o' field grandly, and stop his mouth from sheer amazement" (35-36). The narrator's fanciful tale portrays J.A. Happolati as a kind of Renaissance man, the host of sultans and father of princesses of unsurpassed beauty and leisure who spend their days reclining on beds of yellow roses. The old man, obviously sensing he is speaking to someone deranged, falls silent. The narrator, noticing this, becomes indignant and enraged. "Hell and fire, man ! Do you imagine that I am sitting here stuffing you chock-full of lies?" I roared furiously. "Perhaps you don't even believe that a man of the name of Happolati exists! I never saw your match for obstinacy and malice in any old man. What the devil ails you?" (39). The old man, in a state of fear and shock quickly walks away. The narrator tells us that he feels no remorse or shame; instead, as he tells the reader: "I leaned back and looked at the retreating figure [...] it appeared to me that I had never in my life seen a more vile back than this one, and I did not regret that I had abused the creature before he left me" (40).

In *Good Morning, Midnight*, we suspect that Sasha has made a spectacle of herself in the past—and we see a glimpse of her indignant sensitivity after she breaks down in front of Delmar and Serge Rubin: she utters a few defensive and harsh words and thinks even worse thoughts—but otherwise she does not do anything. To think is not to do, per se, though thought (interior monologue) is a kind of doing that may diffuse one's anger in the heat of the moment. A violent hurtful thought, kept inside, saves her from the indignity of unnecessarily spewing vile words that are both hurtful to others and to her. And Brassaï too made a spectacle of himself while photographing at night. In a sense he imposed himself and his camera on the world. He attracted the attention of the police, was threatened by thugs wielding knives, had his camera stolen twice, his pocket picked. Picasso, because of the sulfurous magnesium flash powder Brassaï preferred to use, made fun of him by referring to him as "the terrorist". Brassaï, with his old unwieldy equipment, certainly was conspicuous in the street and in the close quarters of bars, but there is a distinctive attempt, apparent in the document of the printed photograph, to conceal the fact that he was a conspicuous presence (a photographer) during the shooting of his photographs. His presence, the presence of the camera, made many people nervous and they too, like the old man on the bench, often got up and left.

Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* is another text that resonates with experiences that I would suggest lie within the range of the contra-*flâneur*. The

Underground Man's extreme isolation, scathing social criticism, and outrageous self-contradiction and reversals of opinion accord his incongruous and warped perspective a gloss that is existentially anti-social, fatalistic, yet he cries out for meaningful human contact. The following passage clearly articulates his painfully funny internal struggle to contend with his masochistic view of himself in relation to the world:

> I got to the point of feeling a sort of secret abnormal, despicable enjoyment in returning home to my corner on some disgusting Petersburg night, acutely conscious that that day I had committed a loathsome action again, that what was done could never be undone, and secretly, inwardly gnawing, gnawing at myself for it, tearing and consuming myself till at last the bitterness turned into a sort of shameful accursed sweetness, and at last—into positive real enjoyment! [...] I will explain: the enjoyment was just from the too intense consciousness of one's own degradation; it was from feeling oneself that one had reached the last barrier, that it was horrible, but that it could not be otherwise; that there was no escape for you; that you never could become a different man; that even if time and faith were still left you *to change into something different* you would most likely not wish to change; or if you did wish to, even then you would do nothing; because perhaps in reality there was nothing for you to change into (133).

His fatalism, excruciating self-analysis and belief that meaningful and lasting change is impossible—something we see in Sasha—results in a peculiar sort of inertia, alienation and dissipation that seems to be a kind of social disease. Yet, however pervasive and endlessly professed his "ailments" are, they are contradicted and moderated by his endless curiosity, vivid imagination, dreaming, reverie and open invitation to the reader to laugh at him. His imagination, false assumptions, and self-conscious inferiority lead him into numerous bizarre encounters: the most notable arguably being his encounter and subsequent obsession with the six foot tall Lieutenant against whom he has long harboured (for years he tells us) a resentment of outrageous proportions; a resentment instigated by a brief encounter in a bar during which he was picked up and *moved aside* by the officer. The import of being moved aside, essentially of not being recognized, becomes an intolerable indignity because what the underground man ostensibly wants is a fight, a duel, or to be thrown out of a window into the street; in other words being worthy of being taken seriously, even of being despised. He is fed up with being swatted away like a fly, of being picked up and moved aside, of having to move aside, like an inferior and insignificant thing. Therefore his vainglorious plan for self-vindication is wrapped up in *not moving aside.* The field of contest is St. Petersburg's famous Nevsky Prospekt. It is here among the throngs of strollers that the Underground Man will "confront" the officer and regain his dignity. He says: "Of course I shall not really push him," I thought, already more good-natured in my joy. "I will simply not turn aside, will run up against him, not very violently, but just shouldering each other—just as much as decency permits. I will push against him just as much as he pushes against me" (165). This well-loved portion of the novella concludes with the Underground Man finally "achieving", after numerous failed attempts, satisfaction. He "collides" shoulder to shoulder with the officer, (though we know the Underground Man is much smaller than the officer) and in that "collision" restores his dignity, even though he is the only one aware that an "injustice" occurred in the first place: "I had not yielded a step, and had put myself publicly on an equal social footing with him. I returned home feeling that I was fully avenged for everything. I was delighted. I was triumphant and sang Italian arias" (166).

Inevitably, his manic ascension to exalted triumph is followed by despondency and despair. However, with the Underground Man even despair is not without its positive aspects and fulfillments. As he states: "In despair there are the most intense enjoyments, especially when one is very acutely conscious of the hopelessness of one's position. And when one is slapped in the face—why then the consciousness of being rubbed into a pulp would positively overwhelm one" (133). This sense of being overwhelmed by the moment—of being or imagining that one is singled out for misery, periodically "slapped in the face" by the world is delicious to the Underground Man. Not only does he seek such experience out as an emotional and psychological contrast to the dullness of his solitude, but also as a kind of self-indulgent masochism that momentarily reminds him that he exists and matters in an otherwise indifferent world: hence his manic cycle of triumph and despair. To a certain extent this cycle is observable in Sasha. She tells herself: "But careful, careful! Don't get excited. You know what happens when you get excited and exalted, don't you?....Yes...And then, you know how you collapse like a pricked balloon, don't you?" (351). Rising is inevitably followed upon by deflation—marked by her fleeing to the nearest lavatory.

The link between Brassaï and the Underground Man is forged in their mutual desire to change into something else, someone else. Though moved to transform by different motives, they both share a kind of uneasiness about who and what they are. More specifically, Brassaï was uneasy about being categorized as *a photographer*, and consequently he vigorously explored numerous avenues of artistic expression:

journalism, painting, sculpture, filmmaking, drawing, collage, essay writing, and poetry. Moreover, this desire for continual redefinition emerges in his photographic output, and I argue that his quest for plurality translated into a manipulation of his identity through the incorporation of himself *into* his photographs as something and someone else thereby implying a kind of dispossession of the self born out of a desire to connect with, to insert oneself into a photographed urban world and therefore reconstitute oneself as a different kind of human being in photographs.

Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* is a text whose narrator, though financially impoverished, lacks little in terms of experience: hunger, pleasures of the flesh, times of plenty and times of being without, living fully in the present. Henry's rambling explorations of Paris, "the carnival of lights," are filled with drunkenness, prostitutes, mad conversation, ranting, bizarre encounters, defecation and bile; his explorations demonstrate the reverse of limitation. Henry's state of *being without* results in a *having* of unimaginable proportions—he takes, eats, drinks, has sex with what and whoever Paris throws at him. His park bench existence, his empty stomach, his self imposed exile from responsibility, subservience, work, service and everything American, leads him into worlds that are, at least for a time, fascinating, exotic, and life affirming: "It is now the fall of my second year in Paris. I was sent here for a reason I have not yet been able to fathom. I have no money, no resources, no hopes. I am the happiest man alive" (1). Eventually images of lice, bedbugs, machine technology and disease supervene. The prevailing metaphor of the narrative shifts from the wheel of life and opportunity to the spindled wheel of death, pestilence and torture found in such paintings as Bruegel's *The Triumph of Death*.

Miller states that: “I have found God, but he is insufficient. I am only spiritually dead. Physically I am alive. Morally I am free. The world which I have departed is a menagerie. The dawn is breaking on a new world, a jungle world in which the lean spirits roam with sharp claws. If I am a hyena I am a lean and hungry one; I go forth to fatten myself” (90). This passage, notably colored by a characteristic defiant hopefulness, begins with Miller in a brothel contemplating two “turds” floating in a bidet. He comes to understand that, as Donald Pizer writes, “the search for transcendent meaning in life has produced only *merde*. The recognition of this forces him into an acceptance of life and man as they are, free of cant and convention” (131). Like the hyena, Miller is a voracious consumer of life and experience, roaming the streets with a belly hunger and curiosity that compels him to move in and through the darkest corners of human degradation and into the enlightenment and holy vision peculiar to the artist-ascetic. As Pizer concludes, “Miller in his own way echoes the feeding and mobility tropes that pervade a positive view of the potential of the Paris moment” (131). Sasha too asks the existential question whether *merde* is “the answer, the final answer, to everything?” (400). Much of her behaviour and many of her observations about the world would seem to affirm the philosophy of *merde*. However, her “feeding” is not the voracious feeding of the artist hungry for experience and her conscious mobility is really immobility: always a movement towards the interior, the self, where she can hide from the world. The closed space of the lavatory, in other words her consciousness, becomes the dominant structure. She withdraws into herself, into her hatred of human kind, where the reader cannot hope to find her. This self-defeating movement ultimately leads to the death of the self: in other words, to *total* invisibility.

I have not *explicitly* outlined the potentials for experience in my cursory examinations of the preceding texts and narrators because I wish the reader to make inferences that will lead to associative linkages between a range of texts and characters that are suggestive of the *potentials* for experience that I feel are part of the contra-*flâneur* concept. This approach is not one of purposeful evasion but one that I hope allows for a measure of flexibility. This inferential approach is conducive to negotiating the "problems" of limitation; and along with limitation, the *definition* of the parameters within which the concept of the *contra-flâneur* and its range of potential experiences may be found. Both over-specification and generality are undesirable: the first may over-determine the concept and result in too rigid a concept, and the latter would dilute it to the point of amorphousness and therefore undermine its meaningfulness. The texts and characters I have referred to are meant to open up the field of the contra-*flâneur* concept to discussion, contestation and debate in a way that will hopefully reveal facets of urban experience that not only take us beyond the experiences associated with the traditional motif of the nineteenth century dandyish *flâneur,* but also point to specific related qualities of urban consciousness, perspective, and viewership apparent in literary and photographic production during the years between the two World Wars.

# Chapter One

Sasha Jansen, the first person narrator of *Good Morning, Midnight* tells us early on in the novel that, "I don't belong anywhere". This acute awareness of not belonging, of being an outsider in the metropolis, is fundamental to Sasha's experience of the world and is a theme that recurs over and over in Rhys's fiction. As Deborah Parsons writes in *Streetwalking the Metropolis*: "It is not so much that Rhys's protagonists are not placed within her texts as that they have no claim on these places for identity. Indeed the places themselves are paradoxically places of non-place, places of the dispossessed" (136). This underlying state of alienation, strangeness, and dispossession directly affects Sasha's mode of seeing/observing the city and informs her reactions to the people she encounters in Paris and the everyday social interactions she struggles to complete without suffering emotional and psychological collapse. However, as important as this dislocation is to Sasha's experience of the metropolis, it is constitutive of her profound (one could say hypersensitive) degree of self-consciousness. This self-consciousness is symptomatic of "not belonging anywhere" and results in Sasha's complex and often contradictory desire for invisibility: to hide herself from other people in the fiction and ultimately from the reader. This self-consciousness and the resulting desire for invisibility underlie my claim that Sasha is representative of what I have termed a contra-*flâneur*. *Good Morning, Midnight* uses a first-person stream of consciousness narrative perspective that distinguishes it from Rhys's earlier novels, which, with the exception of *Voyage in the Dark*, all employ a third-person omniscient narrator. *Good Morning, Midnight* is the most fully realized of Rhys's four early novels and presents a wonderfully textured series of photographic/cinematic narrative tableaux that immerse the reader in Sasha Jansen's viewpoint. This fragmentary and "cut up" first-person narrative perspective clearly renders Sasha's self-consciousness in Paris and elsewhere. How Sasha renders her self-consciousness and in what terms she does so will be discussed in detail in the following pages. As I will demonstrate, this facet of Sasha's complex narrative perspective is central to our understanding of her as a human being, and as Deborah Parsons' states, "women's highly self-conscious awareness of themselves as walkers and observers of the modernist city does need to be recognized" (6).

Sasha's walking/being in the city is constituted by a number of contrastive characteristics that clearly distinguish her movements in 1937 Paris from the leisured and privileged walking of the *flâneur*. Unlike the traditionally male *flâneur*, Sasha's self-consciousness, her sense of being looked at, scrutinized, judged and categorized, results in a desire for *invisibility*. The *flâneur*, on the other hand, has no such fear. He is open to being looked at. Moreover, Sasha's desire for invisibility fluctuates in relation to her vacillating sense of vulnerability and self-consciousness. Sometimes she is "armoured," while at other times, when her self-protective armour has holes in it, the words and glances of others around her, as well as her own memories, wound her deeply and impel her to find a place to hide in (often the nearest lavatory or hotel room) that will give her temporary respite from what she often deems to be a "cruel world". The tripartite combination of displacement, self-consciousness, and Sasha's fluctuating desire for invisibility in the city provides the basis for my claim that Sasha contradicts the traditional motif of the *flâneur* in ways that go beyond recent critical examinations of the *flâneur* in terms of distinct male/female forms of *flânerie*. For example, Deborah Parsons argues for a distinctly female modernist counterpart to the traditional figure of the male *flâneur,* (as constructed by Baudelaire and later by Walter Benjamin) which she refers to as a *flâneuse.*[2] However, even though Parsons' investigation of an impressive cross-section of modernist women writers, including Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Janet Flanner and Jean Rhys, expands the discussion of the *flâneur* in ways that are specifically relevant to women in the city, her arguments for a distinctly female *flâneuse* fail to convince. Instead, her examination of these authors' works and their protagonists various urban perspectives is suggestive not of a clearly definable *flâneuse*, but of a heterogeneous and fundamentally unstable twentieth-century *flâneur* figure—a figure that is also strongly suggestive of an urban walker who is unlike the detached *flâneur*. The figure of the *flâneur* has metamorphosed over time through various fictional and non-fictional texts and has subsequently become less and less like the traditional nineteenth-century Parisian *flâneur*. It is my contention that this new heterogeneous *flâneur,* androgynous and not necessarily city specific, in turn contains a walking figure, not specifically male or female, that destabilizes the motif of the *flâneur* in a distinctive way. This contra-*flâneur* figure, as I have already stated, is a self-conscious urban walker whose self-consciousness results in a desire for invisibility, or a kind of "slipperiness" that prevents other characters and the reader from being able to form a clear picture of them as individuals. This is in contrast to, as David Frisby writes, "the *flâneur* as urban observer who 'goes botanizing on the asphalt,' collecting and recording urban images, social interactions and social typifications [...] someone clearly at home in the metropolis and capable of combining observation, watchfulness and preserving his incognito" (my emphasis 92).

In the following discussion I will outline a number of elements and answer several questions that are specific to illustrating and supporting my claim that Sasha Jansen is a fictional (as opposed to sociological) representative of the contra-*flâneur*. What evidence of self-consciousness does the text present and how? How does this self-conscious desire for invisibility influence the narrator's perspective of Paris? As I have already noted, Sasha as a contra-*flâneur* is clearly *not at home* in the metropolis; whether in London where she attempts to drink herself to death on L2 10s a week in a room off the Gray's Inn Road, or in Paris staying in a cheap hotel in the 13th Arrondissement (in the 1930s, one of the poorest quarters of Paris) as a *demi-mondaine,* surviving on money given to her by a woman named Sidonie who "can't bear to see [Sasha] looking like this" (349). "Like what?" Sasha asks. Down and out, we assume. Ostensibly, her trip to Paris is supposed to help her to transform herself (her self). One way that Sasha goes about attempting this is by performing the rituals of consumerism: new hat, a new hair colour (blonde cendré), and cheap jewelry. These rituals are supposed to make her *less* conspicuous as a single, middle-aged woman, who is, by all appearances, down at the heel. These rituals provide her with a kind of personal agency—she is doing something, she is changing her appearance, she is spending money. However, even though her fully funded transplantation from London to Paris does seem to lift the pall of death from her shoulders, it does not deliver her from the intense internal suffering and self-consciousness she feels. As Thomas Staley writes, her daily routine and consumer habits are merely "substitutes for meaning in a life without purpose. They form a geometry of movement which leads nowhere but charts for her a course to preserve some semblance of sanity" (85). Staley's assessment is, at least on the surface, more or less plausible.

However, it seems to me that the "nowhere" he speaks of is really a someplace, though it is a someplace that is suffused with an absence of home. Carol Shields words are insightful here in terms of "homelessness." She writes: "Language that carries weight in our culture is very often fuelled by a search for home, our rather piteous human groping toward that metaphorical place where we can be most truly ourselves, where we can evolve and create, and where we can reach out and touch and heal each other's lonely heart" (*The Arts of a Writing Life* 263).

Sasha's state of being nowhere is the base factor in what one could call Sasha's refugee status. She distances herself from her family and they consider her, figuratively, to be dead. She tells us of how her newborn baby boy died alone in the hospital; how her husband Enno walked out on her, leaving her entirely alone and penniless. Sasha has abandoned and been abandoned. She makes passing mention of the island of Martinique (Rhys's birthplace) as if it is part of a dream landscape—the far away place of childhood. This too is an abandoned place—left behind in favor of a new place—England (where the Rhys family immigrated when Jean was seventeen years old). Considering the considerable amount of biographical information in the novel, one can reasonably assert that this separation from homeland underlies the sense of displacement and alienation found in *Good Morning, Midnight.* The intensely classist and racist society that met Rhys and her family upon their arrival further exacerbated this displacement and alienation from Martinique. Rhys's adult life, like Sasha's, was severed from her childhood: the span of the Atlantic Ocean separating the two places geographically, dividing her sense of self, with only fading memories to connect her London self and her Paris self with that childhood place; memories like a narrow tongue of sand through turbulent waters—inevitably eroded by time and suffering, love, loss and intense alcohol abuse—resulting in the homeland being more forgotten than remembered. She is unable to recover that *place* for herself—the signifying, one might even say the occult, essence of that place one intuitively feels is *home*—as a symbolic reference that constitutes the site of the childhood self. Sasha's memories are primarily of other places, and in a word other selves that are utterly estranged from her childhood self. Serge Rubin's disturbing story of the mulatto woman from Martinique is in effect a rendition of Sasha's/Rhys's story that outlines the acute reaction she suffered to the racial stereotyping and conservative social mores she found in England. Sasha has no place that she can call "my place." Instead of a home there is a yearning to fill up the emptiness, which results in aimless wandering, discontent and bitterness. Perhaps Sasha is able to *write herself a place*—make herself a home in the narrative—the words and pages constructing a kind of home where Sasha/Rhys can abide, if uneasily, for as long as people continue to read her story.

The first-person, stream of consciousness narrative perspective that Rhys employs in *Good Morning, Midnight* vividly renders the complex psychological and emotional mixture that along with vivid recollection constitutes Sasha's experience of Paris. She certainly, unlike Benjamin's *flâneur,* does not go "botanizing on the asphalt". She does not systematically attempt to catalogue her observations and experiences in the city in a rational or ordered manner that in any way attempts to coordinate a "whole" picture of the urban environment. She never becomes, to use a phrase from Michel de Certeau, a "solar eye" that looks down from high above. Sasha's photographic eye is grounded in the material structure of the city, within her own consciousness, and never once shifts its viewpoint to that of a panoramic view.[3] As Elgin W. Mellown writes: "in the Rhys world there is no superior vantage point for anyone" (115). Sasha's perspective is dominated by subjective and fragmented experience that is significantly constituted by memories, flashbacks, and interior monologue. These elements are characteristic of what Renzo Dubbini calls "the *modern eye*, a perspective which is forced to perceive and to judge what seems inevitably disconnected from any whole and excluded from any organic idea of nature. Reality thus appears in a new and fragmented way that 'signifies' by means of incomplete, divided, cut-up images" (*Geography* 6). It is this cut-up cinematic narrative form that injects vitality into the novel and is an important part of what keeps the reader engaged in Sasha's consciousness. (Her world is painfully static, repetitive, and monochromatic in ways that can make it inaccessible, even inhospitable to some readers.) The dynamism that the form of the narrative develops, sustains and enlivens Sasha's first-person consciousness in ways that construct it as an engaging perspective from which to experience Paris, the world, one could say life, for a time. Her propensity for anamnesis, for returning to places through memory (induced by hearing music, standing at various street corners, revisiting restaurants and cafés) introduces an element of randomness into the over-determined thematic undercurrents of immobility, self-consciousness and fear that dominate Sasha's world.

Sasha's experience of the modern metropolis, as I have stated, is mitigated by her sense of being looked at, scrutinized and judged. The following passage from *Good Morning, Midnight* is indicative of the hostility (irrespective of it being imagined and/or induced by an overly paranoid mind) that Sasha often senses while walking in the city, especially during moments when she leaves "her armour at home" and consequently acutely feels her conspicuousness as a stranger in the city:

> Walking in the night with the dark houses over you, like monsters. [...] Waiting for the poor devil without any friends and without any money. Then they step forward, the waiting houses, to frown and crush. No hospitable doors no lit windows, just frowning darkness. Frowning and leering and sneering, the houses, one after another. Tall cubes of darkness, with two lighted eyes at the top to sneer (362).

This rather expressionistic description of the city (and I do think of Grosz and Kirchner here) in which the physical structure of the city is rendered in anthropomorphic and even bestial terms, demonstrates how the city can stalk Sasha with predatory, judgmental and malevolent eyes that have the psychological effect of crushing her into submission. One senses that poverty is at the base of her sensitivity here, and that because she is without funds she is without agency. Here in the looming night Sasha feels helpless and unable to act, and as the will to fight is not strong within, her flight remains her sole recourse. Sasha's description of the darkened street and inhospitable houses, which in effect reduce her physical presence to that of a wandering and lost child, is indicative of her deep-seated self-consciousness, what she later describes as her "persecution mania". This nightmarish scene emphasizes Sasha's vulnerability as a walker in nighttime Paris, and illustrates how hyper-aware and paranoid she can be about being looked at. During such moments her impoverishment and low social status, especially as a woman in her forties, relegate her to a position of liminality—a nameless figure that though *in* the city is really not an accepted part *of* the city—and as such she often feels that she can only lurk on the margins of so called "respectable" society in a labyrinthine urban nowhere where "the passages will never lead anywhere, the doors will always be shut" (*GMM* 362). Moreover, one never gets the sense that Sasha is ever *out* in Paris. She walks the streets, goes to the movies, and shops; however, she never offers any detailed description of the places she visits or sees except in relation to herself. She uses place names and street names, but we do not get a strong sense that Parisians walk alongside Sasha. Her perspective is narrow, even myopic. Again this seems to come back to Sasha's displacement. As she states: "I have no pride—no pride, no name, no face, no country. I don't belong anywhere. [...] I am like one of those straws which floats round the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the center, the dead center, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm" (370). Sasha's lassitude and awareness of her own marginality has dramatic consequences for her perspective on life and contributes to and reinforces her belief that she possesses little or no personal power to combat successfully the persistent assault of the city (and world) on her. As she suggests in the following, autonomy and assertive power seem to be largely unachievable ideals for Sasha: "When you have been made very cold and very sane you've also been made very passive. Why worry, why worry?" (349).

