

# Yom Kippur in Brooklyn (late 1930s)

*Richard J. Fein*

Fasting left a white film on my tongue, and the dark stores yielded a haunted blank on the weekday air, that afternoon lull between prayers when the men, and the women in their wide-meshed veils, went out strolling as if their bodies had no other purpose than testing the air, every store closed, their windows silent transparencies, brick facades absorbent, sidewalks a new stage for pedestrians, some clue of mutability inhering in those once-a-year afternoons even more strangely intimate than a Sunday's pre-sunset spell, as if we of the neighborhood had been transported somewhere, I allured by all those familiar adult faces now altered by this interval-atmosphere, and I had a glimpse of — of what? Structures of lives and their vanishings? A day when our neighborhood turned into an augmented vacancy.

I have the powers of abrupt memory and the tokens of description  
but not that boy's wonder at that day's suspended presence,  
that yearly day I sauntered with my parents, not a destination  
in sight, a pace to be kept, a purchase, an errand.  
I can conjure up speckled arabesques on the tip of an oxford,  
or the dark waxy snout on a fur stole draping a woman's shoulder,  
but cannot enter the threshold-air of those Yom Kippur  
afternoons on my streets — void of business, school, prayer

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