

## Cours de Ph. Romanski

Paul Auster, *City of Glass* (1985)

At the corner of 72nd Street and Madison Avenue, he waved down a cab. As the car rattled through the park toward the West Side, Quinn looked out the window and wondered if these were the same trees that Peter Stillman saw when he walked out into the air and the light. He wondered if Peter saw the same things he did, or whether the world was a different place for him. And if a tree was not a tree, he wondered what it really was.

After the cab had dropped him off in front of his house, Quinn realized that he was hungry. He had not eaten since breakfast early that morning. It was strange, he thought, how quickly time had passed in the Stillman apartment. If his calculations were correct, he had been there for more than fourteen hours. Within himself, however, it felt as though his stay had lasted three or four hours at most. He shrugged at the discrepancy and said to himself, "I must learn to look at my watch more often."

He retraced his path along 107th Street, turned left on Broadway, and began walking uptown, looking for a suitable place to eat. A bar did not appeal to him tonight—eating in the dark, the press of boozy chatter—although normally he might have welcomed it. As he crossed 112th Street, he saw that the Heights Luncheonette was still open and decided to go in. It was a brightly lit yet dreary place, with a large rack of girlie magazines on one wall, an area for stationery supplies, another area for newspapers, several tables for patrons, and a long Formica counter with swivel stools. A tall Puerto Rican man in a white cardboard chef's hat stood behind the counter. It was his job to make the food, which consisted mainly of gristle-

studded hamburger patties, bland sandwiches with pale tomatoes and wilted lettuce, milkshakes, egg creams, and buns. To his right, ensconced behind the cash register, was the boss, a small balding man with curly hair and a concentration camp number tattooed on his forearm, lording it over his domain of cigarettes, pipes, and cigars. He sat there impassively, reading the night-owl edition of the next morning's *Daily News*.

The place was almost deserted at that hour. At the back table sat two old men in shabby clothes, one very fat and the other very thin, intently studying the racing forms. Two empty coffee cups sat on the table between them. In the foreground, facing the magazine rack, a young student stood with an open magazine in his hands, staring at a picture of a naked woman. Quinn sat down at the counter and ordered a hamburger and a coffee. As the counterman swung into action, he spoke over his shoulder to Quinn.

"Did you see the game tonight, man?"

"I missed it. Anything good to report?"

"What do you think?"

For several years Quinn had been having the same conversation with this man, whose name he did not know. Once, when he had been in the luncheonette, they had talked about baseball, and now, each time Quinn came in, they continued to talk about it. In the winter, the talk was of trades, predictions, memories. During the season, it was always the most recent game. They were both Mets fans, and the hopelessness of that passion had created a bond between them.

The counterman shook his head. "First two times up, Kingman hits solo shots," he said. "Boom, boom. Big mothers—all the way to the moon. Jones is pitching good for once and things don't look too bad. It's two to one, bottom of the ninth. Pittsburgh gets men on second and third, one out, so the Mets go to the bullpen for Allen. He walks the next guy to load them up. The Mets bring the corners in for a force at home, or maybe they can get the double play if it's hit up the middle. Peña comes up and chicken-shits a little grounder to first and the fucker goes through Kingman's legs. Two men score, and that's it, bye-bye New York."