Sasha's wariness of eyes, glances, and looks is a fundamental element underlying her need for invisibility. "Eyes", as Carole Angier writes "are *everywhere* in *Good Morning, Midnight* – 'knowing', 'arrogant', 'glassy', 'cold', 'abominable'. 'I think most human beings have cruel eyes,' Sasha says. Everywhere are looks—blank, sly, amused, pitying, severe" (380). This desire for anonymity and invisibility is explicit in Sasha's painfully absurd encounter as a receptionist at a French dress shop, with the British owner, Mr. Blank. Mr. Blank's arrival at the shop elicits the following anxious response from Sasha: "Don't let him notice me, don't let him look at me. Isn't there something you can do so that nobody looks at you or sees you? Of course, you must make your mind vacant, neutral, then your face also becomes vacant and neutral—you are invisible. No use. He comes up to my table" (353). There is nothing she can do to stop Mr. Blank from looking at and judging her. Once again she is helpless in the face of male authority and, as Angier notes, "Sasha fears being looked at for a perfectly good reason: the looks *will* be stares and sneers and judgments" (380).

Angier's unequivocal "will" is indicative of the inevitability and the deterministic fatefulness that Sasha believes pervades her existence. She believes that she is the straw being pulled into the vortex of the whirlpool—the helpless child wandering alone in a labyrinthine and seemingly hostile city. In terms that are specific to being looked at, this definitive "will" refers to a paradox fundamental to Sasha's existence. Sasha's striving for respectability, to appear to be "*une femme convenable,*" manifests itself through the rituals of consumerism. "I must go and buy a hat this afternoon, I think, and tomorrow a dress. I must get on with the transformation act" (383). This process at once makes her feel better (more alive and less self-conscious) and more a part of the society she is moving in (she looks more like respectable people). Ironically, however, these rituals also exacerbate her self-consciousness and awareness of being looked at in other ways. After buying a hat and feeling "saner and happier" (387), she walks into a restaurant and, as she states, "[I] am carefully watching the effect of the hat on the other people in the room, comme ça. Nobody stares at me, which I think is a good sign" (387-388). Sometime later, following a drink at the Café du Dôme, a very good-looking young man approaches her in the street and she thinks, "Oh Lord is that what I look like? Do I really look like a wealthy dame trotting round Montparnasse in the hope of—? After all the trouble I've gone to, is that what I look like? I suppose I do" (389). In her mind, the young man's attentions imply the worst. Instead of feeling like a respectable woman, his gaze makes her feel self-conscious and conspicuous in a new way. Rhys's word choice in this passage is particularly notable in its repetition of the phrase "look like," which reinforces Sasha's sense of conspicuousness as a—here her self-consciousness is linked to a particular category of women—single, wealthy, middle-aged English woman on the prowl for a sexual liaison in the city of love. When examining the ritualistic processes of Sasha's attempts at transformation, one comes to realize that they are largely habitual and defensive. Her attempt to look "respectable, " to look just like everybody else, is predicated on *not* looking like one of the *demi-mondaine* and on a conscious fear of aging, that horror of modern women, and becoming, as Sasha says, a "hag". Just prior to Sasha's hat purchase, she witnesses what is to her a disturbing premonition of what she might become in the not so distant future:

> I look at the window of the first shop. There is a customer inside. Her hair, half-dyed, half-grey, is very disheveled. As I watch she puts on a hat, makes a face at herself in the glass, and takes it off very quickly. She tries another—then another. Her expression is quite terrible—hungry, despairing, hopeful, quite crazy. [...] I stand outside, watching. I can't move. Hat after hat she puts on, makes that face at herself in the glass and throws it off again. *Watching her, am I watching myself as I shall become? In five years' time, in six years' time, shall I be like that*? (my emphasis 386).

The irony of this change into "a wealthy dame trotting around Montparnasse" is indicative of Sasha's inability to find a middle ground between destitution and respectability in which to abide comfortably. She may at times put on a mask of indifference, and be able to withstand her impoverishment, alienation and lack of place; however, I would contend that her inability to find a middle ground is directly related to her fundamental displacement and resultant crisis of self. Sasha does not feel that she belongs in Paris (or anywhere for that matter) and her struggles with memories, self-consciousness, and paranoia are indicators of this. To find a place—a position within society, a place (country, city, street, room)—in which to live and feel at home is very difficult for Sasha, and she spends much of her present wandering through the passageways of the past. As Denis B. Walker writes in reference to Augustine's thinking on the importance of memory and identity: "memory and a sense of self cannot be separated" (27).

The conversation between Sasha and the man she calls a gigolo continues on the terrace of the Closerie des Lilas, where she tells the reader that "I had meant to get this man to talk to me and tell me all about it, and then be so devastatingly English that perhaps I should manage to hurt him a little in return for all the many times I've been hurt" (389). Here Sasha not only refers to the pain she has suffered at the hands of men, and continues to contend with in various ways, but also reminds the Rhys-savvy reader that she shares numerous characteristics with the female protagonists of Rhys's three earlier novels: Anna Morgan in *Voyage in the Dark*, Marya Zelli in *Quartet,* and Julia Martin in *After Leaving Mr. Mackenzie.* All of the protagonists in these novels suffer at the hands of their English lovers: men who manipulate, use, and inevitably abandon them. However, these women, like Sasha, are often complicit (if naïve) in the process, for they have all chosen to live what one could call a "prodigal" life; they have severed their ties with the support networks of family and friends in their desire to follow the uncertain and adventurous paths of the bohemian wanderer. I am not suggesting that they deserve what they get. These women, without an education or independent means of support, naively choose to follow a path that makes them largely dependent on their youthful looks to attract the attention of men who hold the promise of money. Inevitably, wealthy or not, most of these men turn out to be "consumers" of women. Either they are looking for a safe affair with a bohemian girl whom they know they can manipulate, and ultimately discard once the relationship becomes too "complicated," or they lie about their wealth and their intent, and subsequently draw these women into psychologically and even physically abusive relationships from which they are unable to extricate themselves without great emotional and psychological torment. These types of relationships are repeated again and again in Rhys's fiction, and *Good Morning, Midnight* completes the bleakest and most fatalistic portion of the downward trajectory that Anna Morgan, Marya Zelli, and Julia Martin begin and sustain. Sasha's wandering, unlike Anna Morgan's, no longer contains a sense of innocence and hopefulness; in their place has crept in sterility, stasis, fear and cynicism. Sasha has come literally and figuratively to an impasse in her life, and "after all the many times [she has] been hurt" (389) by men, she has become like the unwanted kitten she guiltily remembers who suffers from an "inferiority complex and persecution mania and *nostalgie de la boue* and all the rest" (377) and less like the young bohemian woman who lived entirely in the present and naively believed that in "Paris the good life will start again"(413).

The assault of the eye is not solely a phenomenon related to the judgmental gaze of men. Sasha's seemingly involuntary revisiting of Théodore's restaurant, a restaurant she tells us " I had meant to avoid [...] because [Théodore] might recognize me, because he might think I am changed, because he might say so" (373) is painful not because of what he says or does, but because of what a woman says about her. Inexplicably Sasha is drawn to Théodore's despite her awareness that going inside will be risky, for as she admits, "today I must be very careful, today I have left my armour at home" (373). The combination of psychological vulnerability and revisiting results in powerful feelings of self-conscious paranoia and hypersensitivity to other patron's every look, word and gesture. It is not insignificant that Sasha's return to Théodore's comes at a moment when she has left her armour at home. Just prior to Sasha's arrival at the restaurant, she has a brief encounter with one of Paris's unwanted. She gives two francs to "a little old woman" who in turn "looks straight into [Sasha's] eyes with an ironical expression" (373). Once again, this is a not-so-oblique reminder that Sasha is not very far away from being a "little old woman" with no choice but to beg for her daily bread. This encounter clearly links Sasha with the marginalized and poor inhabitants of the city, and implies that her future may closely correspond to this beggar woman who "disappears along a side-street" (373). This encounter, like her experience watching the disheveled old woman trying on hats, is a disturbing reminder of the tenuousness of Sasha's existence and exacerbates her subsequent discomfort in the restaurant.

Sasha enters the restaurant assuming in advance that the proprietor's thoughts about her will be harshly critical because they will based on a comparison between her appearance five years earlier and her appearance in the present. This suggests that she is aware (or at least believes) that the years have aged her significantly and that there is a great societal difference between being young, poor and beautiful and being middle-aged, poor and losing one's looks. The first is relatively acceptable and even romanticized; the latter is reprehensible and stigmatizing. The combination of circumstance (meeting the beggar woman), her enhanced self-consciousness (leaving her armour at home), and returning to a place from her past (inability to maintain her anonymity) effectively set her up for an emotional/psychological crisis. This amounts to a test of inner strength. At Théodore's she was *known* and believes she might be known again, though, as she asks herself: "What if [Théodore] has [recognized me], what's it matter? They can't kill you, can they? Oh, can't they, though, can't they" (373)?

Sasha's acute sensitivity to the presence of others and even to the mere possibility of being looked at results in her feeling that "these people all fling themselves at me. Because I am uneasy and sad they all fling themselves at me larger than life" (374). Sasha, even though seated at a corner table, through her imagination fixes herself in the middle of the room where all gazes seem to converge. She imagines that she is on exhibit, a magnetic force that draws the glances of a cruel world towards her in a movement that is reminiscent of a zoom lens. Her viewpoint is both magnetic and magnifying. The patrons of the restaurant are "larger than life," exaggerated, blown up to proportions that directly correspond to Sasha's inner sensitivity and self-consciousness. Suddenly and without warning the nightmare scenario Sasha so desperately wants to avoid occurs. Two women, "a tall red-haired one and a little, plump, dark one," walk into the restaurant and Théodore speaks quietly to them. "'Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant' the tall girl says loudly. Now everybody in the room is staring at me; all the eyes in the room are fixed on me. It has happened" (374). Sasha has been observed, recognized, and singled out as a foreigner who has returned to Paris once more. "'Everybody', Théodore says, 'comes back to Paris. Always'" (374). Sasha's reaction is not atypical for her: "My throat shuts up, my eyes sting. This is awful. Now I am going to cry. This is the worst....If I do that I shall really have to walk under a bus when I get outside" (375).

In the first café in which we see Sasha, she is drinking brandy-and-soda. The woman sitting at the table next to hers hums the song *Gloomy Sunday* and Sasha begins to cry. "It was something I remembered" (347) Sasha says to the woman. However, "Unable to stop crying, I went down into the lavabo. A familiar lavabo, and luckily empty" (347). In this scene Sasha reacts by seeking refuge in a "familiar lavabo". One in which she has hidden before, and one that still harbours her past tears and pain. Sasha's reaction in Théodore's restaurant is similar in that she seeks a place of refuge from those around her; however, it differs in that she seeks that refuge outside, in the Luxembourg Gardens. Her passivity inside the restaurant remains the same as in the café. As she says, "I would give all the rest of my life to be able even to stare coldly at her. As it is, I can't speak to her, I can't even look at her. I just walk out" (375). Instead of acting out, she imagines her vengeance: "One day the fierce wolf that walks by my side will spring on you and rip your abominable guts out. One day, one day...."(375). Once Sasha escapes the confines of the restaurant and finds herself on the street her thoughts automatically turn to what she will do for the remainder of the afternoon. This incident has disrupted her daily "programme". As she says to herself, "That's the thing—to have a plan and stick to it. First one thing and then another, and it'll all be over before you know where you are. But my legs feel weak. What, defeated already? Surely not….No, not at all. But I think I will cross the road and sit quietly in the Luxembourg Gardens for a while" (376). Sasha is weakened and she seems, at least for the moment, to be defeated, and the Gardens offer her "a gentle, formal place" (376) in which to sit relatively undisturbed. The interior monologue that ensues during her respite in the Gardens is about "piecing it together, arguing it out" (376). Her internal debate regarding the incident reveals how distorted her perspective of the scene in the restaurant was. Even though she attempts to piece together the situation in a rational manner, and attempts to dispassionately account for and adjudicate every word and gesture—going so far as to fill in the unheard dialogue between Théodore and the girl, and assessing the girl's underlying motives and feelings—Sasha can only ask the defensively rhetorical question: "Can I help it if my heart beats, if my hands go cold?" (376). The answer to this is obvious: no, she cannot help it. Just as she cannot do anything to prevent Mr. Blank from looking at her and judging her, she cannot stop herself from thinking and believing that other people think that she is "la vieille," the old one. "Qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, la vieille? What the devil (translating it politely) is she doing here, that old woman? What is she doing here, the stranger, the alien, the old one?…I quite agree too, quite. I have seen that in people's eyes all my life. I am asking myself all the time what the devil I am doing here. All the time" (376). Interestingly, this is not what the girl says in the restaurant at all. What she asks is "Et qu'est-ce qu'elle fout ici, maintenant?"—what the devil is she doing here, now? In effect Sasha rewrites the dialogue in a way that conforms to and verifies her self-defeating, fatalistic and one might even say nihilistic view of herself. Her reconstitution of herself as "la vieille," reactivates in both Sasha's and the reader's memory the spectral image which clings to her like a shadow: of Sasha as the old "hag" who futilely tries on hat after hat while grimacing at herself in the mirror.

* * * *

So far the discussion and the textual "evidence" I have presented in support of my claim that Sasha Jansen is a character representative of what I have termed a contra-*flâneur* revolves around her sense of self-consciousness of being looked at and judged, that results in a complex and at times contradictory desire for invisibility. However, one might infer from the preceding discussion that the contra-*flâneur* is an entirely marginal, powerless and passive figure. This is not my intent, nor do I believe that marginality is a defining characteristic of the contra-*flâneur.* This characteristic stems from the fact that *Good Morning, Midnight* is, as most critics of Rhys's work contend, her bleakest novel. It takes up and reweaves her favorite thematic threads of isolation, loneliness, rejection, dispossession, oppression, and passivity into a text that powerfully asserts a hatred of humanity. Ultimately, the monochromatic despair of the plot can tax the reader's emotional and psychological endurance with its overwhelming sense of hopelessness. And Sasha is in many ways a pathetic character who ultimately, it seems to me, embraces failure at the conclusion of the novel—the failure of love, hope, and of the possibility for transformation of the self. Yet, despite these characteristics, Sasha Jansen is likable and somehow attractive to us as readers, and the novel somehow enjoyable to read. What accounts for this enjoyment? What makes the reader want to spend time absorbed in Sasha's consciousness? First of all, she is not self-righteous in her struggle in a world in which she feels an utter stranger and has the capacity to reveal herself (however, as I will discuss later on, she also plays a game of concealment with the reader) to the reader.

This is contradictory evidence: Sasha *not* being afraid of being analyzed, criticized or pitied? Sasha never solicits her audience in a way that *directly* begs for sympathy. Her excessive drinking and austere loneliness makes me think of Faye Dunaway's role in the movie *Barfly* as a depressive alcoholic whose beauty, though faded, still retains a kind of magnetism and charm that moderates *and* intensifies the unknown sufferings that led her to the skid row bars in which she drinks. Sasha's biting social commentary (all revealed through interior monologue) can be very funny, and at times unexpectedly violent. It is this internal energy, confined to the combat zone of her mind, that leads to an answer to the second question concerning what makes me want to spend time in Sasha's consciousness. In short: the *form* of the narrative. Rhys employs an innovative and fast-cut cinematic narrative style that constructs Sasha's consciousness in a manner that counteracts the monochromatic dullness of her static existence. Sasha's existence may be seriously lacking in vibrancy and color, but the form in which her experience is presented certainly engages the reader's imagination. The form presents a vivid moving tableau of consciousness—representative of Sasha's thought process—made up of interior monologue, dialogue, dreams, song lyrics and memories that snap us back and forth through time and space. This closely emulates the cinematic use of the flashback, the dissolve, jump-cut, and fade in and fade out.

Moreover, it seems to me that the vibrancy of the narrative asks us to question the extent of Sasha's paralysis and therefore her reliability as a narrator. Is she as helpless and defeated as she makes herself out to be? Or is Sasha inviting us, as Carole Angier suggests, to laugh at her as she bitterly laughs at herself? Angier suggests that: "You can't feel about Sasha as you can about Marya, even about the others—simply irritated by her incompetence, her self-pity, her excuses. For [Sasha] irritates herself; she takes the words out of our mouths, and is crueler to herself than we could ever be. [...] We can look at her if we want to" (405). Angier's comments are interesting, and her extensive knowledge of Rhys's life adds a compelling dimension to her assessment. Even if I do not find Angier's argument totally convincing, her suggestion regarding *Good Morning, Midnight's* dark sense of humor is worth considering in relation to Sasha as a contra-*flâneur*. Angier brings up the "overwhelming sense of absurdity" that is imbedded in Sasha's employment experiences (all of which are utter failures), most notably in her painful encounter with Mr. Blank and the futile search for the 'kise', which Angier describes as "a sustained exercise in Kafkaesque absurdity, funnily horrible, horribly funny. In it Sasha searches for she-knows-not-what, the holy grail, the 'kise'—the keys?—(which is really the *caisse*, money)" (378). This prolonged misadventure sees Sasha stumbling down one hallway after another, all of which terminate in a lavatory. Sasha's ability to laugh at herself (even if it is a predominantly rueful and bitterly ironic laughter) is demonstrative of a kind of maturity and self-knowledge. In this respect, Angier's comparison of Sasha to Marya Zelli is illuminating. Marya is a character who is perplexingly childish in her involvement with the Heidlers, and explicitly displays her profound ignorance and naivety in negotiating the often-difficult terrain of human relationships. Her inexplicable refusal to accept the futility and termination of the obviously parasitic affair with the rational and cold Heidler, and her continuing delusion of being able to win back his "love" when there is nothing to rationally support such a hope, all contribute to the reader's dislike of Marya "the miserable weakling," "the little woman who lived in the Hôtel du Bosphore for the express purpose of being made love to" (*Quartet* 190). Sasha does none of these things. She does not allow herself. She has made herself "invulnerable". As Angier writes, "[Sasha] is more cut off inside her head than any of the heroines—utterly alone, spinning a fantasy of revenge. *But at the same time* she is the most 'worldly-wise' of all the heroines" (378).

In my opinion, Angier's interpretation of Rhys's self-ironic laughter does not sufficiently account for my own personal experiences and enjoyments of the novel: I did not find myself snickering. However, what I do find attractive about Sasha is that she knows herself well enough to question her feelings and thoughts. One cannot say that she is circumspect, though she has learned that her first impressions and the resultant self-consciousness she experiences are more often imagined than real. Additionally, Sasha has *the strength to be a first-person narrator.* On the surface, this may seem a rather feeble quality—for what does she risk or dare by writing herself, presenting herself to an invisible audience? However, her willingness to be a first-person narrator distinguishes Sasha's essential power as a contra-*flâneur.* She, like the faceless patrons at Théodore's restaurant who fling themselves at her, unapologetically flings herself, her consciousness, at the reader; in effect demanding recognition as a woman with a past and a present (in other words a story) even though she suspects that we as readers may be like all those other "damned hyenas" (450), that "bloody human race," who Sasha is afraid of at times and hates for their judgmental voices, eyes and laughter. *Despite* her fears, her poverty, her "inferiority complex", and her "persecution mania", she writes herself out, she puts herself on view. She *dares* to transcribe herself into text, to be read: interpreted, analyzed and dissected by people such as myself. Herein lies the risk. She puts herself, her mind, her present, her past, at least partially *on view*, despite the fact that she struggles against these inhibiting psychological forces. She finds the strength to speak, to make her presence known, and to endure and persevere even when she believes that there are no hands willing to help her. As she suggests:

> I am not talking about the struggle when you are strong and a good swimmer and there are willing and eager friends to on the bank waiting to pull you out at the first sign of distress. I mean the real thing. You jump in with no willing and eager friends around, and when you sink you sink to the accompaniment of loud laughter (348).

She endures personal indignity even in the knowledge that her moment in Paris, her striving against the powerful dark currents of poverty, alcoholism, depression, alienation may be futile and not lead her out of the oppressive "impasse" that terminates in a steep flight of stairs leading to the unknown. However, the possibility remains that that steep staircase at the end of the impasse her hotel is on, opens up onto a broad welcoming boulevard where the buildings greet her, the doors of opportunity open up before her, and the acidic hatred she harbors against humanity will dissipate. The world that she often fears can also be blocked out, denied. As she states "I can put my arm up to avoid the impact and they slide gently to the ground" (374). A.C. Morrell writes:

> Anna Morgan [narrator of *Voyage in the Dark*] and Sasha Jansen know only that they suffer and that therefore they exist; anything outside themselves exists only because they happen to think about it, or because it impinges upon their consciousness. The controlled point of view which holds to the consciousness of the central character is not only a functional way of telling her story, but also expresses her solipsistic philosophy. The aesthetic value of both *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good*

> *Morning, Midnight* is raised because the first person point of view is the technical correlative of Jean Rhys's understanding of life (*Critical Perspectives* 112).

Solipsism or no, Sasha abides in world she has difficulty contending with. But she makes do. She does not kill herself even when her own family suggests that she do so, and when suicide would seem like the easiest way to alleviate her suffering and misery. It seems to me that the words of Arthur Rimbaud from his prose masterpiece *A Season in Hell* are illuminating here (Rhys twice refers to him by name in the novel). He writes: "Weakness or strength: you exist, that is strength…you don't' know where you are going or why you are going; go in everywhere, answer everyone. No one will kill you, any more than if you were a corpse" (*Rimbaud* 217). This kind of confidence and unselfconscious indifference to "everywhere" and "everyone" is, for Sasha, an attitude to strive for. Perhaps one can think of her first-person narrative, what I earlier referred to as a "flinging" of her consciousness at the reader, as a written "answering" to everyone everywhere?

