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SPECIAL REPORT

By Alan Shapiro

Fever Streets

Dream Scenery from the City

A black and white photograph of a park path lined with bare trees and a fence, with reflections in a wet surface. The trees are tall and leafless, their branches creating a complex web against a pale sky. A dark wooden fence runs along the path, and a street lamp is visible in the distance. The foreground shows a wet, reflective surface, possibly a puddle or a wet path, mirroring the trees and the sky.

SPECIAL REPORT

that Never Sleeps

What I remember most vividly about my first visit to New York City in the early summer of 1968 was looking up at the sky as I walked from the Trailways Bus Terminal over to Fifth Avenue. I had come from Boston to see my brother, who had a small role in an off-Broadway musical. I saw myself as a city kid, so I felt ready enough for the densely crowded streets, the shrill knots of traffic, and even the half-exhilarating, half-terrifying sense of freedom in this place where no one knew me, and where nothing I did would matter to anyone.

All that day I walked. I kept on walking. There was something in the city itself that wouldn't let me stop—in the flashes of midtown sky; in the grand display windows; the snatches of languages, of conversations I overheard at corners where people jostled as they massed together waiting for the light to change. I felt the abrasive rhythms of people going into and out of doorways, in and out of taxis, dawdling or hurrying, all carried along within the separate yet interweaving channels of their desires, until the city seemed like a fever dream, an inchoate longing for excitement, for longing itself. Everything was too much and not enough, elusive and all pervasive, immediate and out of reach.



Rosenthal's photographs of crowded



streets are spacious with loneliness as well as possibility.

The city seemed like a fever dream, an inchoate longing...



for longing itself.



John Rosenthal grew up in New York and has had solo shows at the Panopticon Gallery of Boston; the National Academy of Sciences in Washington D.C.; the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland; and the New Orleans African-American Museum. His essays and photography have appeared in various journals and periodicals including *ARTVU*, *New Orleans Magazine*, *Habitus*, *Kenyon Review*, *Five Points*, *The Sun Magazine*, *Spiritus*, *The New Orleans Magazine*, *The New York Magazine*, *Key West Review*, *NCArts*, *The Arts Journal* and *In Brief*, *Short Takes On The Personal*. During the 1990s Rosenthal aired 70 commentaries on NPR's *All Things Considered* and in 2003 he provided the narration and 85 photographs for *The Morrison Project*, winner of the Best Documentary at the 2003 Hamptons International Film Festival. A collection of Rosenthal's New York photographs, *Regarding Manhattan*, was published by Safe Harbor Books in 1998.



John Rosenthal









Alan Shapiro is the author of 10 volumes of poetry, the most recent of which are *Old War* (2008), *Tantalus in Love* (2005) and *Song and Dance* (2002), all published by Houghton Mifflin; two prizewinning memoirs, *The Last Happy Occasion* and *Vigil* (University of Chicago, 1997); *In Praise of the Impure: Poetry and the Ethical Imagination: Essays, 1980-1991* (Northwestern University, 1993); and a translation of *The Oresteia* (Oxford University, 2004). Shapiro wrote the introduction to John Rosenthal's book *Regarding Manhattan* (Sunapee Editions, 1988), from which this essay is adapted.