Despite the fact that Sasha appears to be on the verge of becoming a *clochard,* one of the homeless, one of the countless individuals *sans domicile fixe,* she thoroughly inhabits the pages of *Good Morning, Midnight*—she flings herself, her voice, at the reader—she somehow has the strength to tell us a story. And in telling us *a* story—not necessarily *the* story—of her life, she plays a game of show and tell. She chooses what to tell, what to show us, of her self. Certainly she does not idealize her situation, as the last thing she seems to want is another human being's pity, and in her veracity (even if questionable) invites us to look at her even though what we may see is at times unattractive. However, her willingness to make herself at least partially visible to the reader, tells us that she is either indifferent to our opinion, or she suspects that she will be able to find among her audience some who understand her—even some who will have endured similar hardships, and similar joys. And there are joys here too: the warm sun-washed summer streets of Paris—being in love, carefree, unworried about the future, money—"the streets, blazing hot, and eating peaches. The long, lovely, blue days that lasted forever" (425). The taste of hot ravioli, fresh black coffee and tart new wine: these are poetic experiences and tastes that characterize the colorful imagination of an artist or poet—and one senses again the presence of that *enfant sauvage* Arthur Rimbaud here:

> He: Just the two of us together, / Okay? We could go / Through the fresh and pleasant weather / In the cool glow // Of the blue morning, washed in / The wine of day… / When all the love-struck forest / Quivers, bleeds // From each branch; clear drops tremble, / Bright buds blow, / Everything opens and vibrates; / All things grow ("What Nina Answered" 33).

As with so many of Rimbaud's poems the transcendent, the ethereal and the beautiful are balanced by and even a part of inherently terrestrial experience: "And the warm smell of stables / Full of manure, / Of a calm rhythm of breathing / And of broad backs // Pale in the light of a lantern; / And there below / A cow drops dung, dignified / And slow" (36). Sasha's urban existence does have moments of poetic diversion and they remind her that there is potential to have different kinds of experience—not just loneliness and fear. Perhaps even the potential for healing, for *catharsis,* is available to her?

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> "You are walking along a road peacefully. You trip. You fall into blackness. That's the past—or perhaps the future. And you know that there is no past, no future, *there is only this blackness, changing faintly, slowly, but always the same*" (*GMM* 450).

For Sasha, Paris is not a city of bustling crowds flowing ceaselessly along sidewalks, or of hot nights spent carousing at the *bal musette*, or a vibrant avant-garde mecca filled with writers, poets, bookstores, and cutting edge painters. Nor is it a city filled with monuments and tourist sites that attract untold thousands. For Sasha, Paris is an urban matrix that is primarily self-referential insofar as it acts as a continual inducement to memory and reverie—a remembered city as well as a city for remembrance[4]. She is a lone consciousness who moves through the city as if wearing blinders—her awareness of the world around her is a mere sliver of light that has leaked through the keyhole of her perception and the amorphous structure of the city that emerges links her, as Philip Fisher suggests, to "modernist writers like Eliot, Rilke, Biely, Joyce, Dreiser, Dos Passos, and Kafka, writers for whom the city is never a problem or a matter but a structure of consciousness" (Fisher 377). Sasha is world wise, self-conscious, fearful, paranoid, often intoxicated by alcohol and barbiturates. These and various other "filters" of consciousness create a layered Paris made up of the unstable and shifting building blocks of memories mediated by the emotional and psychological fluctuation between indifference and fear, brief happiness and regret.

The structuration of Paris—the superstructure of the city—is dominated by Sasha's solipsistic consciousness. Her consciousness, one could say, is both an interior and an exterior. Her inside, her perspective on the world, mediates through language the nature of the city's architecture. Imbedded in Sasha's conscious organization of the city (of her world), is a dialectical opposition between inside and outside, room and street which seems to have been created by her wretched existence in London and contributed to her overriding fear of the human race. In Paris this remains to a certain degree, though as Sasha observes, "When I remember how one well-directed 'Oh, my God,' lays me out flat in London, I can only marvel at the effect this place has on me. I expect it is because the drink is so much better" (370-71). In Paris it seems Sasha is somewhat more comfortable, more able to maintain the protective shield she puts up between herself and the world that flings itself at her.

In Sasha's world rooms carry with them tremendous symbolic, even superstitious powers that can alter her fate and her plane of existence. They are spaces of refuge where she can find strength and security from the outside world. But they are also filthy cages, prisons, coffins in which she hides and suffocates and approaches death. Rooms too, as Part three so clearly illustrates, are also about memories. "Well London...It has a fine sound, but what was London to me: it was a little room, smelling stuffy" (412). In Paris at least, her room, though dirty and harboring cockroaches, is not totally life draining. The streets seem to offer her some measure of welcome and relief; however, even in the street, she is continually confronted with the past: her memories of early and happier days in Paris, and so the street, what seems to be the outside, returns her to the dominating "interior" of her consciousness. We never really feel that Sasha is "out" in the city—her movements are too regimented and cautious. There is no "trailing around" as she says, as carefree wandering for her inevitably leads her to the sudden discovery of a painful and humiliating memory. The maze of Parisian streets is then a charted labyrinth dotted with memory nodules—locations that hold, for Sasha alone, specific memories that disturb her present and throw her back to various past moments which she does not wish to relive. As such the street returns her to herself.

The dialectic of inside and outside, and the continually changing dynamics of these spaces is indicative of an internal disturbance within Sasha. As I have said earlier, her placelessness, her homelessness, plague her mind and contribute to her unease in nearly every place she stays or visits. Moreover, her hatred of humanity overwhelms and sabotages her ability to interact socially. Her state of impasse implies calmness, but really she is disturbed and volatile—she is not a peace with herself or the world. She has assumed the role of sole defender of a vulnerable fortress and must fend off an unimaginably large army of attackers that lies in wait for her beyond the walls. She arms herself as best she can. As Gaston Bachelard writes in *The Poetics of Space*: "Jean Hyppolite spoke of 'a first myth of inside and outside.' And he adds: 'you feel the full significance of this myth of outside and inside in alienation, which is founded on these two terms. Beyond what is expressed in their formal opposition lie alienation and hostility between the two'" (212). Bachelard goes on to write that this "[f]ormal opposition is incapable of remaining calm" (212). This notion of calmness is contingent upon the fluctuating waves of self-consciousness and ever changing awareness of herself as a foreign entity, stranger, and an alien in the city.

I have already mentioned the metaphor of the whirlpool and pointed out several of the contradictory elements that complicate Sasha's desire for invisibility in the metropolis. However, the following will add an additional dimension to that discussion by focusing in on the significance of the dialectic of interior and exterior that is a constitutive part of Sasha's complex and often contradictory desire for invisibility in the city.

Calmness: Paris emerges, like Sasha's existence, as a highly circumscribed though amorphous realm mitigated by self-enforced checks and limits. As she says, "The thing is to have a programme, not to leave anything to chance—no gaps. No trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in your head, no 'Here this happened, here that happened'" (351). The routinization of experience is primarily a self-defense mechanism, and as Staley notes: "the arrangement of the room, the meals in cafés, the *fine* in a bar, the buying of a hat, all define the nature of her attempts at self-control" (85). However, this "programme" of routine is not as straightforward as it may appear to be. The following passage begins to suggest the complexity of Sasha's daily life in Paris and reveals that she has a keen awareness of the spatial categories that largely define her temporary existence there. Even though she renders her life in Paris in terms that are reduced to general categories of positive and negative, of "yes" and "no", one senses that there are vast areas of gray in between:

> My life, which seems so simple and monotonous, is really a complicated affair of cafés where they like me and cafés where they don't, streets that are friendly, streets that aren't, rooms where I might be happy, rooms where I never shall be, looking-glasses I look nice in, looking-glasses I don't, dresses that will be lucky, dresses that won't, and so on (371).

Even though Sasha may feel that her world is defined in these terms, her use of binaries oversimplifies a mode of experience that is far more intricate in its shades between black and white, between room and street, interior and exterior. The shocks of the urban world (glances, memories, words) Sasha absorbs (or deflects if she has her “armour” on) often threaten and overwhelm her hypersensitive self-consciousness and her typical reaction is to run and hide from the world—to seek refuge and solace in the safety of four walls. However the rooms in which she finds refuge and relief from the assault of the outside world (the realm of social interaction) are also places of confinement and imprisonment; places that reinforce our sense that Sasha’s life is one dominated by passivity and ceaseless return. Sasha seeks to escape from the confinement of the room and she recognizes that the relief that the room offers is only temporary and will soon turn to oppression, of sameness and death-like calm. However, the spaces of the interior and exterior are not sovereign. They penetrate and mimic one another. The interior takes on characteristics of the exterior and vice-versa and results in Sasha’s restless dissatisfaction with both realms. She cannot remain calm. As Sasha states at the end of Part two: “this damned room—it’s saturated with the past….It’s all the rooms I’ve ever slept in, all the streets I’ve ever walked in. Now the whole thing moves in an ordered, undulating procession past my eyes. Rooms, streets, streets, rooms….” (411). Her frustrated and restless struggle to negotiate the seemingly oppositional realms of inside and outside are the futile flutterings of a bird in a cage: futile because both inside and outside are imbedded in a larger and more dominant static structure of her consciousness which seems to impose the structures of impasse and labyrinth.

The opening paragraph of the novel well encapsulates the dynamics of this dialectic:

> ‘Quite like old times,’ the room says. ‘Yes? No?’ There are two beds, a big one for madame and a smaller one for monsieur. The wash-basin is shut off by a

> curtain. It is a large room, the smell of cheap hotels faint, almost imperceptible. The street outside is narrow, cobblestoned, going sharply uphill and ending in a flight of steps. What they call an impasse. I have been here for five days. I have decided on a place to eat in at midday, a place to eat in at night, a place to have my drink in after dinner. I have arranged my little life (347).

The initial question, posed by the room itself, is suggestive of the thematic complexity imbedded in the various interior spaces that construct part of Sasha's experience of Paris. The mockingly ambiguous double question seems to make fun of Sasha and implies a number of answers: 'yes' quite like old times indeed (things have not changed); 'yes' (glad to see you again); 'yes' (oh my god not this room again); 'no' (things have changed—you're different/I am different); 'no' (things are much better than they once were). Irrespective of these surmises, an answer is hinted at: "the smell of cheap hotels is faint, *almost* imperceptible". Sasha is familiar with the smell of cheap hotels and even if faint, she can recognize it. This smell of the room reminds her of old times, and *is*, even though a "new" room, old times, and old rooms—old streets. The past may seem to be at a distance but the smell of the room creates an associative portal to that distant past and renders it immediate. Such is the power of the *memoire involuntaire*. As Graeme Gilloch writes, the *memoire involuntaire* "flow[s] from the elusive moment of illumination in which a sensation in the present suddenly and fleetingly calls to mind an earlier, forgotten experience with its train of associations and impressions, only for these to be forgotten once more. The smell and taste of madeleines dipped in tea, the scent of various flowers (*Myth and Metropolis* 59). So rooms present summon up rooms past; and likewise street corners, which remind Sasha of watching Anatole France's funeral procession and induces a vision of herself "coming out of the Métro station at the Rond-Point every morning at half-past eight, walking along the Avenue Marigny, turning to the left and then to the right" (352). Her present is inherently influenced by the past, and vice versa. Like room and street, the two realms merge, interpenetrate and influence one another in ways that make both past and present unstable, negotiable and seemingly in a constant state of redefinition.

Sasha's room is notably situated on a steep street that the French call an "impasse". The *Oxford Concise English Dictionary* (9th Edition) defines impasse as "a position from which progress is impossible". Rhys's use of impasse here is both denotative and connotative—her description of the street simultaneously renders for the reader a clear urban street scene, and more significantly, locates Sasha in a broadly encompassing figurative orientation that is indicative of the present state of her "journey" in life. This state of stasis, impasse and labyrinth equates to Sasha's inability to progress beyond her seemingly endless cycle of poverty, drink, despair and debilitating hatred of humanity. As Deborah Parsons suggests, *Good Morning, Midnight* is a text that is "less [about] a pilgrimage than a constant re-walking of the past" (144). Sasha is not on a journey of discovery but ostensibly one of escape and respite from an intolerable and destitute existence in London, where in a room just off the Gray's Inn Road she has been trying unsuccessfully to drink herself to death. Even though Paris is more hospitable to her, as she anticipates, it does not offer her much hope for enduring escape and transformation: "And when the Exhibition is pulled down and the tourists have departed, where shall I be? In the other room, of course—the one just off the Gray's Inn Road, as usual trying to drink myself to death…." (363). She explicitly dismisses the city as a catalyst for metamorphosis—she can only see her room in Paris as an outlying way station where her tenancy is temporary. The only way open to her inevitably leads back to London. This labyrinth of dejection is explicit in Sasha's observation that "A room is where you hide from the wolves outside and that's all any room is" (366).

In a sense Sasha "travels" widely through recollection. But her memories seem to be limited to specific portions of her past experiences. Noticeably absent from them are flashes of childhood experience. René tells her that she is childlike. However, that girl is obscured from the reader. This absence seems worthy of note in a narrative that is based in a single consciousness that continually vacillates between present and past. There seems to be some kind of mechanism of suppression at work here, even one of active denial. Walter Benjamin's essay "A Berlin Chronicle" is useful, because contrastive, in demonstrating the experiential absences and perspectival idiosyncrasies found in *Good Morning, Midnight.* This contrast is especially observable in the thematic element of recollection of childhood experience. Benjamin's long essay begins with him recalling those people or other experiential guides who introduced him to the nuances of his birthplace: his two nursemaids, his mother, the city of Paris, the German author Franz Hessel. For the child W.B. the labyrinth was not a structure representative of finite limits, but instead a structure that held within its unfathomable circuits the genesis of exploration and imagination. The way in was, in a sense, *a way out.* The labyrinth was "not without its Ariadne" (293). The thread of exuberance that leads the young W.B. through the Hohenzollern labyrinth translates into an adult fascination with the visceral city, where losing oneself in the city, "the art of straying", conducts him into zones of experience where nearly everything, "signboards, and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest" (298). In doing so the child penetrates to the central core of the labyrinth, to the "Minotaur's chamber" (298). He likens his "endless *flâneries*" to the mythic fantasy walks of the child in the forest, where the world weaves and textures itself into a wondrous narrative that contains the mysteries of the mind and the senses. His memories of childhood form an incomplete narrative that he draws out continuously, like a mummy's dressings, in the writing out of his essay. As we read we are introduced to multiple facets of W.B.'s life—dreams, secrets, passions, small rebellions, literature, ideas. All of these are given a kind of personal lineage, a trajectory tracking out of his earliest remembered moments in the city of Berlin. This trajectory is absent from *Good Morning, Midnight* and we sense this in the apparent vacancy of home that underlies Sasha's dispossession. Her home is a virtually blank somewhere that Sasha is estranged from—her family in England, the only direct ties that remain between her and that place, have long been severed.

Sasha's construction of the room as refuge, as a place to hide in from the outside world, is one important characteristic of the interior and is directly related to Sasha's self-conscious desire for invisibility in the city. The room as a place of refuge and security is ultimately an illusion constructed on the unreliable nature of anamnesis. For example: "I get up into the room. I bolt the door. I lie down on the bed with my face in the pillow. Now I can rest before I go out again. What do I care about anything when I can lie on the bed and pull the past over me like a blanket? Back, back, back...." (378). Her bolting of the door—a physical act of separation of interior and exterior renders the room a safe place; however, the bolting of the door can also be read as imprisoning. Her denial of the outside world and retreat into the dream world of the past belies the fact that she does in fact care about things. Hiding her face in the pillow, and bolting the door is suggestive of how potently the outside world can affect her. As we know, the past is an unreliable security blanket for her, and this episode demonstrates just how unpleasant the past can be. Instead of a warm escape into a dream world of pleasure and rest, Sasha relives the painful days she spent in a hospital for the poor waiting to give birth to a baby boy. "And five weeks afterwards there I am, with not one line, not one wrinkle, not one crease. And there he is, lying with a ticket tied round his wrist because he died in a hospital" (381). We know that Sasha's baby boy suffers a fate similar to Rhys's first child, who died alone in the hospital while his parents caroused and drank champagne in their room. His death from pneumonia was extremely painful to Rhys and haunted her for her entire life. The guilt that resulted from this experience underlies some of the pain and adds to the symbolic significance of baby carriages in the Luxembourg Gardens. So instead of finding reassurance, Sasha relives the pain of the experience and the profound helplessness of being in a hospital room swathed in "very tight, very uncomfortable bandages" (380). And this sense of restriction threads its way throughout the novel. Sasha metaphorically reinforces this prevalent motif in relation to rooms in the following passage:

> The Hotel of Arrival, the Hotel of Departure, the Hotel of the Future, the Hotel of Martinique and the Universe [...] You press the button and the door opens. This is the Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name, and the clients have no names, no faces. You go up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always

> the same room. The room says: 'Quite like old times. Yes?...No?...Yes' (433-434).

As Deborah Parsons observes, "these are always the non-spaces of the dispossessed, the hotels and rooms being only places for pause in an ongoing wandering journey and therefore blurring with the streets themselves" (146). This ghost-world of nameless streets, hotels, and people transcends designations of interior and exterior. Sameness infiltrates everywhere and though Sasha fights in her own awkward way to maintain a kind of distinct identity, her fluctuating sense of self-consciousness, despair, poverty and hatred of humanity leave her unable to free herself from her state of impasse.

The downward trajectory that is part of this stasis is reinforced by Sasha's reliance on lavatories for emotional and psychological recuperation. As Sasha states "Unable to stop crying, I went down into the lavabo. A familiar lavabo, and luckily empty. [...] I stayed there, staring at myself in the glass" (348). Her retreat into the lavatory as a retreat from the world of judgmental eyes and criticism is indicative of Sasha's arc as a character. As Angier writes it is "a squalid, shameful descent, as towards the lavatory [...] Sasha's movement is a deflation, an ignominious collapse" (378). It is in the private space of the lavatory that she confronts various versions of herself in the mirror. Mirrors act as reflecting gateways to the past—another inducement to memory.

> This is another lavatory that I know very well, another of the well-known mirrors. 'Well, well,' it says, 'last time you looked in here you were a bit different, weren't you? Would you believe me that, of all the faces I see, I remember each one, that I keep a ghost to throw back at each one—lightly, like an echo—when it looks into me again?' All glasses in all lavabos do this (448).

Ultimately her desire for invisibility is a darkly ironic acquiescence to the grim fate she anticipates is waiting for her when she returns to London: the withdrawal into the suffocating room off Gray's Inn Road, into which she had months earlier willingly "crept in and hid. The lid of the coffin shut down with a bang" (369).

However, Sasha's desire for invisibility is not as straightforward as the plot may suggest. It is something of a representational game of hide-and-seek that Sasha/Rhys plays with the reader. Sasha looks in the mirror, and the mirror throws back what Sasha refers to as an "echo" of all the faces she has presented to it. But as she states several times in reference to herself and others, "I/they have no name, and no face". We never really get a good look at Sasha, even though she ostensibly reveals herself to the reader throughout the narrative. But it is an oblique view that actually helps to maintain her incognito. The first-person narrative perspective seems to be revelatory, though, really it is a crafty method of concealment. She shows the reader what she chooses, what she feels more or less comfortable with revealing. In order to better illustrate this concept it is useful to look at a painting by Edward Hopper in which the lone female figure's face is turned away from the viewer in a way that makes it inscrutable. As such, Sasha's narrative "portrait" can be interpreted as a face unavailable for beholding. There is no eyes or mouth to read, no line or wrinkle that might hint at what the character may be feeling or thinking. As Schopenhauer writes: "the outer man is a picture of the inner, and the face an expression and a revelation of the whole character" (qtd in Sontag 184). In Hopper's paintings other elements of the composition, like the surroundings, the position of the figure, colors and line demand more subtle contemplation. We are encouraged to seek out clues to the central figure's expression elsewhere in the painting. Take for example (fig.1) *A Summer Interior* (1909).

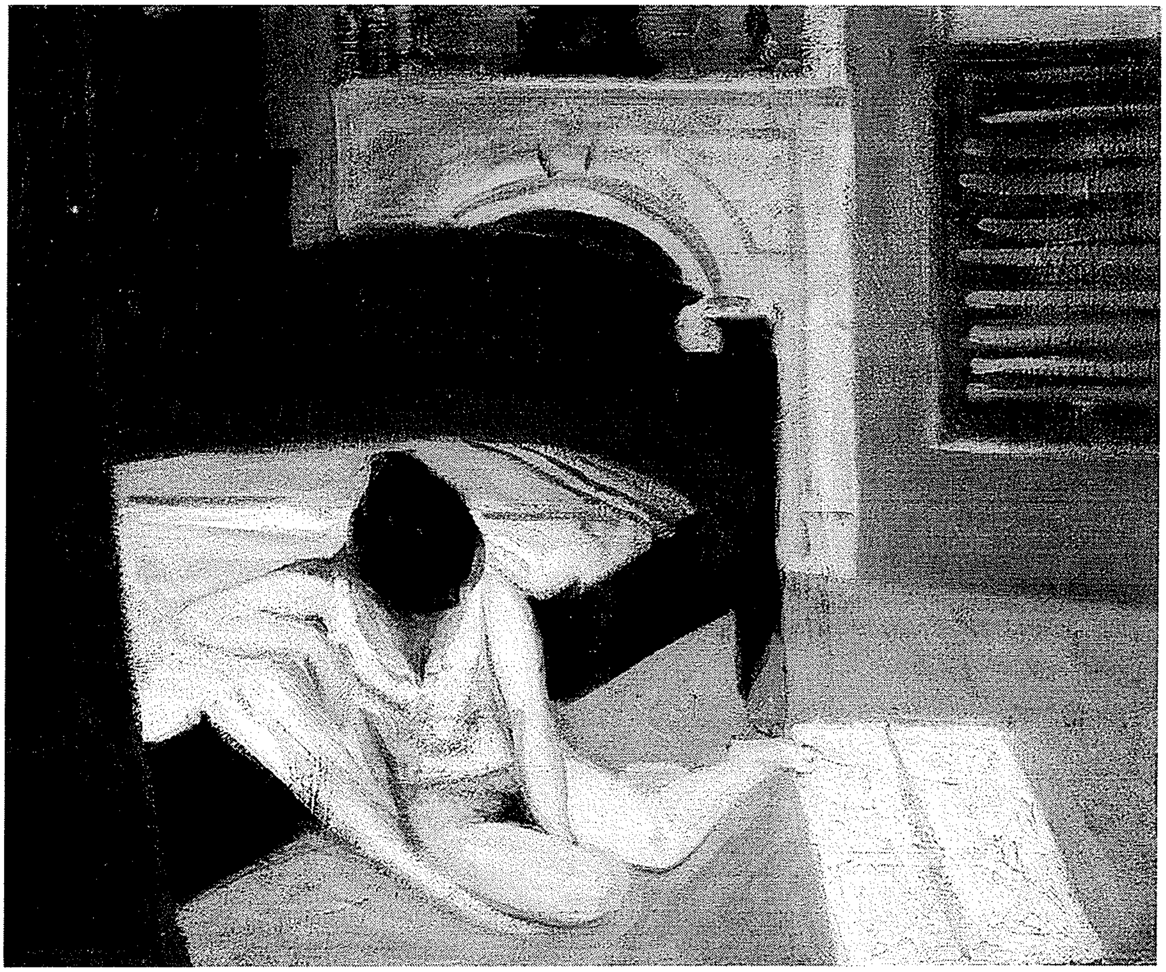

**Figure 1.** Edward Hopper: *A Summer Interior*

In this painting a woman sits on the floor, one arm on a large white unmade bed, the other arm is rigid, the hand hidden and thrust behind the knee of her bent left leg. Her head is lowered and turned partially away from the viewer and shows only the top of her dark haired head and a sliver of her nose and chin. She is thoroughly *absorbed* in her own contained world. She does not acknowledge the presence, or give any hint of being aware of a beholder. As Michael Fried writes:

> *There is an obvious sense in which all paintings posit the existence before them of beholders*, and we have only to think of works such as the *Sistine Madonna*, the Isenheim altarpiece, *Las Meninas*, the *Syndics*, and the *Déjeuner sur l'herbe* to realize that painters of different epochs and national schools have come to terms more or less emphatically with that basic truth in widely disparate ways (11).

What I have referred to as her absorption in her own world (thoughts, emotions, daydreaming), is central to the concept of beholding. Fried writes that:

> Diderot maintained that it was necessary for the painting as a whole actively to "forget" the beholder, to neutralize his presence, to establish positively insofar as that could be done that he had not been taken into account. "The canvas encloses all the space, and there is no one beyond it," Diderot wrote in his *Pensées detacheés sur la peinture* (7-8).

The seated woman's face is unavailable. We cannot determine what or where, if anything or anywhere, she is looking. She is alone. Her posture implies a kind of unconsciousness and naivety indicative of a deeply personal and private moment—possibly meditative and thoughtful, though more likely one of grieving or depression, emotional or psychological distress. In Fried's words, the scene is inherently "antitheatrical". The faceless woman is totally *naïve* about the fact that she is being beheld and therefore the way she is seated on the floor betrays nothing of contrivance or pose, what Diderot referred to as "grimace". Because her face is unavailable to the viewer, we must look elsewhere for clues to reading the scene. First of all, her forward leaning, slumped position on the floor. The bed sheet is stretched tight from the bed to the floor as it is pinned beneath her. This detail seems to suggest that she dragged the sheet along with her when she slid off the side of the bed and onto the floor. Somehow we feel that the tension of the white sheet is *part* of the seated figure and reveals the inner tension we cannot discern from her face. Secondly, the room she is in is spare and barren. The background wall is a sickly yellowish green and houses the white façade of a fireplace and mantel with a dark-faced and unreadable clock. There is no sign of her material belongings: clothes, hairbrush, shoes, or a handbag. The empty bed is the only piece of furniture visible in the room. What kind of room is this? Whose room? To the right of the fireplace is what appears to be a window covered over by horizontal slats or shutters. There is no view of the outside world available to us. And the young woman does not seem interested in the existence of that world at all—she seems utterly unconscious of her surroundings and absorbed in her own thoughts and emotions. She has not dressed, nor is she concerned about being naked from the waist down. The one detail that may account for this painting's title is the square of what appears to be creamy beige light that makes a kind of hole on the olive-green carpeted floor and illuminates part of the young woman's bare left foot. Yet despite this sunny spot, the presiding tone is one of despair and sadness. The warmth on her foot has not awakened her from her reverie. There is an *absence* here—we are viewers *after the fact*—witnesses to a scene where we have missed some definitive action: a lover leaving, a frightening dream. We cannot know for sure. We are forced to survey the scene as if we were detectives looking at the scene of a crime, though we can only interrogate the subject and the scene with our eyes and imagination.

Hopper's painting along with Fried's ideas regarding beholding, theatricality and absorption are useful in discussing Sasha's narrative perspective. Even though she does not directly acknowledge the presence of the reader and therefore her awareness of an audience, her narrative does contain a notable performative element. This element is what Michael Fried refers to as *theatricality*. Despite the fact that Sasha seems totally absorbed in her own thoughts, fears and paranoia, her energized narrative form demands recognition and attention. As such, she flings her consciousness at the reader in a way that is in effect, to use Diderot's term, a *grimace*. No matter how often Sasha states that she does not want anyone's sympathy or pity, or how persistently she portrays herself as utterly helpless or ridiculous, we suspect that things are not quite as bad as they seem. To a certain extent, she is posturing in front of the reader. But this unreliability is fundamental to Sasha Jansen's story. Her view, perspective, and one could say her ostensible "absorption" in herself, demand that the reader pay attention to how she goes about representing the world around her. She is our sole pair of "eyes" into the world of *Good Morning, Midnight* and the reader must be aware of the fact that what Sasha sees and experiences may not be the whole story. This so called flinging of herself betrays the fact that she is aware not only of other character's gazes, but the reader's as well. The faceless woman who has her face *turned away* from the beholder in Hopper's painting, corresponds to a *turning away* or concealing that Sasha/Rhys performs in the narration of *Good Morning, Midnight.* She poses for us but only gives us a partial view of herself, of who she is. She tells us a story, ostensibly her story, and we want to believe her, and she seems to want to believe herself, believe in what she has written about herself. Interestingly, we cannot be certain to whom she is addressing the story or *why*. Sasha never directly addresses the reader, the beholder so to speak. She seems to be absorbed in her own world. Details regarding her surroundings and other characters she interacts with are scant at best. In many ways she hardly seems to be in Paris at all. The urban space is masked by, and characterized in terms dictated by, her consciousness. The fact that she addresses herself as if there were two distinct personalities within implies a kind of identity struggle or process of self-deception: a concealing or a denial of one part of the self to the other. What is she concealing from the reader, or more importantly, from herself? Is she lying to the reader, to herself? Perhaps more plausibly, she like the piece of straw caught in the whirlpool, is just circumnavigating around the truth—working herself up to a disclosure she is not yet prepared to make. Perhaps she is not prepared for serious self-examination—after all the *inside* is where many wanderers fear to tread most.

Her unreliability as a narrator is also part of Sasha concealing her "face" from us, and I would argue that she only provides us with an "echo" of herself—like the mirrors in lavabos that throw back ghostly reminders of her past selves. The notions of "echo," or, to employ a visual term Sasha uses in referring to human beings, "masks," have a resonance for many of the characters that appear in the novel. The reader is only shown a plaster façade. Sasha asks us if being "plunged in a dream, when all the faces are masks and only the trees are alive and you can almost see the strings that are pulling the puppets. Close-up of human nature—isn't it worth something" (399)? However, we are rarely given a close-up look at the people behind the masks—we are given glimpses (always tinged by Sasha's skewed perspective) about them through their behavior, conversation, and actions. Sasha's encounters with denizens of the city, whether in the street, in her hotel, or in restaurants and cafés are encounters with partially known human beings—her assumptions about them are significantly influenced by the mitigating structure of fear and self-consciousness. Many of them, like Sasha, are displaced, marginal figures to whom she attributes vague or altogether non-existent histories. They appear out of and disappear back into the ether of a city in which they do not seem to quite belong: the two Russians Sasha meets in the darkened street who sense that she is filled with "*tristesse*," the intense and somewhat self-centered Jewish painter, Serge Rubin, who calls her "amis," René the French-Canadian who has supposedly deserted from the French Foreign Legion and tells Sasha that he just wants to lie quietly in her arms, and finally, the strange spectral *voyageur commis,* the "ghost of the landing," who wears a white dressing gown and whom Sasha seems to despise though she accepts him into her bed at the conclusion of the novel. These men move in and out of Sasha's solipsistic consciousness—what she calls her "film-mind" and are, like Sasha, figures that cannot be easily located or placed within the city. However, even though these characters are displaced and difficult to locate in the city, they do have direct, if momentary, effects on Sasha's lived experience in the city.

In many ways the most poignant example of this occurs in the cold Left Bank apartment of Serge Rubin. Delmar takes Sasha to meet the idiosyncratic painter and they drink tea, talk about "negro music" and "seriously discuss the subject of weeping." The latter occurs following one of Sasha memory-induced episodes of crying. However, instead of being unsympathetic and distant, Rubin encourages her tears. He tells her: "But cry. Cry if you want to. Why shouldn't you cry? You're with friends" (401).

Sasha's response is defensive and somewhat indignant, but her host ignores her rude and demanding language and Sasha notes this with some amazement: "he blots out what I have said and the way I said it. He ignores it as if it had never been, and I know that, for him, it has never been" (402). The painter's unaffected acceptance of Sasha's pain and tears infuses a calmness into the room; inspired by the territory (physical and emotional) they share, the painter tells a rather disturbing and sad story about a mulatto woman he once met while living in a rooming house near Notting Hill Gate in London. "She had been crying so much that it was impossible to tell whether she was pretty or ugly or young or old. She was drunk too, but that wasn't why she was crying. She was crying because she was at the end of everything" (403). He goes on to say that, "she came from Martinique, [...] and she had met this monsieur in Paris, the monsieur she was with on the top floor" (403). We learn that this woman was reviled in the house, and the only time she felt she could leave her room and go into the street was at nighttime—when she felt unidentifiable as a dark skinned and "dirty woman," as one little girl yells at her in the hallway. Of course, this is very much like Sasha, and more specifically, like Jean Rhys herself. Rubin's story intertwines a number of different histories: Rhys's autobiography, his own memories, and Sasha's (Rhys's) life in London. All these strands intersect in the cold empty room, where the common experiences of displacement, racism, sexism, and poverty bind them together. Serge Rubin admits that the harsh treatment he witnessed this young woman endure led to a hatred of the house and its inhabitants and in relation to this hatred he makes the Sasha-like observation that the women in the house "had cruel eyes [...] perhaps all women have cruel eyes" (404). Sasha responds, "I think most human beings have cruel eyes" (404). This shared sentiment establishes a very specific connection between the two—they both understand the blunt force of English racism and sexism. Even though Rubin's experience was ostensibly as a witness and not as a victim of this cruelty, it made an enduring impression on him in the marginalized subjects he chooses to depict in his paintings. One might suspect that, as a Jew, he has experienced racism in other ways and that these untold experiences have developed in him a substantial capacity for empathy for those who bear the stigma of "outcasts."

Following this shared moment, Rubin leaves the apartment for an appointment and Delmar proceeds to arrange numerous canvasses around the room so Sasha may see them. Her response is immediate and unmistakably one of liberation—one might even say epiphany:

> I am surrounded by the pictures. It is astonishing how vivid they are in this dim light....Now the room expands and the iron band round my heart loosens. The miracle has happened. I am happy. Looking at the pictures, I go off into a vague dream. Perhaps one day I will live again round the corner in a room as empty as this [....] nothing in it but the bed, the stove and the looking-glass and outside Paris. And the dreams that you have, alone in an empty room, waiting for the door that will open, the thing that is bound to happen....(405).

Even though she is "surrounded" by the pictures we do not get the sense that she is enclosed. Instead the reverse happens: the colours flow *into* Sasha's consciousness and the cold room expands and a sense of release and relief supervenes. There is space for Sasha to take a full breath. The room has become another kind of space. She is, both consciously and physically, in a transformed space where different experience and emotion is possible. The contrast to her previous mental state make the moment that much more vivid. As she says earlier in the narrative, "there must be the dark background to show up the bright colours" (360). The contrast seems to take her aback and she begins to daydream: but it is not reminiscence or remembrance, it is a daydream of *what could be*. This daydream carries with it a tone of hopefulness, one that flows into her world in correspondence with the vivid and living colours of the paintings and she forgets the pain and crushing weight that have bound her heart and mind. Her perspective shifts from one dominated by thoughts of "never again" to that of "perhaps one day I will". On the surface this may seem a small ripple in a vast ocean of despair, but nonetheless it is significant insofar as "perhaps one day I will" is suggestive of the fact that Sasha can still find hope even when hopefulness seems to be a dead letter. Momentarily Paris becomes a place of future aspiration—a place to live in and realize dreams and aspirations. Where the "miracle of happiness" has occurred other miracles may follow. The colours superimposed on the dark background of Sasha's perspective etch a bold mark, an associative instance, in Sasha's catalogue of memories of Paris. A miracle of the unexpected. Walter Benjamin, in "A Berlin Chronicle", describes the intricacies of experiential phenomena and the force they have in relation to memory. He writes:

> Anyone can observe that the duration for which we are exposed to impressions has no bearing on their fate in memory. Nothing prevents our keeping rooms in which we have spent twenty-four hours more or less clearly in our memory, and forgetting others in which we passed months. It is not, therefore, due to insufficient exposure-time if no image appears on the plate of remembrance.

> More frequent, perhaps, are the cases when the half-light of habit denies the plate the necessary light for years, until one day from an alien source it flashes as if from burning magnesium powder, and now a snapshot transfixes the room's image on the plate. Nor is this very mysterious, since such moments of sudden illumination are at the same time moments when we are beside ourselves, and while our waking, habitual, everyday self is involved actively or passively in what is happening, our deeper self rests in another place and is touched by the shock, as is the little heap of magnesium powder by the flame of the match. It is to the immolation of our deepest self in shock that our memory owes its most indelible images (*OWS* 342-343).

Benjamin's association between the photographic process and memory is one that is very applicable to Sasha's conscious experience of the world and to her decisive and transformative moment with Rubin's paintings. The latter is an exquisite, though all too rare, human moment: art acting as a vector that momentarily stops the world and renders us *beside ourselves*. Benjamin refers to this split as an experience of the "deepest self". For Sasha the "deepest self" emerges from the background to remind her that hope is not dead. She lets her guard down and the colours surge into her imagination and fill up the thick darkness that has held sway in her mind for too long. Sasha could not have anticipated that in the room of a stranger, and on their very first meeting (a chance meeting?) would provide her with the miraculous gift of happiness and hopefulness. What might the future hold?

The painter returns at seven o'clock and asks Sasha if she wants to purchase one of the paintings. A moment of awkwardness ensues when Sasha, after stating that she wants to buy the painting of "an old Jew with a red nose, playing the banjo" (405), admits that she does not have six hundred francs to cover the painting's cost. The painter bursts out in ironic laughter, though he quickly alters his tone and says with sincerity: "But have it, take it, all the same. I like you. I'll give it you as a present" (406). Sasha's observation of Serge Rubin's reaction is interesting: "When he says this, he smiles at me so gently, so disarmingly. The touch of the human hand....I'd forgotten what it was like, the touch of the human hand" (406). His smile, a gesture of comradeship and fondness, dismisses the awkward formality that often accompanies the business of bartering over merchandise. The "touch" she speaks of is obviously not directly physical. Its metaphysical quality is that of basic human interaction—an unspoken recognition of another's value as a feeling, thinking human being. The "affectiveness" of this touch is akin to the physical, and carries, one might say, the physiological weight of reassurance because it contains in it the tangible power of genuineness and sincerity—what Benjamin refers to as the "gift of the moment" and contributes an essence of durability. In effect the smile embodies a spontaneous act of kindness that goes far beyond Rubin's offer of presenting the painting to Sasha as a gift. He is not a straw man—not one of those damned hyenas with cruel laughing eyes. His smile, like the paintings in the cool, empty room, is filled with colour and made more affecting and powerful because so singular and so rare. It too stands out against the "dark background" of cruelty and mechanical harshness that Sasha has come to expect from the world. The smile/touch is followed up by the physical act of shaking hands. "Then he gives my hand a long, hard shake and says 'Amis'. [...] When he shakes my hand like that and says 'Amis' I feel very happy" (406). Her good feelings follow her outside into the "very cold, clear night". "Now I am not thinking of the past at all. *I am well in the present*" (406). Paul Rosenfeld's thoughts regarding living in the present are interesting here. He writes in his review of an Alfred Stieglitz exhibition that:

> [U]nless one consent in suffering, there can be no complete living of the present. There can be no complete draining of the cup of the now by him who is unwilling to empty it if perchance it contain hemlock in place of wine. There can only be a vague floating to some otherwheres which perhaps never existed, or will never exist. There can be no facing of what is directly before one by him who is unwilling at every instant of his life to look his fate fully in the eye, to dare to summon his entire man, perhaps in vain, to solve the problem immediately before him. Perhaps, indeed, the acceptance of the present is nothing else than a resolution to be solitary, if need be, always; to suffer, if need be, always; to accept a grim fate, if that be hidden in one's bowels" (*Photography: essays and images* 212).

I have chosen to analyze this episode at length because it is one of the few sustained and genuine human contacts between Sasha and another human being that results in a reaction that is other than fear, passivity and extreme self-consciousness. Moreover, it is notable that it occurs between Sasha and a *man,* as we know she has had numerous traumatic experiences with men and that they have greatly contributed to her cynicism and hatred of humanity. Serge Rubin's paintings and his gestures of comradeship make an impression on Sasha, and as such, he emerges as a character with psychological and emotional depth that distinguishes him from her other human contacts (in the haberdashery, various restaurants and the hair salon) that are characterized by money exchanged for services. As such the niceties that pass between Sasha and the hat-shop attendant and the hair dresser are ones born out of polite formality, and therefore, contrived: the attendant knows what a customer wants to hear. Even though Sasha's contact with Serge Rubin is relatively brief, and he only "reappears" in conversation and in Sasha's thoughts after this point, she attributes to him and his paintings one of the few instances of happiness she experiences during her ten days in Paris and the only instance of what one might call pure presentness.

Her time with René corresponds here as well: however, with him she *assumes* that he is after her money and she takes on a smug and rather vengeful attitude—she counts herself as "unassailable" and will try to hurt him like she has been hurt so many times before. However, comfortable in the knowledge that she is unable to give him what he wants, she discovers to her perplexity that he seems to be other than she thinks him to be. In other words, René's interest in her may be genuine. As Sasha observes, "I don't know what it is about his man that seems to me so natural, so gay—that also makes me feel natural and happy, just as if I were young—but really young" (439). Even so, she is not able to let down her guard or turn off her fear of humanity and so prevents herself from becoming involved with him. Essentially Sasha is not able to suspend her disbelief (at least not until it is too late) and dwell solely in the moment. Her suspicion, cynicism and past hurts inflicted by various men prevent her from making even the most casual and uncommitted sort of connection with René. Sasha's phenomenal distance from René as a human being is perhaps best revealed through her curious blindness when it comes to physical details. It should be remembered that René is the one character whom she spends a significant amount of time with, yet she only tells us that he is "very good looking," that he has beautiful teeth, and untidy hair. The one definitive physical characteristic she fails to notice is "a long scar, going across his throat [...] from ear to ear. A long, thick, white scar". Then she notes that "It's strange that I haven't noticed it before" (451). And her inability or refusal to read this distinctive marking is directly correlated to her inability, perhaps even paralysis, when it comes to interpreting the intentions of men and women. She seems unable to distinguish between the genuine and the fake. She is only willing to admit that his wounds "amuse" her. She does not freely reciprocate with a personal revelation of her own—she has to be prodded into admitting that she is afraid of people, that in fact she *hates* people. But she does not discuss the underlying reasons for her hatred, though we can guess. René's admission associates him with so many of the post-World War I walking wounded—one thinks of fictional characters from the so called "Lost Generation" like Jake Barnes and Lady Brett from *The Sun Also Rises*, Dick and Nicole Diver from *Tender is the Night*, J. Alfred Prufrock, Charley Anderson from *The Big Money,* whose suffering and wounds are hidden behind a façade of mad pleasure seeking. His wounds may "amuse" Sasha—but her amusement rings false because the reader suspects that she too is one of the walking wounded, and René's highly visible scars correspond to invisible scars that she harbours deep in her heart and mind.

However, René is not fooled by what I have referred to as Sasha's posturing and in his blunt way tells her so. Sasha admits to him in her self-defeatist way, "I'm no use to anybody. I'm a cérébrale, can't you see that?" (443). René replies, "I should have thought you were rather stupid". Sasha is taken aback and offended as he continues his explanation: "No, no. Don't be vexed. I don't mean stupid. I mean that *you feel better* *than you think*" (443). René's sharp observation, combined with Sasha's own self-questioning results in her becoming self-conscious and shy. This sends Sasha running to the lavatory. "You're always disappearing into the lavabo, you" René remarks upon Sasha's return (449). Sasha's response reveals one of her basic fears, one of her reliable excuses: "I'm getting old". René replies: "No, don't say that. Don't talk like that. You're not old. But you've got to where you're afraid to be young" (449).

René offers to walk Sasha to her hotel, all the while trying to convince her to spend the night with him. She adamantly refuses. But the two of them share a passionate embrace and kiss on the dark landing in Sasha's hotel and suddenly Sasha becomes another person: "I have my arms around him and I begin to laugh, because I am so happy. I stand there hugging him, so terribly happy. Now everything is in my arms on this dark landing—love, youth, spring, happiness, everything I thought I had lost. I was a fool, wasn't I? to think all that was finished for me. How could it be finished?" (453). However, this voice disappears as soon as she opens the door to her bedroom and fearfulness and awkwardness resume. "I am uneasy" Sasha says, "half of myself somewhere else" (453). Two voices begin to battle loudly in her head, and the narrative of concealment begins to unravel slightly. While one voice tells the gigolo that it would be much easier for him to just take the money he wants from her dressing-case, the other voice pleads, "Don't listen, that's not me speaking. Don't listen. Nothing to do with me—I swear it" (457). Eventually, after some futile struggling on the bed, René has enough of what he calls a "comedy," and without saying a word he gets up and leaves. Sasha is left alone to cry. "Who is this crying? The same one who laughed on the landing, kissed him and was happy. This is me, this is myself, who is crying. The other—how do I know who the other is? She isn't me" (458). The other voice, the "ridiculous monster," is the voice of mocking negativity, of self-reproach and self-loathing, that tells her that what she has done in Paris is perform the lead role in an absurd play. I think it is fair to say that Sasha is performing: acting out her misery on the page in order to convince the reader and herself that her hatred of humanity and *ennui* in the face of an indifferent universe are justifiable attitudes. That she is, like a marionette, pulled and jerked by unseen strings tied to the fingers of a cruel and jesting god, and ultimately not responsible for what happens in her life. Her inside is not like her "outside," her "echo" or "mask". The inside is revealed only in brief flashes: her acknowledged misinterpretations of others, her recognition that she is oversensitive and often "ridiculous." This conflict between inside and outside, self, "echo" or "mask," is most openly revealed by the contrast between the dynamic narrative form and the often monotonous plot. Perhaps this is the indication of the author as contra-*flâneur*: Rhys, like Sasha, posturing in front of the reader in a devious fashion and thereby presenting the reader with various masks that ostensibly constitute who she is. Rhys plays a game of revelation and concealment that destabilizes the reader's ability to locate her in the narrative and compels him to search for her and piece together a composite sketch that might depict her with her face turned toward him.

Escapism: Sasha's preferred methods of minimizing the pressures and pains of the present are alcohol and barbiturate intoxication. However, though intoxication is fundamental to both her denial of reality and the creation of new realities, memory and recollection also form a significant method of escaping present reality. Part Three of the novel well represents her propensity for anamnesis. Her recollections here are like a cinematic revisiting of a number of rooms located in various European cities. The section begins, as Part Two concludes, with ellipses, thus implying continuation while simultaneously demonstrating transition from present to past (much like a dissolve in film editing). Part three takes the reader on an interior journey through various remembered rooms and scenes in Amsterdam, Brussels, Calais, and an earlier more promising Paris where Sasha believes "the good life will start again"(413). Her sincere and perhaps naïve hope for the future is characterized through a well-known motif: "My beautiful life in front of me, opening out like a fan in my hand" (415). The fan—here a structurally delicate symbol of promise and unknown future opportunities—also holds within its convolutions the more disturbing elements of delusion and denial, and these are apparent in Sasha's recollection of rooms past. Walter Benjamin hints at these darker elements of recollection in "A Berlin Chronicle." He writes:

> He who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments; no image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside; that image, that taste, that touch for whose sake all this has been unfurled and dissected; and now remembrance advances from small to smallest details, from the smallest to the infinitesimal, while that which it encounters in these microcosms grows ever mightier. Such is the deadly game that Proust began so dilettantishly, in which he will hardly find more successors than he needed companions" (*One-Way Street* 296).

How similar this process of recollection is to Sasha's trajectory in life! The solipsistic "inside," microcosm, labyrinth, and stasis: a room of one's own, a place to hide in.

Memory, like life, leads Sasha "Up the stairs. Always the same stairs, always the same room" (434). This small place is in a "Hotel Without-a-Name in the Street Without-a-Name" (434). One of Sasha's defensive responses to her belief that she will simply return to the destitution of that London room and therefore to invisibility, emerges as a desire to participate in the ritual of spending money for the sake of spending money. At the close of Part three she lays out her plan:

> Tomorrow I'll go to the Galeries Lafayette [...] buy anything cheap. Just the sensation of spending, that's the point. I'll look at bracelets studded with artificial jewels, red, green and blue, necklaces of imitation pearls, cigarette-cases, jeweled tortoises....And when I have a couple of drinks I shan't know whether it's yesterday, today or tomorrow (434).

Sasha's desire to consume, to spend money, is cut through with self-deprecation and perhaps self-loathing and is reinforced through the adjectival stress on cheapness, artificiality and the inauthentic. The passage concludes with Sasha seeking the bliss of forgetfulness, self-negation and numbness in intoxication. Steve Pile writes in his essay "Sleepwalking in the Modern City," that:

> The endless production of commodities taps directly into the conscious wishes of modern individuals. Unfortunately though commodities seemingly embody people's wishes, they remain unconnected to the desires and fears that surround them. It is as if the moderns are talking in their sleep: talking, asking, wishing, but unaware of the meaning of the words (78).

The final sentence of Part Three indicates Sasha's desire to replace past, present and future with the blur of forgetfulness and amnesia. She is, like Steve Pile says of the "modern" individual, "doomed to walk in a gray, alienated dream world as if [asleep]" (77). Sasha is caught between conflicting desires. She wants to be able to return to the world of the living, to cast off her despair and hatred, but she also seems to want to forget herself (her self) and dull her awareness of being in the world. In other words she refuses to act upon her fears of nothingness and her innate knowledge that the world will soon forget her, if it has not already. Being alone is a refuge—one doesn't have to rely on anyone else or be disappointed by anyone else.

The inside is the outside, the room is the street—both realms promise escape and refuge and ultimately restriction, labyrinth—perpetual grayness and sameness occlude differentiation and individuality. This "always the same" contributes to our sense that Sasha is subsumed by (subsumes herself?) and relinquishes herself to the dark waters of futility, despair and stasis. Her presence in Paris is very much like "a hole in the water"—she jumps in, the water parts with a quiet swish and just as quickly its implacable darkness closes over her head. Sasha, like the old beggar woman she meets in the street, disappears from view and follows the downward trajectory she outlines for herself earlier in the novel: "[I am] one of those straws that floats round the edge of a whirlpool and is gradually sucked into the center, the dead center, where everything is stagnant, everything is calm. Two-pound-ten a week and a room just off the Gray's Inn Road..."(370).

The fluid state of inside and outside, of room and street: "*this room, which is part of the street outside*—this is all I want from life" (424). As I have suggested, Sasha never really seems to be *outside* in the city. Though she is not entirely absorbed, her first-person narrative perspective firmly ensconces her *inside* of herself where she jumps backward and forward through memory and ever more inward toward that calm space where she seems to believe solace awaits her. For tomorrow is a blank space, a *carte blanche*, and Sasha does not believe in the promises of the future as she implies when she says, "tomorrow never comes" and "I don't believe things change much really; you only think they do. It seems to me that things repeat themselves over and over again" (385). It is in the liminal space of the text, a someplace between her concealed "interior" and the readable "exterior," that Sasha/Rhys puts herself on view for the reader. She attempts to make herself known, to reveal herself to the reader, to the characters in the novel, though ultimately what she reveals, what she *gives* to us is merely a cardboard box full of under or overexposed negatives. We can try, if we have the energy, to develop positives from them, though such an effort would inevitably be frustrated by indistinctness. And what would be most noticeable in these foggy areas would be partially discernible figures, or simply blank empty spaces. This is Sasha and Rhys's contra-*flâneur* trick on her readers. By keeping us guessing, making us look for her, she makes herself a mystery; a woman who is concealed by a number of protective guises. She presents to the reader various episodes from her messy life, bringing them along on a guided tour in which she takes numerous detours, strange turnings and finally loses the reader in a labyrinth of experiences and memories that even Sherlock Holmes would have difficulty compiling in a way that resulted in a useful profile.

Sasha's self-conscious desire for invisibility in the city is also, perhaps more importantly, a desire that is constitutive of the very structure of the narrative itself. She is constantly on view, though she has written herself out in an *indecipherable* manner: filled with subtle and not so subtle contradictions, incongruities and dead ends: the unreliability of her perspective and memories. One might ask, what does Sasha/Rhys want from the reader? Does she want understanding, sympathy, or forgiveness? She seems to ask for the reader's sympathy only to repudiate any claim to such a desire. Sasha has the opportunity to forge meaningful connections and relationships with a number of men who genuinely seem to be interested in her as a human being, as a fellow sufferer and lonely wanderer, yet she accepts the white-robed *commis* into her bed at the conclusion of the narrative; she provides us with hints, and glimpses into her past though we are never presented with a decisive moment, a lynch pin that tells us *why* she feels the way she does. These partialities place the reader on unstable terrain insofar as it becomes apparent that the profound stasis and calmness of the whirlpool is something of a mirage—the center does not hold and Sasha does not plunge into the maelstrom where her personality becomes suspended in a way that allows the reader to look her directly in the face. In this way she is very much like the half naked young woman sitting beside the bed in Hopper's *Summer Interior*: she refuses to show her face, her expression. But Sasha's absorption is only partial. The reason she does not show us her face is because she is aware of being looked at. The reader is only shown a refraction of Sasha's face reflected in the convoluted mirror of the narrative. More specifically, these refractions take on the forms of the various characters Sasha encounters throughout the novel. They are pieces of who she is. Delmar, Serge Rubin, René, the old woman in the hat shop, the homeless woman in the street present the reader with various hints to Sasha's identity. Yet, as with Sasha, all of these portraits are manifestly incomplete. We do not feel that we know them nor are we able to firmly situate them in the vaporous urban landscape they seem to share with Sasha. The numerous lavatory mirrors she looks at throughout the course of the novel only reflect for her.

Ultimately, at the conclusion of the novel the reader is left to contemplate the novel's most inscrutable act and most impenetrable character: Sasha's schizophrenic rejection of René and subsequent acceptance of the *voyageur commis* into her bed. In a bizarre hallucinatory sequence, the *voyageur commis becomes* René. This disturbingly strange man without a history or identity haunts the hallway of Sasha's nameless hotel. On the surface he seems merely a fragment, a specter of a man, yet his total silence and the shroud of mystery that surrounds him (we have no idea *what* he does) effectively work to subsume, to absorb, all of the other vague and dispossessed characters in the novel. Sasha has kept everyone else at arms length. He alone imposes himself on Sasha and is "accepted". He not only assumes René's place, he assumes the places of all the other men in the novel. He is utterly absorbed. There is nothing for us to look at, to derive meaning from. While this totally absorbed figure is looming over a naked Sasha, she looks "straight into his eyes" and in that moment he assumes a position in the general category of "human being." Sasha says, "I look straight into his eyes and despise another poor devil of a human being for the last time. For the last time…" (462). Her disturbing acceptance of the *voyageur commis* (disturbing because we cannot understand what the payoff is for Sasha and the ellipses imply that she is uncertain about the definitiveness of her acceptance of him), represents Sasha's final folding in on herself. She becomes fully absorbed by the *voyageur commis* and articulates her acceptance, her absorption into him by emphatically repeating: "Yes—yes—yes…". This affirmation is in effect a negation of self: Sasha chooses to put on another mask and descends deeper into the small interior space of the lavatory, symbolic of the core of her consciousness, where she can be sure that nobody will be able to follow. It is in this entirely interior space that she can hide from the world. The narrative itself takes on the connotative significance of the labyrinth and the impasse: like the amorphous city in which Sasha/Rhys conceals herself and loses the reader in. The reader continues to turn the pages, like turning corners, and is perpetually faced with streets and corridors of similar appearance: another doorway, another cobblestone street, another door that finally leads to a dead end. Ironically Sasha's search for a "light room", a room with a view of the outside world instead of a brick wall, mimics the reader's futile search for her in the text.

## Chapter Two

Paris changes! But nothing in my melancholy
Moves: new palaces and scaffoldings, new blocks,
Old suburbs, all become for me an allegory,
And my dearest memories grow heavier than rocks.
—Charles Baudelaire

Haussmann's restructuring of Paris following the 1848 revolution opened up the center quarters of the city—in the process destroying the ancient dynamics of these neighbourhoods—by bulldozing medieval streets and emphasizing in their place monuments of civic, military and political significance. This process, this violent reconfiguration of the urban complex was one that Brassaï lamented. This monumentalization of the city was evidence of a civic preference for "monumental" history over the far richer, because living and dynamic, cultural significance imbedded in street and neighbourhood. Brassaï writes in 'The enquiry into the transformation of Paris' (1959) that:

> The soul of Paris is in the process of being destroyed; on the pretext of clearing slum areas we are knocking down what used to be the essential magic of the capital; on the pretext of making space around the monuments we are demolishing the streets which gave them their context. Given the choice, I would rather they demolished the monuments and left the streets alone—there are no museums for streets" (qtd in Marcus Robinson 54).

Marcus Robinson observes, "it is a fitting irony that his own work is in a very real sense the living museum of these streets and their transient beauty" (54). Brassaï's photographic documentation of the Paris of the 1930s reveals *a* Paris caught in between imaginative dreaming and "reality". Henry Miller dubbed Brassaï 'The Eye of Paris'; the singular "the" is not misplaced insofar as many of Brassaï's photographs of the city of light have become iconographic, even representative of that city, according it a mystique and poetic exoticism that no other nighttime photographer had accomplished with such poetic depth and breadth before him. Perhaps what Miller's apt moniker suggests is that Brassaï's photographs significantly contributed to and even *defined* the Parisian *mise en scène*, and in doing so established an immediately recognizable image of Paris—a nocturnal metropolis in chiaroscuro imbued with centuries of symbolic resonance. This photographic definition of the Parisian *mise en scène* is directly and indirectly observable in Brassaï's substantial influence on French cinema. As Anne Wilkes Tucker notes "Between 1937 and 1946, he worked with French director Marcel Carné and the screenwriter and poet Jacques Prévert on six films that were unsurpassed in thirties France and are regarded as the creative force behind the development of poetic realism in French cinema" (44).

Inevitably "the eye of Paris" and the name Brassaï became synonymous with nighttime Paris and its demimonde and so emerged as his urban dream theatre—a dream city as seen through his uniquely large and protuberant eyes, the Heliar lens of his 6 x 9 cm Voigtländer camera—a city captured and made immutable in prints. Just as Sasha Jansen presents a complex and "filmic" rendering of her experiences and perceptions in Paris and elsewhere in a first-person narrative that ultimately conceals her more than it reveals her to the reader, so too does Brassaï's *Paris by Night* present a first-person rendering of the city that I read as being fundamentally informed by his concerted, though ultimately impossible to achieve, endeavour to complicate, diminish, even erase, his presence as the photographer named Brassaï from, in front of, his photographs.

Brassaï's self-conscious desire for invisibility in his photographs is not born out of fear or paranoia as in Rhys, but instead out of a deeply personal sense that he, as Brassaï/Gyula Halasz, did not have the right to impose *his* photographic perspective of Paris on others. I understand this attitude as demonstrative of his awareness of how powerful the camera was as an image making, let us say history making, machine that could powerfully influence our understanding of reality. Additionally, though no less importantly, Brassaï saw himself as a being who did not rest comfortably at the top of the biological hierarchy, but instead coexisted alongside everything, animate and inanimate, as though on a continuum. An anecdote is illuminating in this respect. Anne Wilkes Tucker writes:

> In issue 3-4 of the Surrealist magazine *Le Minotaure*, Brassaï is one of a dozen artists asked the question, "What has been the most essential encounter of your life?" He responded that his encounter with Goethe had been "fatal" by which he meant the death of his "self" as a romantic subject. Rather than reflect the world in the mirror of his own temperament, Brassaï concluded "the world is richer than I" (*Brassaï* 23).

The American photographer, Weegee, whose work shares a number of characteristics with Brassaï's, makes his presence as a photographer "visible" in his photographs of New York nightlife, crime scenes, and the like by a tone that overtly declares judgment on the scenes and figures he captured. Weegee is often harshly critical where Brassaï is subtle and uncritical. Weegee *imposes* and declares his politics and personal beliefs on and through his photographs. He purposefully captured scenes in which his subjects (one often senses that they are prey), are caught in moments of distress, awkwardness, and absurdity. In contrast Brassaï's photographs are imbued with a unique calmness, one might even say repose, that as in Eugene Atget's photographs is suggestive of a window being opened on the world without the aid of a guiding human hand. As Anne Wilkes Tucker writes, "The extreme diversity of subjects inserted issues of economics and social class into his project, but he never proclaimed his political view" (*Brassaï* 32). In so many of Weegee's photographs, one first senses his cynicism and judgment and not, as in Brassaï's work, how the human beings he captures on film are part of the world in which he found them situated.

Brassaï, as his photographs demonstrate, is a different kind of contra-*flâneur* than is Sasha Jansen. But I will argue that his photographs contain distinct though latent characteristics, illuminated through Fried's critical framework, that reinforce the connection between Sasha Jansen and Brassaï's 1930s photographs of nighttime Paris. This line of inquiry will demonstrate that Brassaï's aesthetic preference for the dark silent streets of Paris, the secret underworld realm of brothels, opium dens, the *bal musettes*, and the ancient labyrinthine side-streets of Montparnasse, Montmartre and the Latin Quarter where prostitutes, pimps, criminals, homeless rag-pickers and nocturnal revelers of various kinds chose to pursue their desires, dreams, miseries, and in other words their lives, is not the sole correspondence between *Paris by Night* and *Good Morning, Midnight*. As I interpret it, *Good Morning, Midnight* is a fine analogue to Brassaï's photographs in *Paris by Night,* not solely because of their shared concern with the Parisian demimonde, but more importantly because of their shared concern with self, perspective, and self-consciousness. The instability of self and identity that is apparent in both works, along with the underlying issue of self-consciousness, are clarified and articulated through Michael Fried's concepts of beholding, absorption, and theatricality.

As in the chapter on Rhys, I will use Fried's conceptual framework to advance the idea of the contra-*flâneur*: a nameless viewer of the scene who *takes the place* of Brassaï as a photographer/ beholder *behind* the camera. At this point, my thesis here may strike some readers as being too metaphysical; however, this concept will develop and gain solidity as I begin to examine the eight photographs that I believe help to substantiate such claims.

Edward Hopper's *A Summer Interior* (fig.1) is a useful pivot point on which to move from *Good Morning, Midnight* to the photographs by Brassaï. Hopper's painting shares with both *Good Morning, Midnight* and Brassaï's photographs not only the element of absorption, but a paucity of detail that effectively leaves the reader or viewer at an epistemological disadvantage in terms of arriving at concrete conclusions (as far as that is possible) about what they have read or seen. Of course Hopper's painting, like *Good Morning, Midnight* and Brassaï's photographs, provides clues that encourage the viewer to construct a narrative for the painting; however, ultimately this narrative remains incomplete and somewhat indeterminate due to a paucity of visual information and detail. We can be relatively sure that the faceless woman is inside—both inside a room and inside her thoughts. There is no outside world visible. Her total absorption tells us that she is uninterested in what lies beyond the walls of the room and by extension what lies beyond the frame of the painting. As I suggested in chapter one, the scene implies that we are viewers *after the fact*. We are late arrivals on an interior scene in which some kind of decisive action has already taken place. However, there is little evidence that speaks decisively and therefore we cannot establish for certain what the nature of the preceding actions might have been. We are invited to speculate. Similarly, in *Good Morning, Midnight,* Sasha's descriptions of various characters and the world around her often leave much to be desired. Her perspective, myopic and even solipsistic, presents the world around her in a way that obscures it in dense fog. Significant details are missed: the thick white scar that runs across René's neck slips by her notice. Paris itself hardly seems to exist as a present reality; it is more real, vivid and alive in her memories than it is while she is there physically. Brassaï's Paris too is filled with unseen spaces, opacities and occlusions. What several critics, such as Marja Warehime, have referred to as the *surreal* in Brassaï's work: Paris captured in deep shadow, where the familiar is reconstituted as fantastic, sinister and strange. Deep black shadows obscure vast expanses of space in many photographs and act as an impenetrable backdrop that compels us to shift our focus to the bright (the light) details that flare out through the darkness that acts as an abutment to vision. As in *A Summer Interior,* much remains *beyond view.* The viewer is asked to search elsewhere (in himself?) for details and explanation. The areas of blackness are consigned to the realm of the imagination, nightmare, and fantasy.

Beyond this indistinctness apparent in all three of these works, both Rhys's novel and a number of photographs in *Paris by Night* reveal a self-consciousness that is demonstrated through several compositional techniques that work towards the diminishing of (and I want to go so far as to say the *invisibility* of), to modify a term used by Michael Fried, the "photographer/beholder's" presence *behind* the camera and *in front of* the representational plane of the photograph. My claim that a number of photographs in *Paris by Night* are demonstrative of a self-conscious photographer/beholder who attempts to erase or at least minimize his presence as a viewer in front of the photograph originates from a number of Brassaï's comments regarding his underlying photographic methodology. This is characterized by an all-encompassing respect, even awe, for the subjects and objects he felt inspired to capture in photographs. His adoption of Goethe's words, "gradually objects have raised me up to their own level," which eventually became a mantra for Brassaï, clearly articulates this overarching methodology that has distinct influences on the aesthetic criteria he followed in capturing nocturnal Paris. His attitude of deference to what he referred to as the "inimitable object" is a personal declaration of his reverence for and humility in the face of the world around him: and many of his photographs are documents that attest to his profound respect for that world. He strived to represent the world in a way that did not include a preponderance of his presence. Brassaï saw himself in relation to and even part of what he was photographing and attempted to minimize his presence as much as possible, to make himself invisible in his photographs. As Anne Wilkes Tucker writes in *Brassaï: The Eye of Paris*:

> He worked so assiduously to keep out of his pictures any easily recognizable form of himself and of his photographic style. There are no characteristic quirks, such as Garry Winogrand's reckless horizon lines, László Moholy-Nagy's passion for abstraction and visual play, or Richard Avedon's stark white backgrounds and ragged black borders [....] Only one of his dominant subjects so lacked precedence that all subsequent essays on that subject might be traced back to him—his photographs of a city at night, particularly a city so rich with destinations for pleasure seekers" (119).

Ultimately and ironically, as Brassaï came to realize, the more he tried to remove his presence from his photographs, the more his photographs acquired distinctiveness as photographs *by Brassaï*. One could say that his humble self-consciousness resulted in a wonderfully "failed" attempt at self-erasure and is a foundational element underlying his unique photographic rendering of Paris at night. Of course this self-consciousness is not self-evident, nor is his contra-*flâneurie.* The aesthetic manifestation of the contra-*flâneur* in a number of Brassaï's photographs is *generally* evidenced by Brassaï's ability to remain impartial: his photographs do not suffer from an excess of human sympathy. One senses in his photographs a non-judgmental viewpoint. He simply observes and records without approval or disapproval. More specifically, the contra-*flâneur* "appears" in photographs that attempt to *erase* the presence of the photographer/beholder by establishing a compositional tension between subject and photographer/beholder and create a representational space that is as Fried suggests "antitheatrical" because the subjects within the frame demonstrate a *naivety*, in other words, a total lack of awareness of being photographed. These kinds of photographs blur the identity of the viewer/photographer/beholder and present the world as seen through eyes that are not connected to Brassaï or his camera: it is a world as seen through the eyes of the contra-*flâneur*. This erasure of the photographer/beholder is apparent through a number of representational techniques observable in Brassaï's work. This process of erasure, as you will recall, is contingent upon the photograph's ability to demonstrate that it has "forgotten" the presence of a photographer/beholder. The photograph must effectively deny the existence of any other space, any viewer beyond its borders.

As I realize that the personal claims of the artist are a dubious form of evidence to use in interpreting the aesthetic and methodological processes of that artist, I will draw Michael Fried into the discussion. In *Courbet's Realism*, Fried outlines his phenomenologically based interpretation of Gustave Courbet's paintings in what amounts to an enlightening assessment of various techniques Courbet unknowingly "used" in achieving a representational effect that actively forgets the existence of a painter/beholder. The methods/concepts that Fried argues are central to achieving this end are as follows: Diderot's notions of "theatricality" and "anti-theatricality", "naivety" and "grimace"; figures depicted from the rear (facing away from the viewer) or in moments of *absorption* (they do not acknowledge the presence of camera, photographer/beholder or viewer because they are absorbed in some task). Brassaï employed a number of these techniques (consciously or unconsciously is debatable) in his attempts to diminish his *presence* as the photographer named Brassaï, as a photographer/beholder, in front of his photographs. To this end he occasionally employed unique, some would say dubious, methods such as "stage directing." In other words he manipulated the scene by rearranging objects within the frame, and using "actors" (most often friends and occasionally himself) to stand in the frame in order to fulfill his imaginative vision for a particular setting where a "candid" shot could not or did not materialize. Brassaï's occasional practice of "stage directing" may seem a somewhat paradoxical method of diminishing one's presence as an organizing force. Nonetheless, the practice results in a kind of control that allowed Brassaï to obtain specific sorts of shots while maintaining a level of discrete distance between photographer and subject/object. For example, for obvious ethical and safety reasons, Brassaï could not randomly photograph men he did not know or who had not consented to being photographed, entering a brothel. To make things easier and safer for himself in such situations he would use a friend to stand in *as if* they were part of a candid scene.

Even though Brassaï's methods and work are often discussed in ways that make it seem he is a *flâneur*-type figure, his photographs, especially in *Paris by Night*, tell another kind of story by revealing the presence of a self-conscious viewer who does not wish to be recognized. Brassaï's *flânerie* was part of his education, so to speak, the legwork that provided him with ideas, inspiration, specific locations and subjects for projects such as *Paris by Night* and *The Secret Paris of the 30s*. Composition, control, and most importantly form, were his guiding protocols. The test of a photograph's veracity was whether or not it was convincing. Only if a photograph was unconvincing was it deemed unsuccessful. Therefore, Brassaï's well-known habit of staging his photographs—employing actors to sit in where he saw fit—did not in any way make them false. If in order to attain the desired effect—one might say the desired reality effect—he had to pay a group of thugs to pose, so be it. If he had his Hungarian friend and sometime bodyguard Kiss stand in as a lover, or a late night brothel visitor, so much the better to fulfill his preconceived, or imagined, artistic vision. The "stage" was already there so to speak, but the scene sometimes required adjustments and coaxing: the insertion or alteration of this or that element, the arrangement of glasses, cigarettes, ashtrays on the table, or people in order to attain the desired compositional form. And in the end the photographic negative was merely the base building material in constructing the final printed document. Parts of negatives were singled out and enlarged, various prints made and selected, thus consigning portions of negatives to the undeveloped darkness of possibility. Moreover, this process of construction, of *developing* the *mise-en-scene* so to speak, plays an important part in his aesthetic attempt at self-diminishment and, as we shall see, transformation into someone/something else.

As Sasha Jansen/Jean Rhys conceals/reveals herself from/to the reader through her narrative, so too does Brassaï conceal/reveal himself in his photographs of 1930s Paris. As I have stated, the self-conscious desire to minimize, even erase his presence from his photographs is a philosophical and aesthetic attitude fundamental to Brassaï's photographic methodology, though we sense this tension *within* the photographic frame, what Collin Westerbeck refers to as the "dialectic between the photographer and his subject" ("Night Light" 44). This dialectic, or what one might call the *tension of mutual awareness* between photographer and subject, is most apparent in Brassaï's interior photographs of *bals mussettes*, brothels, and opium dens found in *The Secret Paris of the 30s* and resulted from the obvious difficulty that Brassaï could not literally "make himself invisible" in the tight quarters of these spaces, considering the kind of equipment he used. As Westerbeck notes, "The Bergheil Voigtländer camera he used in the '30s, a 6x9 cm plate camera had to be mounted on a tripod and, under the available light of the cafes, would usually have required exposures of three of four seconds or more, sometimes much more" (37). Brassaï also preferred to use a magnesium powder flash, something that inspired Picasso to dub him "the terrorist." However, Brassaï, whether photographing indoors or outdoors, employed a variety of techniques in order to minimize the tension of mutual awareness between subject and photographer. For instance he would never take a photograph when a subject was fully expecting it—he would go through certain pantomimes that made it seem like he was engaged with technical matters and not in taking a photograph. When the subject's guard was sufficiently lowered, he would snap the photograph. These techniques were useful in satisfying his aesthetic desire to minimize his presence as a photographer/beholder within the frame. Brassaï's humility and reverence for the world around him is potently distilled in his third-person "preface" to his book *Camera in Paris* in which he compares himself to that "universal man" and artist Constantin Guys, with whom he shares, as a "lover of life," the intense desire "to snatch the fleeting image of their time." As "universal men," Brassaï continues, "their whole curiosity is turned towards the myriad faces of human existence. With Goethe, *'they consider the world more fraught with genius than themselves' "* (12).

In the following I will discuss a number of photographs that exhibit what I believe is photographic "evidence" of Brassaï's self-conscious awareness of himself as a photographer/beholder and suggest that this awareness resulted in a desire to minimize his presence *within* the photograph. This self-consciousness, as in Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, is indicative of a kind of vision or perspective that can be attributed to the contra-*flâneur*. Anne Wilkes Tucker writes that "in his first two years of photographing at night, Brassaï focused on exterior views [... and] when he did include persons, they are usually seen from a distance and primarily served to humanize the larger scene" (32). The humanization of the scene may well be part of the effect, though I would suggest that there is a greater underlying complexity at work in the way Brassaï captures many of the figures in *Paris by Night*. This complexity lies in what I have already referred to as *absorption*. Absorption, as a technique for minimizing the presence of the photographer/beholder in the frame, is found extensively and in a variety of configurations throughout *Paris by Night*: figures photographed while reading, sleeping, kissing, in conversation, working at a task, or shown from the rear. In all configurations, the subject(s) do not acknowledge the camera or the photographer. Michael Fried highlights the essence of the dynamic between painter and subject(s) when they are depicted in states of absorption:

> [Diderot] concluded that nothing was more abortive of that act of persuasion than when a painter's dramatis personae seemed by virtue of the character of [the subjects] actions and expressions to evince even a partial consciousness of being beheld, and that the immediate task of the painter was therefore to extinguish or forestall that consciousness by entirely engrossing or, as I chiefly say, *absorbing* his dramatis personae in their actions and states of mind. A personage so absorbed appeared unconscious or oblivious of everything but the object of his or her absorption, as if to all intents and purposes there were nothing and no one else in the world (7).

Directly related to the concept of absorption is that of "theatricality", a concept first articulated by Denis Diderot in reference to paintings in which the subjects depicted obviously wore in their manner, posture, and expression an awareness of being looked at. Fried writes:

> The notion of "theatricality" is a central issue in the aesthetic success of representation of "absorptive" themes, subjects, scenes. Presenting figures who by virtue of [their] absorption would appear oblivious to being beheld is key to the "detheatricalizing" of the representation. The painting appears to deny the presence of the beholder of the painting and perhaps, by extension, the presence of the painter himself' (14).

With these concepts in mind, the first example of absorption, of detheatricalized representation, I will focus on is plate 45 in *Paris by Night* (fig. 2)[5], which shows a

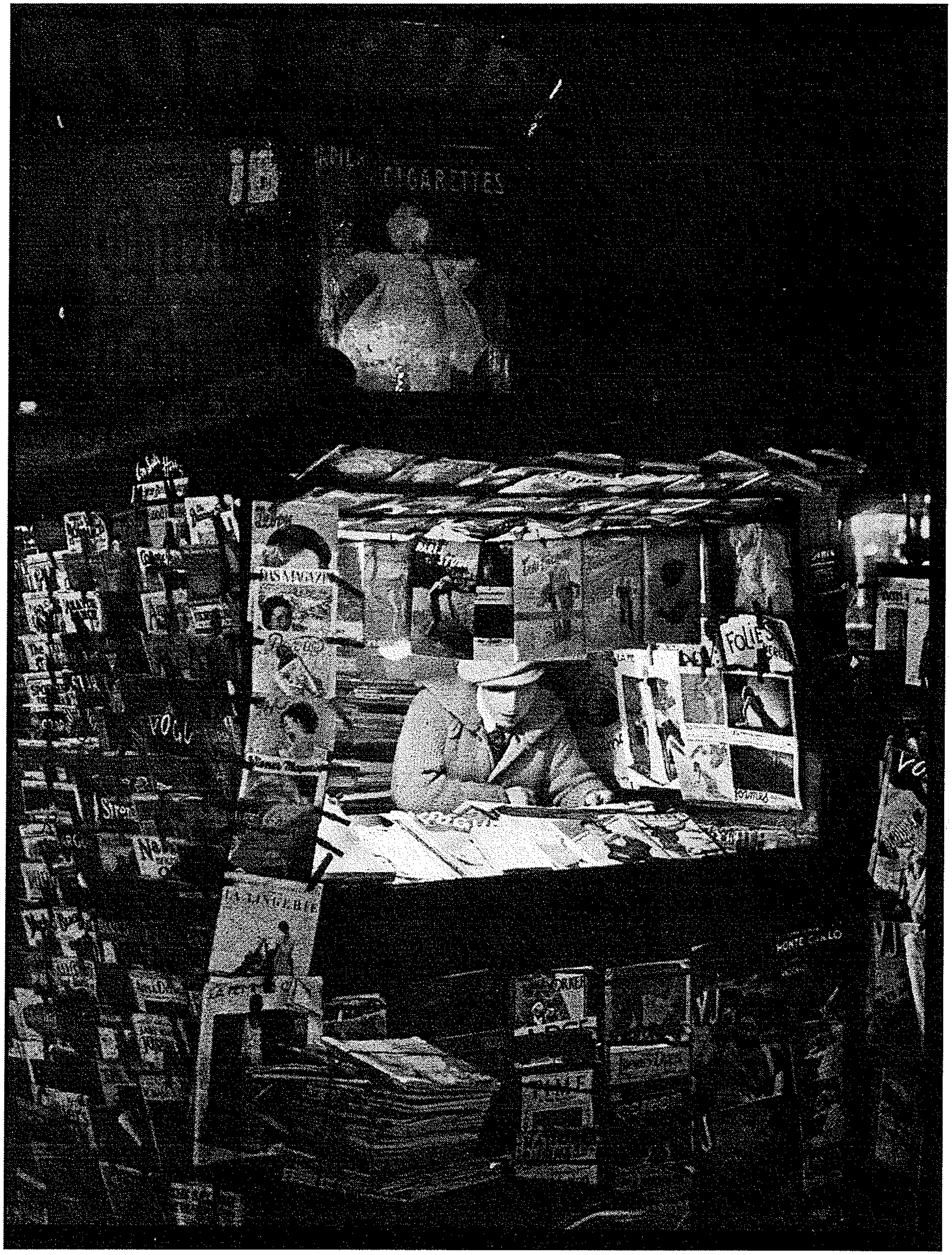
CIGARETTES
DAS MAGAZIN
VOGUE
FOLIES
LA LINGERIE
MONTE CARLO

**Figure 2. Brassaï. Plate 45, *Paris by Night.***

young man in a brightly lit newsstand kiosk, the exterior and interior of which is almost entirely covered by various magazines and newspapers. The young man is engrossed in reading or looking at the newspaper or magazine that is laid out in front of him and the placid open-mouthed expression on his face suggests that he is entirely elsewhere. He does not acknowledge the coolness of the evening air that his heavy sweater and woolen cap seem to imply. The little world of the newsstand, and the world beyond its lit interior has ceased to exist for him: his mind is entirely engaged by the words or images that lie in front of his eyes. His eyes, somewhat obscured by the shadow cast down by the rim of his cap, are focused downwards. His total absorption in his reading material creates the impression that he is totally unaware of being looked at. He is alone in the world and this solitude conceals the presence of a photographer/beholder. The nighttime city beyond his window holds no interest for him, there is nothing "out there" that catches his attention, there is nobody out there for whom he has to maintain a cultivated guardedness as a newspaper/magazine seller. In other words he is naïve and has no role to play in the window of the kiosk—he is a non-performative subject and therefore "detheatricalizes" the scene.

I would suggest that his absorption in the newspaper emulates or anticipates the viewer's absorption in the photograph. We too, if willing to become absorbed in this photograph, become absorbed in reading the tapestry of magazine titles that are arranged over every available surface of the kiosk. Perhaps we begin by remembering the many times we have walked up to such kiosks in other cities, in other countries. We transport ourselves to another place and time. And like so many other newsstands, no matter the languages found on the covers, we find placed among the numerous titles those titles and cover images that are intended to titillate and entice us to reveries of a more carnal sort; and inevitably our eyes are drawn. Just to the young man's left are conspicuously luminous and glossy white pages that hang beneath a slightly crumpled sign reading *Folies Bergères*: an immediately recognizable name that has held so much mystique and allure for countless young men coming to the city of light; the infamous name that the nineteen year old Ernest Hemingway coyly included in his first letter home from Paris to his religiously conservative mother because he knew it would ruffle her feathers. The glowing whiteness of these pages and the figures of scantily clad women in provocative poses draw the eye. The absorbed young man occupies the center of the frame, and by their proximity to him and their luminous contrast to the dull greyness of the surrounding pages and magazines, so too these pages. They thrust themselves forward. As I begin to read, other erotic titles begin to emerge: "La Femme", "La Lingerie" "Das Magazine" in close proximity to more "serious" material: "The New Yorker", "Time", "National Business", "Literary Digest", and "Screen". I do not wish to overemphasize the erotic element of this photograph; however, Brassaï's caption explicitly draws attention to this element. It reads: "At frequent intervals along the streets, gaily lit kiosks display an infinite variety of magazines in every language and to suit all tastes, not omitting the erotic." Interestingly, Brassaï selects the erotic taste for specific mention, to the exclusion of all others.

My reading of the titles, and so my participation or absorption in the textual element of the photograph, binds me to the young man's absorption; to go one step further, perhaps I mimic his apparent obliviousness to the world outside, and more importantly, that of the photographer/ beholder. In other words the photographer/beholder slips from my field of view, and I "forget" about *who* the photographer is and sense that the lit newspaper kiosk and the young man within are part of a world seen through the eyes of a being without a name, identity or face. A contra-*flâneur* figure whose identity is obscured and chameleon-like, becomes like me, *is* me. This may seem something of a stretch but let me go even further and suggest that the young man *stands in* for me the viewer, as well as for the photographer/beholder. He is symbolic of me concentrating on the image, and he is a doppelganger for Brassaï, bent over his camera peering into his viewfinder. His *hold* on the material in front of him, his *absorption* in it, is my hold on the book, and Brassaï's hold on his camera.

The photograph in this instance is a window suddenly opened up into the world—a shutter opened randomly by an invisible hand. A moment captured by the self-conscious figure of the contra-*flâneur*: ironically the only "evidence" of his presence is the absence of any acknowledgement of a beholder by the figure photographed. One may wonder at the paradoxical element in the relationship between photographer/beholder and the subject—one that seems to suggest both a movement *towards* and *away* from the subject. Perhaps this paradox is part of Brassaï's somewhat contradictory relationship to the world. His profound curiosity about everything in his world combined with his deep respect and humility that inspired him to attempt to subjugate his presence to that of the subject. I realize that this may sound far too subjective a claim. After all, how can one be certain of a photographer's attitude regarding his subjects? I must admit that my claims regarding Brassaï's respectfulness and humility are partially based on gut instinct, but more substantially on what I have read about Brassaï's disarmingly generous and open personality and on what he has written about his own attitude in relation to his photographic subjects in such works as *Camera in Paris*. As Brassaï writes in that work, "the most thrilling event for him is daily life" (10).

The second photograph I want to discuss in relation to the concept of absorption is plate 10 of *Paris by Night.* This photograph (fig. 3) shows a man with his back to the viewer standing in front of a "Morris Pillar" as he ostensibly reads the advertisements for the latest Parisian shows and entertainments. Here as in the previous photograph, the figure does not acknowledge the presence of the photographer/beholder. The *compositional denial* of the photographer/beholder by the subject creates a candid, even voyeuristic atmosphere. The face and therefore the eyes are not available as nodes of expressiveness and therefore they cannot betray awareness of the camera by obviously looking away as if obeying a command not to watch the birdie. Because there is no expression to interpret, we must rely on other elements within the photograph for details of interest and engagement. The pillar provides an immediate focal point for our attention. Once again we are invited to read into and actively participate in the moment.

What about the gentlemanly figure that stands, hands in the pockets of his overcoat, his collar up against the cool night air, with his back towards the viewer? He has moved off the sidewalk that cuts across the bottom right hand corner of the frame in order to better see and read the posters in front of him. Something on the pillar has caught his eye and drawn him towards it—just as our eye, looking for something to fixate upon, gravitates to the brightly lit pillar and its various messages. Mistinguett catches the eye: the erotic in the foreground once again. The dark background with its solemn ranks of leafless trees contributes an eerie dimension of the unknown to a well-lit foreground in which the most prominent elements are easily comprehended and discernible (with the

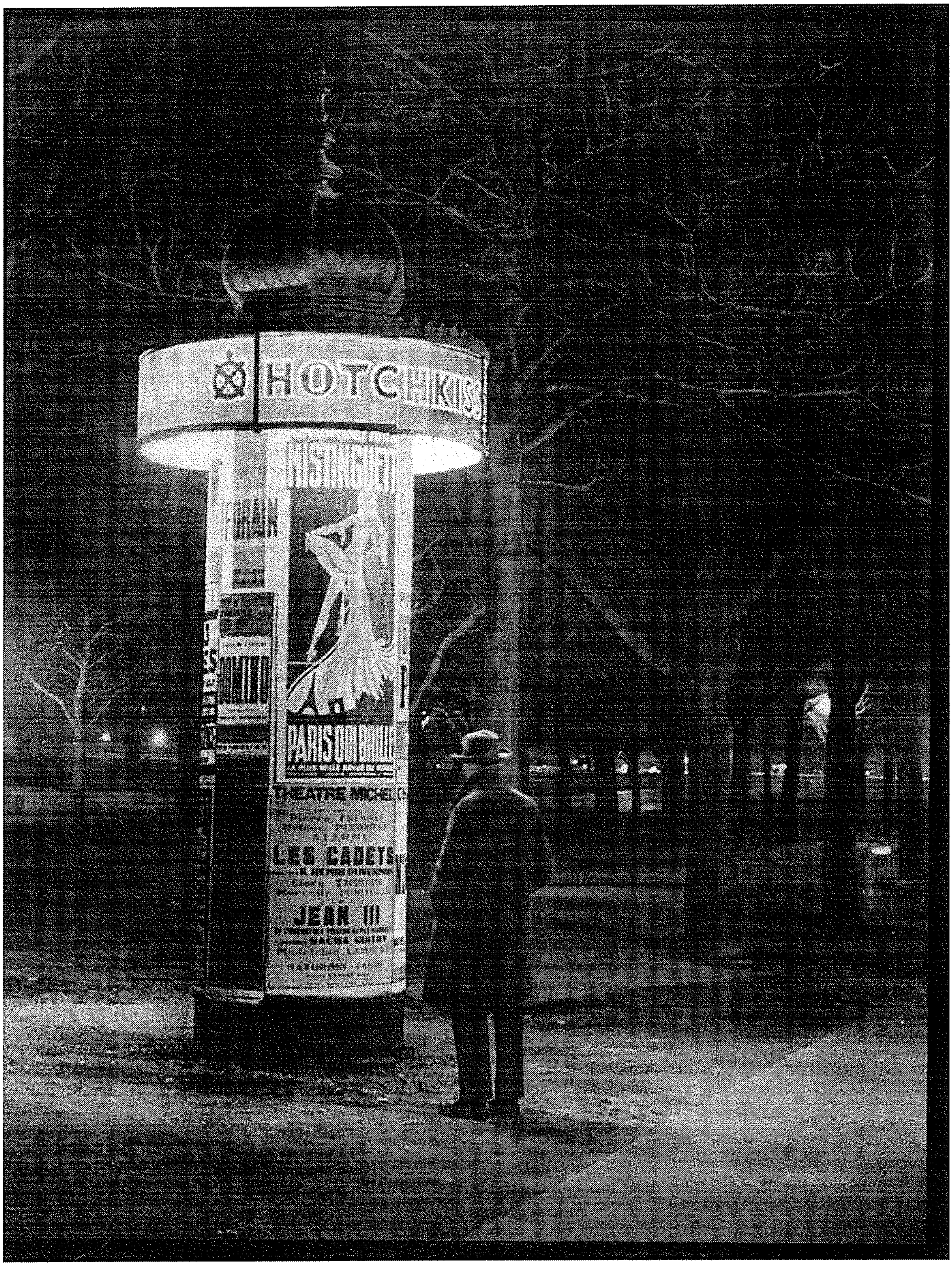
HOTCHKISS
MISTINGUETT
FORAIN
DOMINO
PARIS QUI REMUE
THEATRE MICHEL
LES CADETS
JEAN III

**Figure 3. Brassaï, Plate 10, *Paris by Night.***

exception of the man's face). The compositional tension between dark background and light foreground places the man in an interesting relationship with his surroundings. His dark toned jacket and pants seem to suggest that he is part of the background, yet his position just to the side of the pillar along with the highlights on his shoulders and hat associate him with the foreground. We might ask such questions as 'what is he doing there all alone?', 'where is he going?', 'is he lonely?': questions that one most likely would not ask if it were daytime. There is a distinct sense of loneliness here that extends beyond the lone man depicted from behind. It is what one might call the romance of loneliness. A kind of projected loneliness that is the result of the photographer/ beholder's subtle sympathy for the figure depicted. Perhaps the man *is* Brassaï! Figure 4 in the exhibition catalogue *Brassai: No Ordinary Eyes* is a photograph, precisely titled, "Brassaï Photographing the Parisian Night on Boulevard Saint-Jacques with his 6x9 Voigtländer". Even though this photograph does not show Brassaï from the rear but from the side, his absorption and concentration behind the camera, his absorption in the act of looking through the camera's viewfinder (as we can see from his visible eye, the eye nearest to the camera taking the photograph, being closed) demonstrates a kind of self-reflexive awareness of his own absorptive techniques. One could re-title this photograph: "The Photographer Absorbed in his Work." Brassaï's denial of a beholder seems to dispel or at least contradict any suggestion that this is the photographer *demonstrating* or *performing* his task for another camera. For those not convinced that his absorption is real, that he is posing, I ask, what makes you think his posture uncharacteristic or contrived? Irrespective of this, what I am interested in is the correspondence between the man standing before the "Morris Pillar" and Brassaï's posture behind his camera: he, like

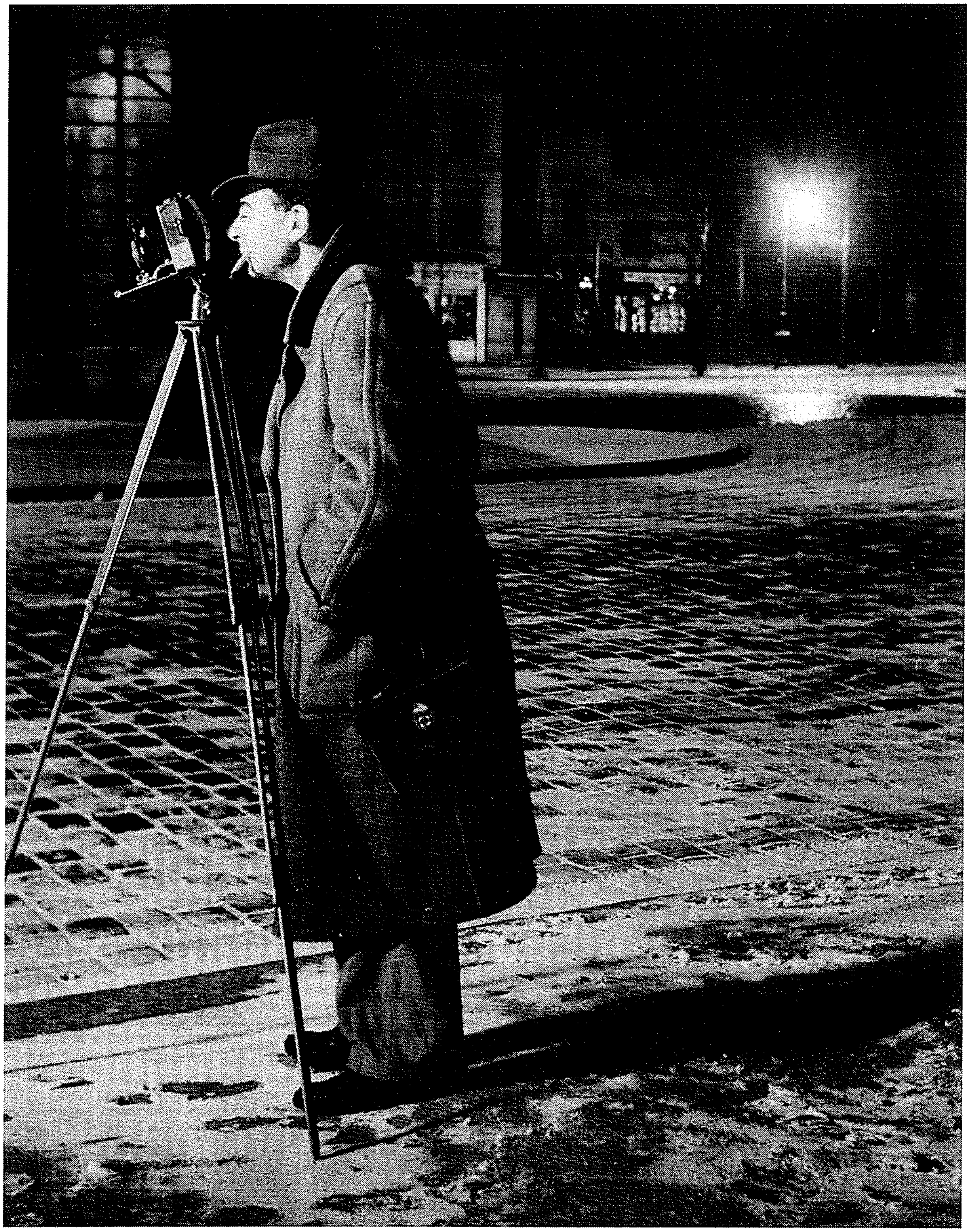

**Figure 4. Brassaï. "Brassaï Photographing the Parisian Night on Boulevard Saint-Jacques with his 6x9 Voigtländer,"** ***Brassaï: No Ordinary Eyes.***

the man in front of the pillar, has his hands in the pockets of his long overcoat and his collar up to protect his neck from the winter chill. Also, like the other man, Brassaï is is wearing a dark colored hat. And just as we cannot be sure where the man has focused his gaze on the pillar, or if he is looking at it at all and is not dreaming, lost in thought, remembering, or fantasizing, we cannot know what Brassaï's camera is focused on as the object or subject he is looking at through the camera lies *beyond the frame* of the photograph. What we can infer from this is that what lies *beyond the frame* is the infinite *potential* of subject/object: the nearly infinite possibilities of the nocturnal urban complex that could be captured by Brassaï's lens; and what lies in front of the man's unavailable gaze too is infinite potential. We cannot know what lies before his eyes, we can only assume. But what I want to propose is Brassaï's physical embodiment within the "Morris Pillar" photograph, *as* the man standing with his back to the viewer. I base this idea on something curious Brassaï writes in *Camera in Paris*:

> The countless pictures which, by dint of patience, ruse or diplomacy, [the photographer] has stolen or extorted from time, are a living record. But they are more than that; *they are moments of his own existence* entered day by day in his log. They say not only: "Such and such a thing happened," but also "I was there," "I saw this thing," or even "*I was this thing*" (19).

To become another thing, something or someone else, is an extraordinary desire that I would suggest is not only part of Brassaï's intense curiosity and respect for the world, but part of his aesthetic goal, even if impossible, of erasing his presence as a photographer/beholder from his photographs. As such Brassaï attempts to convince the viewers of his photographs that a nameless urban figure, a contra-*flâneur*, might have taken these photographs. And part of this process is his attempts *to be in them as something else*, as someone else, other than Brassaï. This is why Brassaï's use of absorption is distinct from the innumerable other photographers who use absorptive themes. Brassaï's own implied absorption into his photographs, his crafty insertion of himself into the representational field as a figure indistinguishable from one of the "real" figures of the Parisian demimonde, implies that he like so many other artists and writers following World War I was acutely aware of the dispossession in himself.

In order to substantiate such a claim, it is necessary to examine a number of photographs in *Paris by Night*, whose subjects, according to Frank Dobo, appear to be *clochards* or late night wanderers, but are actually Brassaï himself. Plates 11, 44, and 47 (figures 5-7) all supposedly depict Brassaï as something, someone else, in various "poses". Notably in each he does not present his face to the beholder. In figure 5 a man wearing a long dark overcoat and a hat (see figs. 2 and 3) is caught emerging from one of Paris's outdoor public urinals, or "Vespasiennes" as they were commonly called. The man is slightly hunched over and seems to be in the process of doing up his zipper or buttoning his coat. He is occupied in doing something, fiddling with something (focusing a camera, releasing the shutter?) He has posed himself in shadow as a nighttime wanderer on his way to a someplace that seems to lie somewhere down the long partially lit walkway. Again in figure 6, the perspective lies beneath the heavy metal girders of a shadowy tunnel running beneath the railway. A man wearing a long overcoat and hat stands facing the far wall: perhaps to urinate, to light a cigarette, or scratch something into the masonry. We cannot be certain of his motives or his actions. He is inscrutable. He casts a dark

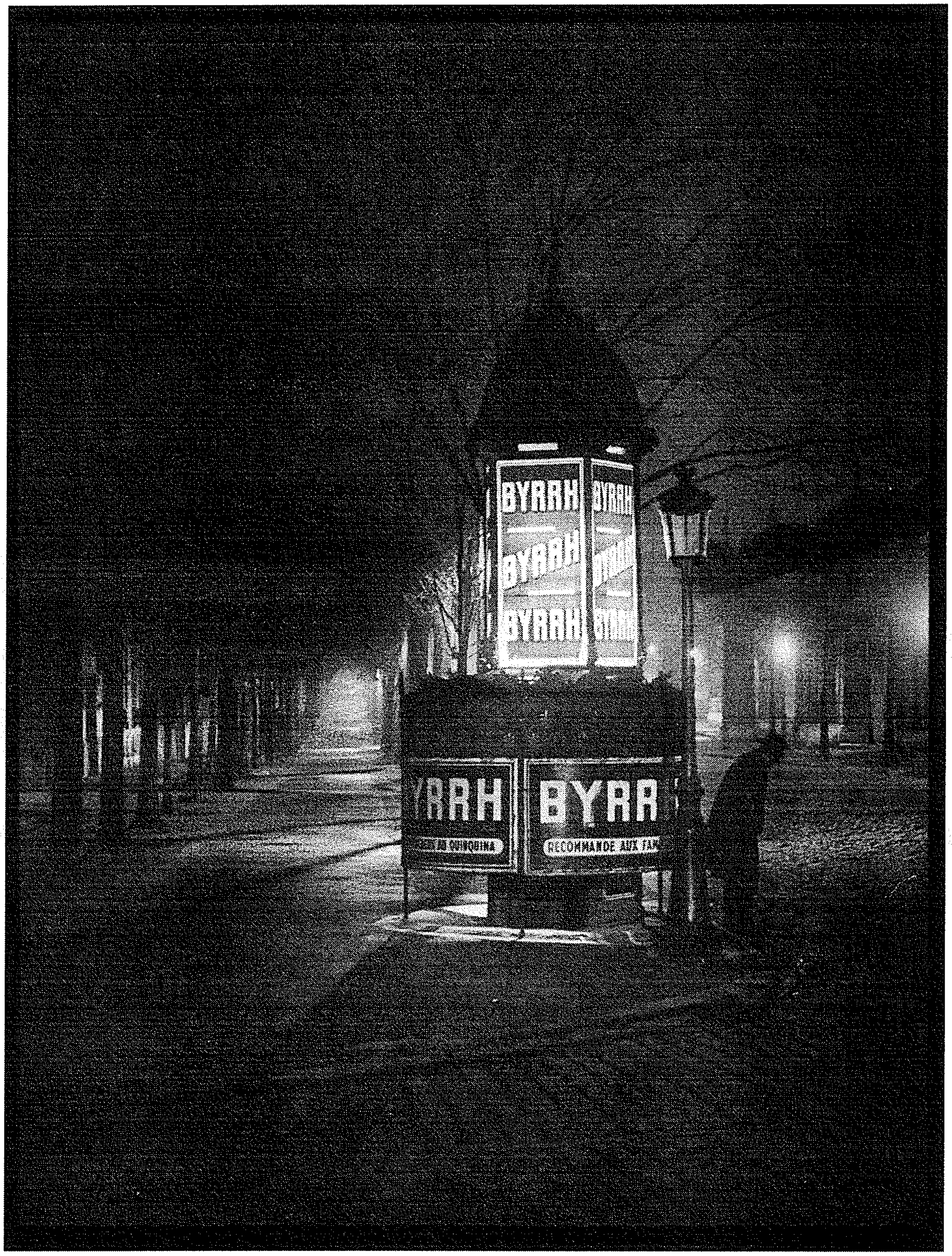
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**Figure 5. Brassaï, Plate 11, *Paris by Night.***

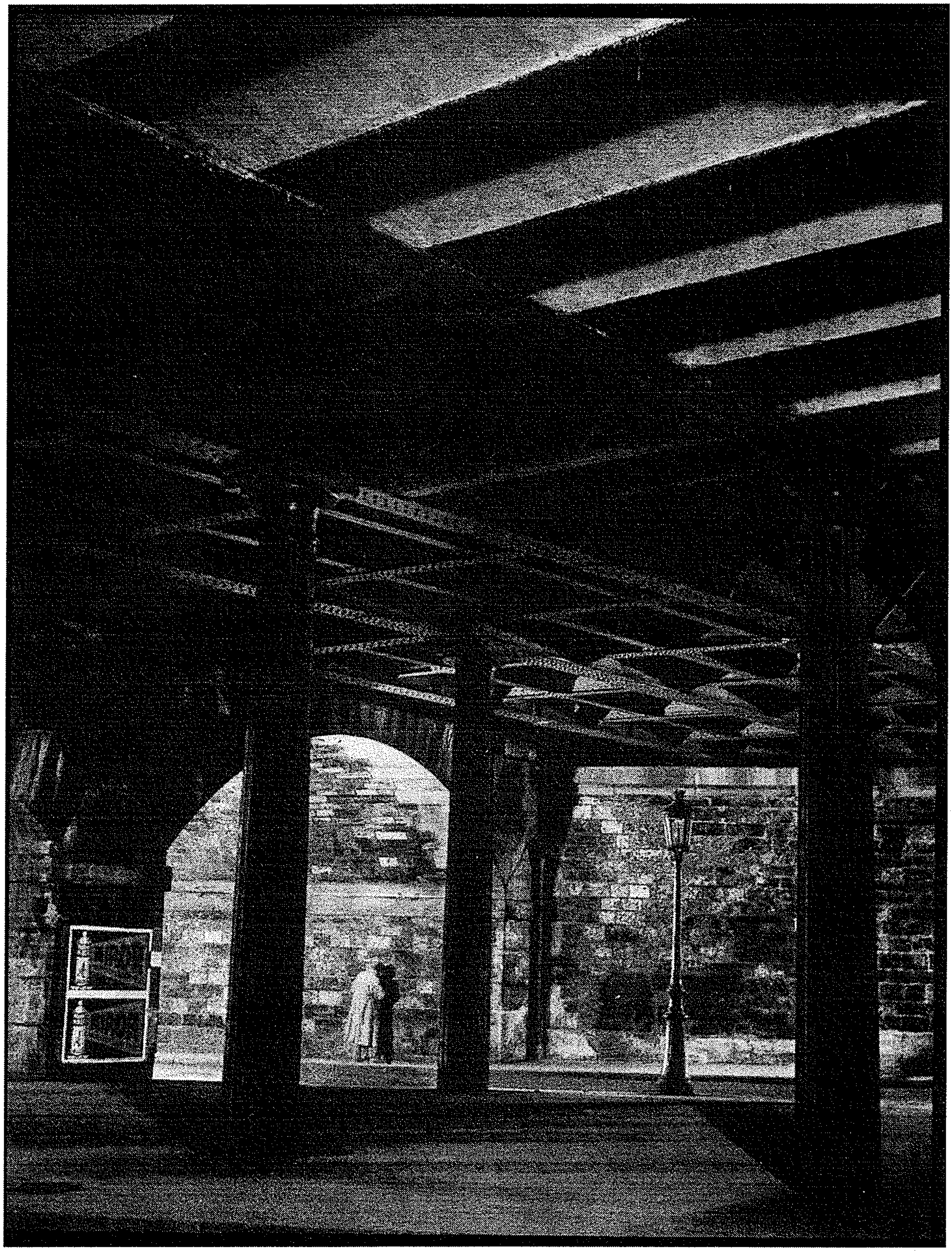

**Figure 6. Brassaï, Plate 44, *Paris by Night.***

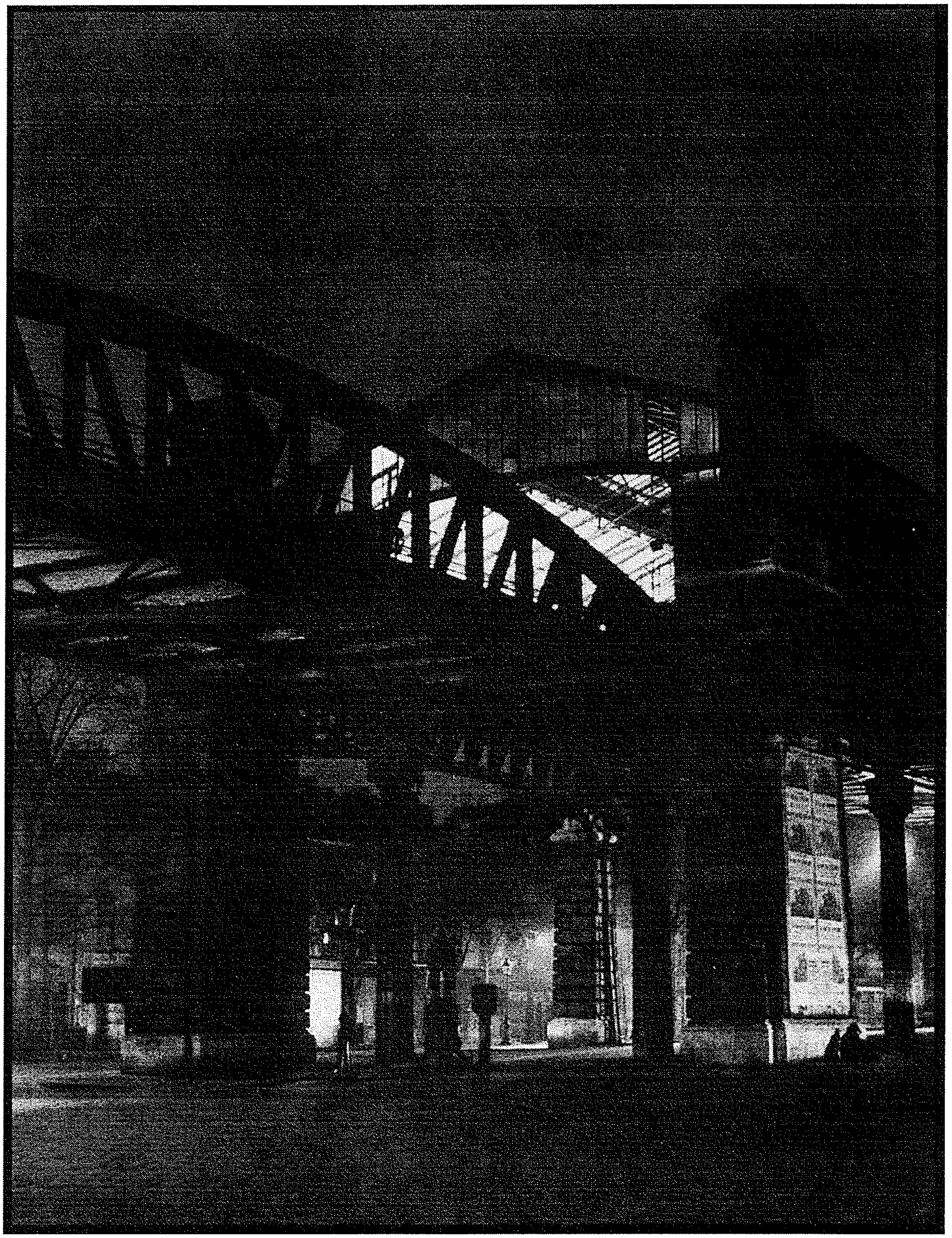

**Figure 7. Brassaï, Plate 47, *Paris by Night.***

shadow on the wall, an impenetrable double that magnifies the curiousness of his position in front of the wall. In Figure 7, the glowing light from a metro platform starkly illuminates the iron girders of a railway bridge. A dark desolate scene dominated by looming stone pillars and other looming vertical masses. In the bottom right, slumped on the ground is a lone wayfarer: stranded, perhaps drunk and down-and-out. Once again the man's face is not available to be beheld. Brassaï has absorbed himself, in a sense "hidden" himself in these photographs in a way that we cannot know that it is him. He does not show us his face. These photographs, in light of Frank Dobo's admissions, can be read as other forms of what I have suggested is Brassaï's attempt at *being* something or someone else in his photographs—whether a nighttime wanderer, wayfarer or a drunk who has missed his train. Here is perhaps an early Hitchcock—the auteur inserting himself in his creation. The photographer photographing himself as someone something else: he does not reveal his identity and therefore successfully, at least within the photograph, distorts his personality as the photographer named Brassaï. This compels us to ask: who or what is standing behind the camera? Who or what is timing the exposure? Who or what kind of beholder is looking through the viewfinder? And so these photographs represent a kind of personalized embodiment in his photographs—his private knowledge of himself "being that thing," of playing a role in a setting that gives nothing away regarding his play acting. He has placed himself, covertly inserted his physical body into his dream Paris where, it might be suggested, his body becomes a kind of dream body obscured by shadow and distance and the common indistinct male winter garb of a long overcoat and hat. Perhaps the contra-*flâneur* caught on film? His face, like Sasha Jansen's, is always turned away from the viewer of the photographs. These photographs, like Sasha's lavatory mirrors, complicate and conceal the identity of the photographer named Brassaï. If he is in the photograph as someone, something else, who or what is standing behind the camera taking the picture?

Anne Wilkes Tucker suggests that "Brassaï gravitated to instances in life in which prohibitions and desires are confronted, channeled, released, modified, and compounded" (47) and I would argue that the majority of the photographs I have commented upon are captured instances in which prohibitions and secret desires are being confronted, rediscovered, or rekindled. Perhaps what can be inferred from these photographs, given the ambiguous nature of the absorption depicted, is a sense that inhabitants of the metropolis harbor within themselves a disturbing secret that would make them utterly repugnant to others if it were known.[6] This repugnant secret is reminiscent of the burdens of guilt that Raskolnikov and Svidrigailov carry with them in *Crime and Punishment;* the first finds redemption by coming clean, the other, ironically or justifiably, "escapes" his self-loathing through suicide. Dostoyevsky's Underground Man also bears with him his "loathsome actions," though from them he derives a kind of masochistic pleasure in the knowledge, from the guilt he experiences and exaggerates afterwards. However, in these instances we as readers are told of their transgressions, are told about the nature or specifics of these foul deeds. But other characters within their fictional worlds are unable to penetrate through the masks that they put on. In these photographs we are like the passer-by in a fictional world—a Raskolnikov, Svidrigailov or an Underground Man passes by in the crowd and they betray themselves by a glint in their eye, a strange twitch of the cheek, a wry smile. We may think nothing of these expressive gestures, or being of a paranoid bent, we might suspect a killer, an amoral predator, a neurasthenic or perhaps and even more troubling, we may quietly think to ourselves: '*they are like me'*. And we do not follow them to find out how similar they might be to us because we are afraid of what we might discover. Perhaps we are like the narrator of Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd" who after following an old man's manic wanderings throughout London, comes to the conclusion that "This old man [...] is the type and the genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd.* It will be in vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds" (188). What I am attempting to reinforce by way of literary examples of the tenuousness of urban selfhood is that the figures within the photographs have unstable identities—Brassaï attempts to eliminate himself by becoming, by embodying himself in the Parisian world he creates and verifies through his photographs as someone else. These photographs compel us to ask questions about who and what the photographer is and where, if he is in the photograph and not behind the camera, he might be?

In order to further develop my contention that subjects depicted in absorptive states have the effect of minimizing the presence of Brassaï as a photographer/beholder I will examine a photograph in which the so called "presence" of the photographer/ beholder is very apparent in the tension of mutual awareness between subject and photographer/beholder. "La Môme Bijou" or "Miss Diamonds", plate 43 in *Paris by Night,* (fig.8) is one of Brassaï's most celebrated portraits of the many he made during his 1930s forays into the Parisian demimonde. Her fantastic appearance, "her bosom

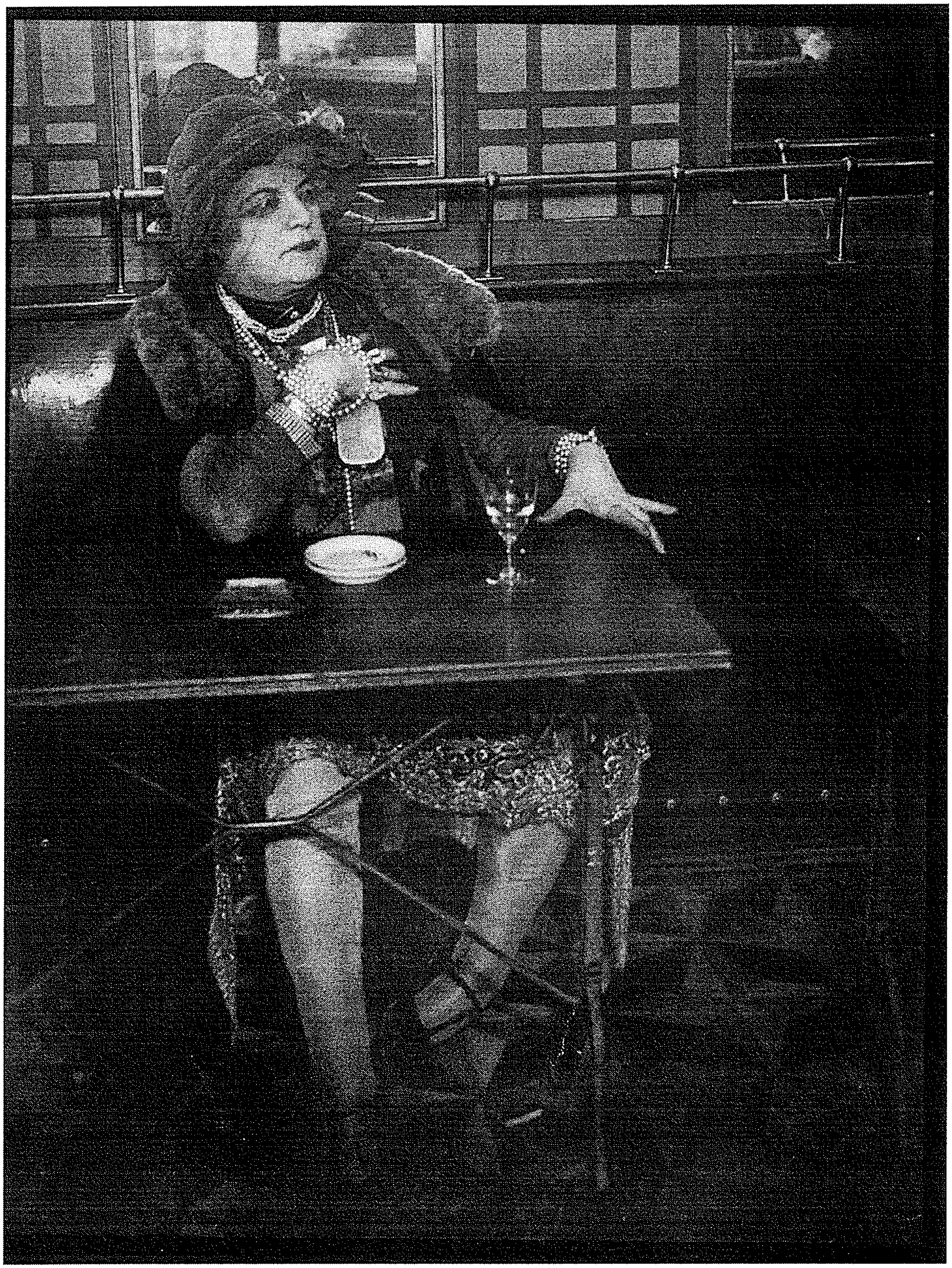

**Figure 8. Brassaï, Plate 43, *Paris by Night.***

covered with an incredible quantity of jewelry: brooches, lavalieres, chokers, clips, chains—a veritable Christmas tree of garlands, of glittering stars eccentric even in the realm of the Parisian demimonde" (*Secret Paris*—no pagination) turns her into a kind of shimmering apparition from the *belle epoche*. Even though she does not direct her gaze at the camera, does not acknowledge the photographer/beholder with her eyes, numerous elements in her posture are indicative of "pose". She is performing for the camera and has arranged her body to be photographed. Her right hand's delicate placement on her breast is an indication of her haughty, though slightly self-conscious awareness of being looked at. Her left hand's awkward and unnaturally contorted position on the edge of the table reveals a kind of straining, and perhaps even discomfort. However, what I find most intriguing is the position of her left foot, caught in motion, as if she was in the process of shifting her position when the photograph was snapped. These elements suggest that she was in fact in the process of arranging herself to be photographed. Yet her facial expression gives away nothing of this straining discomfort. Her powdered white face and rouged lips have the appearance of self-possession and repose. It is the restlessness of her hands and feet that reveal her awkwardness and Brassaï's presence within the photographic frame. We see the *effects* of his being there, in front of Bijou, as a photographer. This is what Diderot would call an expression of "grimace" and of "theatricality" and therefore an ineffective and even tasteless representation of reality. The subject has put on her "Sunday best pose" and therefore every element of her posture and expression exudes contrivance, unnaturalness and performance. Bijou's looking away is not an absorbed looking away but an 'I must look somewhere, but it can't be at the camera' grimace. "Naivety" does not grace her features. I should state here that this photograph is not one of Brassaï's finest and is the least effective of the three shots he took of "Bijou" on a night in 1932 (the other two are found in *Secret Paris*) though it does have a charm and magnetism that corresponds to another of Brassaï's guiding criteria for a successful photograph: that it be unforgettable. Additionally, we should remember, as Westerbeck astutely observes, that the people Brassaï photographed in the demimonde were part of a unique social milieu permeated by affectation, pose, artifice and role-playing. Truly unguarded moments were for all intents and purposes non-existent in "a world whose inhabitants were trying to wear their emotions on their rolled-up sleeves" (37). This photograph (perhaps the most Rhys-like of the photographs), provides a contrastive context to the absorptive photographs that I have focused on thus far, and I hope helps to illustrate and reinforce my main contention that absorptive techniques are effective in minimizing, even erasing, the presence of the photographer/beholder from the photograph and in doing so, opening up a space for a viewer in front of the camera whose identity is obscure.

What are the representational consequences for Brassaï's photographic subjects, and more generally the city of Paris, resulting from his desire to minimize his presence as a photographer/beholder in his photographs? Though Brassaï categorically denied ever *actively* directing or posing his subjects, he most certainly "staged" scenes in order to achieve or fulfill his imaginative vision for a particular scene he had in mind. His seemingly fluid relationship to "reality" is revealed in the following statement he made to Nancy Newhall in an interview:

> The object is absolutely inimitable; the question is always to find that sole translation that will be valid in another language. And now, immediately there is the *difficulty of being faithful to the object*, the fear of betraying it (for all literal translation is treason), which obliges us to recreate it or reinvent it. The compelling pursuit of *resemblance*, or representation (whatever may be said about it today*) leads us far, much farther than 'free' imagination or invention. It is what excites in art those pictorial, verbal, or other discoveries that constantly renew expression*. The sources are always exciting, but they flow formless…. How to capture them, how retain them without *form*? Not being a stenographer, nor a recording machine, my course seems clear: to cast the living thing into an immutable form…In a word, *I invent nothing, I imagine everything*" (Newhall, 279).

Though Brassaï's unflagging desire for objectivity lies at the heart of his aesthetic practice, there is a delicious ambiguity here, one may even want to say contradiction; however, if we probe a little deeper into the ambiguity of invention and imagination and into Brassaï's photographic practices, an interesting and complex process begins to emerge. In order to better penetrate into these notions of invention and imagination it is enlightening to turn to Baudelaire's essay "The Life and Work of Eugene Delacroix" where he writes, "almost at the dictation of the master":

> Nature is but a dictionary, [Delacroix] kept repeating. Properly to understand the extent of meaning implied in this sentence, you should consider the numerous ordinary uses of a dictionary. In it you look for the meaning of words, their genealogy and the etymology—in brief, you extract from it all the elements that

> compose a sentence or a narrative; but no one has ever thought of his dictionary as a *composition*, in the poetic sense of the word. Painters who are obedient to the imagination seek in their dictionary the elements which suit with their conception; in adjusting those elements, however, with more or less of art, they confer upon them a totally new physiognomy. But those who have no imagination just copy the dictionary. The result is a great vice, the vice of banality (*Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* 46).

Brassaï's "staging" of his photographs was in accordance with his preconceived or "imagined" visual stage for the photograph. He envisioned a particular scene, and occasionally that scene differed slightly from the one available; however the discrepancy between what he wanted to capture on film and what the world presented him was not a transgression of physical "reality" due to the fact that what he imagined and the photographic representation of the staged composition maintained a spirit of fidelity to the "reality" he found. For Brassaï a photograph was only untrue if it was unconvincing. As Tucker writes, "The aspect of invention and staging in [his] work shifts it from being a straight record of reality to being what critic Charles Hagen identified as "emotionally urgent inner landscapes" imposed on the world around [him]" (62).

However, this so called imposition of the "emotionally urgent inner landscape," what I like to call Brassaï's *dream* of Paris, does not in any way diminish the veracity of the work as a document because the scene, whether depicting human interactions, eerily calm shots of a shadowy street or a barge moored on the Seine, do convince us as being "real" because they are scenes in which the figures depicted (if there are human figures at all) are established as being natural elements. They demonstrate to us that what we are seeing is well within the range of what is possible for human experience in that time and place. They are, for all intents and purposes, historical documents. Perhaps this is partially based upon the faith we have in old black and white photographs, and in the camera's infallibility in representing the world *as it is*. As Roland Barthes writes in *Camera Lucida*, "What I see is not a memory, an imagination, a reconstitution, a piece of Maya, such as art lavishes upon us, but reality in a past state: at once the past and the real" (82).[7] And this is why the staged scene cannot be detected as being such; it is authenticated by the photographic document as *something that has happened*. Brassaï's *imaginative* reconstruction of the scene is a confidence trick and perhaps suggests the level of faith he had in his ability as a photographer and in the medium itself. As Baudelaire suggests, "the whole visible universe is but a store-house of images and signs to which the imagination will give a relative place and value; it is a sort of pasture which the imagination must digest and transform. All the faculties of the human soul must be subordinated to the imagination, which puts them in requisition all at once" (*Delacroix* 48). And as we have seen, there are some fine examples of staged photographs: images that clearly demonstrate this confidence trick. They seem to show us Paris "as it was"—but it is all a wonderful dream—authenticated by the click of Brassaï's Voigtländer and more definitively by the proof positive that says: I was there, I saw this happen and I exist—through this image—through this object. But exist as what, as whom? Where might Brassaï be in all of this? What is he? Who is he? Is he like us—a partially sympathetic spectator? Or is he like Weegee, utterly indifferent or at worst a hostile witness to the subjects he trains his camera on? Even if what Brassaï captures in these dream moments, these "emotional inner landscapes" do not exist any longer, or never did exist in the first place—the scene has been authenticated and set down in immutable form *as if* it did exist, as if it was candid. Brassaï shows us his dream Paris in images, and looking at them we cannot discern whether or not they are staged—and therefore we are unwitting "theatre" goers thoroughly duped by the reality effect of the photograph. Plate 24 of *Paris by Night* (fig.9), two lovers seated on a park bench in the Tuileries Gardens, is a good example of this. Frank Dobo, a friend of Brassaï's acknowledged that, "he was the male lover on the bench [...] while the female was Janet Fukushima, the sister of [his] sister-in-law" (Tucker 43), though here as elsewhere, there are no faces to give the deception away. The couple is absorbed in one another and do not acknowledge the viewer or the world around them in any way. They are a little world. One could never guess, by simply looking at the photograph without Dobo's admission, that the scene was staged. It is in perfect accordance with what we believe is possible in the city of light and secret pleasure.

Perhaps another part of the "authenticity" of such staged moments lie in the cohesive and synthetic form of Brassaï's compositions. A comparison to another photographer with similar nocturnal tastes is useful here. As Westerbeck writes:

> The crucial difference between Brassaï's photographs and Weegee's is that the forces at work in Brassaï's are centripetal, while those in Weegee's are centrifugal. Brassaï's show how people fit into their environment. His pictures are gravitational, pulling everything in them together, achieving an organic unity. Weegee's show how people do not fit into their environment. His pictures are explosive, blowing what is in them apart and achieving a kind of chaos (44).

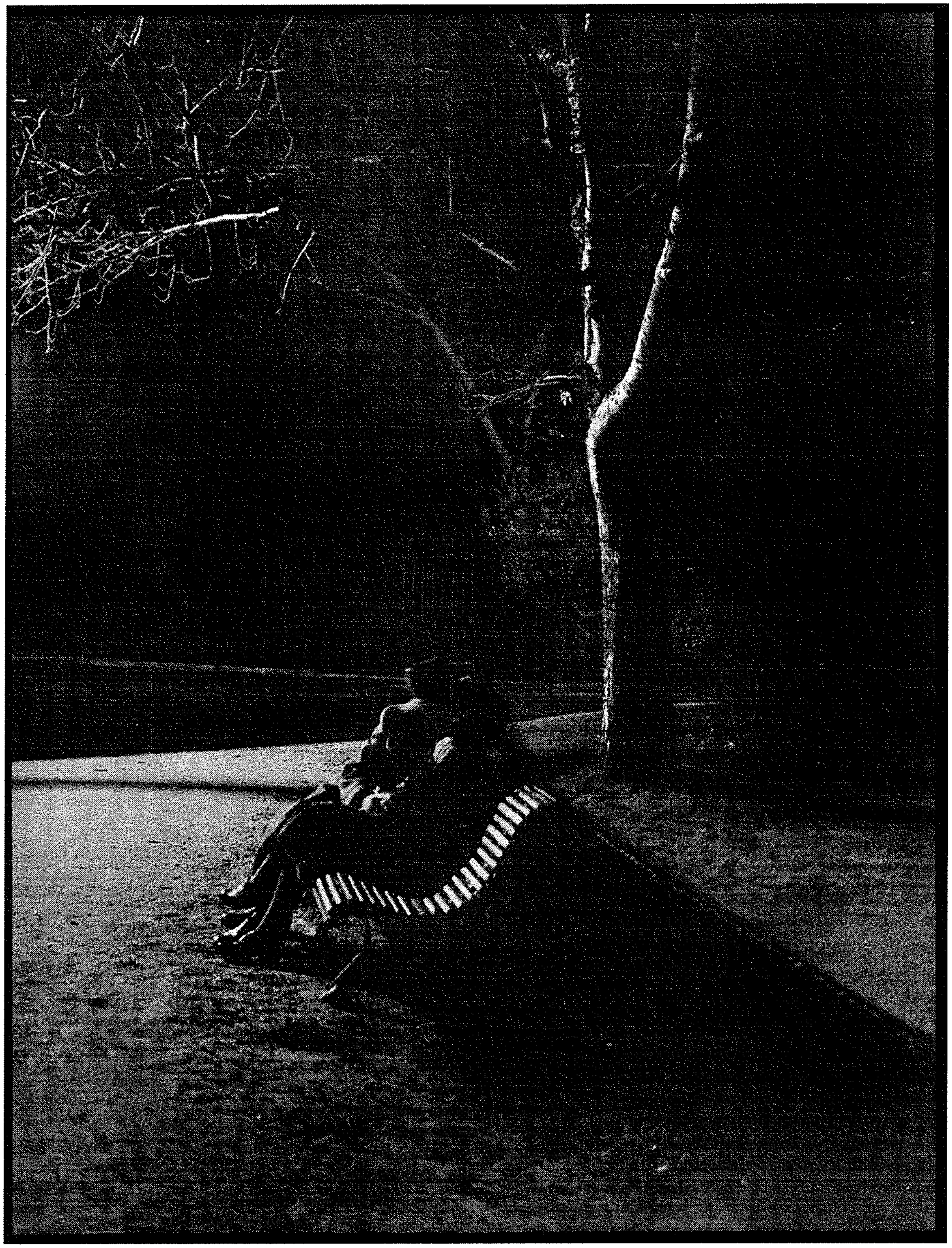

**Figure 9. Brassaï, Plate 24,** ***Paris by Night.***

Brassaï's photographs are compositions that adhere to his strict ideas on form, structure and balance. These compositional requirements worked against styles of photography that preferred, as he says, a kind of "pell-mell" stylistic randomness or spontaneity. Here he seems to be referring to the work of his contemporaries Cartier-Bresson and Weegee. Brassaï's dream Paris was not one developed from a chaotic vision of the world. Brassaï's generous and open personality, his fascination with all walks of life and unsurpassed ability to earn the trust of those he photographed, his refusal to pass judgment, criticize, condemn or promote a political agenda all attest to an aesthetic vision that was fundamentally integrative.

In closing, the underlying irony of Brassaï's attempts to erase himself from his photographs through the aesthetic manipulation of the photographic scene and the depiction of subjects in states of absorption or in positions that do not acknowledge the presence of a beholder, is apparent in the following statement. Brassaï writes:

> Something very strange has happened to [the photographer]: the more scrupulously he has respected the independence and autonomy of his subject, and the closer has he gone towards it instead of bringing it nearer to himself, the more completely has his own personality become incorporated in his pictures. *They betray his presence by a tone, a light, a familiar twist which it would be difficult to define.* And by restoring to nature the multitude of subjects of which he had plundered her, it seems as though he had given away part of his own personality—the best of himself—as if man were never so entirely himself as

> when he forgets himself completely and merges his individuality with the sum total of things in the universe (*Camera in Paris* 19).

As Brassaï realized, his presence as the photographer named Brassaï could not be erased from his photographs no matter how persistent he was in his attempts to do so. In fact his attempts, his aesthetic preferences and techniques thoroughly established and therefore, as he writes, *betray* his presence. He could not, no matter how scrupulous he was, maintain his incognito: his name, Brassaï (Hungarian for "from Brasso") is infused in his nighttime Parisian photographs as a distinctive aura. As Westerbeck observes, "The person we ultimately uncover lurking in the shadows among the thugs and swells, the prostitutes and their johns, the cops and gawkers, low life and high life, is the photographer himself" (34). The name Brassaï, etched in nearly invisible ink, became increasingly visible as his reputation grew following the publication of *Paris by Night*. It is an additional irony that Gyula Halasz became famous as the photographer named Brassaï as he assumed the *nom de plum* because he did not want to associate his birth name Halasz with his photographs, since initially he believed that photography was too mechanized and inferior to his passion for painting. And so the painter from Brasso, Transylvania, came to merge his personality with the city of Paris, the city of light and night, and became known, though uneasily, as "the poet with a camera" and "The Eye of Paris".

# Conclusion

The figure of the contra-*flâneur* I have presented in this thesis addresses a specific kind of first-person urban consciousness or perspective. I have purposely not attempted to specify the characteristics of this figure beyond the general "symptoms" of self-consciousness and a resulting desire for invisibility, of remaining or attempting to remain unidentifiable to the reader/viewer. As with the *flâneur*, there are potentially numerous subtle variations to the concept of the contra-*flâneur,* and therefore, the general formulation of the concept I have presented in this thesis is a starting point for further examination of the self-conscious urban perspective in various representational media. Though Sasha Jansen and Brassaï are both self-conscious, ultimately they are different types of contra *flâneur:* their desires for invisibility emerging from very different reactions to the urban world around them. Sasha is identifiable as a contra-*flâneur* most obviously by her fearful and paranoid behaviour, and less obviously so in the structure of the narrative itself in which she plays a game of hide-and-seek with the reader. Her theatrical narrative performance provides the reader with what seems to be substantial personal information; however, the reader is always kept at a distance and ultimately in the dark about who Sasha Jansen is. The vague details she provides about other characters, the world around her, and her final absorption into the most absorbed and ghostly character in the novel, all suggest that Sasha is unwilling to reveal her deepest self to the reader. Brassaï's contra-*flâneurie* is identifiable only in aesthetic terms—his behaviour as a photographer of nighttime Paris is that of the traditional Parisian *flâneur*—made recognizable through an examination of absorptive techniques that minimize his presence as a photographer/beholder in the photograph. Perhaps I have not been entirely convincing in establishing the contra-*flâneur* concept in relation to Brassaï's photographs; however, I do think that the dispossession of the self that the concept implies is a constitutive underlying element in the photographs discussed. This is especially so in the photographs in which Brassaï craftily inserts himself into the nocturnal world as one of the demimonde. As such, my argument that *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Paris by Night* can be connected and usefully interpreted through the concept of the contra-*flâneur* may not be entirely convincing. Irrespective of such ostensible weaknesses, I feel that Fried's critical framework is a useful one in negotiating both Rhys's first-person fictional narrative and Brassaï's photographic documentation of Paris, and would suggest that his concepts of beholding, theatricality and absorption can be extended to the examination of a range of texts and other representational media (self-reflexive narratives, autobiography, film to name a few), in ways that will illuminate the intricate dynamics that exist between narrator and reader, image/subject and viewer. One might ask how pervasive is self-consciousness in the artistic production of the inter-bellum period of the twentieth century? And how does this self-consciousness manifest itself in various modes of artistic expression? Are there notable differences between the "symptoms" of self-consciousness during this period of chronic uncertainty and trauma and earlier or later periods?

Moreover, I see this interdisciplinary thesis as being located in a field of intellectual contestation where the challenge of synthesis is implicit. The directions in which the discussion could have gone were multiple, and perhaps instead of indirectly addressing the intersection of, the similarities and contrasts between, narrative fiction and documentary photography in their representation of the city, these concerns might have formed a more central line of inquiry. However, this mode of interrogation regarding these two representational forms will wait, like undeveloped negatives, on the shelf. As such, my examination of *Good Morning, Midnight* and *Paris by Night* is a first step in the direction of a more in-depth critical examination of the urban environment in relation to narrative and photographic modes of representation. Can we really use general terms such as "narrative" and "photography" when speaking of the representational possibilities they hold, or can we only speak of "narrators" and "photographers"—in other words, subjective "beholders" and subjective cities?

## End Notes

1. Diderot's notion of "theatricality" is always used in a pejorative sense. Theatricality implies an unnaturalness in representation (theatre, painting etc) that is distasteful to a discerning viewer. A theatrical representation presents to the viewer a "grimace" that speaks of a mutual awareness between viewer and viewed that corrupts the innocence and candor of the representation.

2. The concept of the *flâneuse* has been discussed by critics such as Janet Wolff in "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity", and Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, "The *Flâneur* On and Off the Streets of Paris". They both argue that the *flâneuse* is not a viable socio-historical designation. For example, Parkhurst Ferguson writes: "In 1877 when Littré picks up a reference to a *flâneuse*, it is not the missing female *flâneur* that acquires lexicological legitimacy. The word occurs in an advertisement and turns out to refer to a chaise longue!" (in Keith Tester 32-33). Of course this interior fixity is opposite to the perambulating figure of the *flâneur* and interestingly Parsons neglects to mention in her book, *Streetwalking the Metropolis*, Parkhurst Ferguson's observation

3. See Parsons, Deborah. *Streetwalking the Metropolis,* 141.

4. See Graeme Gilloch's *Myth and Metropolis*. Gilloch writes that, "Benjamin's examination of the character of the city as it appears in memory (the remembered city) and that of memory as it appears in the city (urban memory) coalesce in his conceptualization of the monument, the edifice or structure erected in the city precisely to commemorate the past" (72).

5. There are arguably a dozen or so examples of absorption in *Paris by Night.* I am lumping together figures photographed while sleeping, kissing, working, reading, or otherwise engaged in a task. I do not include here photographs that maintain significant distance between photographer and subject. For example, shots taken from a vantage point, or through a window.

6. Here I am thinking of Walter Benjamin reference to Eugene Atget's photographs of empty Paris streets as "crime scenes" and his reference to Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram* in his book *The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire*, 38.

7. Of course the proliferation of digital technology and computer software that allows for the easy manipulation of the photographic image seriously undermines the veracity people once accorded to the photograph. We can no longer safely assume that, as Barthes says, "the thing has been there" in front of the lens.

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