In the eighth chapter of the book of Matthew, Jesus travels in the land of the Gadarenes, where he is confronted by two men possessed by demons (daimonisomenous), who have come from the tombs of the dead. “Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” they ask Jesus, in the King James translation. In the next verse Matthew makes it clear that it is the demons (daimones) themselves, speaking through the possessed, who beseech Jesus: “If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.” Jesus casts the demons from the men into the herd of swine, who then, seized with frenzy, rush headlong into the sea to perish in the waters (Matt. 8:28–32). For our purposes, this episode is emblematic for more than one reason. First, it gives a local habitation and a name to the demonic. If the demons inhabit the men, the men possessed by demons inhabit the tombs of the dead (mnemeion), like their counterparts in Mark 5:1 and Luke 8:27. In Luke, the man long beset by demons wears no clothes, nor does he live in any house, but “in the tombs.” The habitations of the possessed are places of concealment, but they are also, perhaps not incidentally, monuments to the dead. If we consider that the precincts of the tombs are the ritualized and architecturally constructed space of ancestral memory, these scenes from the New Testament take place as if there were a hidden demonic possession within the space of memory itself, so that, metaphorically, the emergence of the possessed from out of the tombs...
figures as the unveiling of a terrible secret. The possessed who interpellate Jesus represent a kind of return of the repressed from the depths of cultural and tribal memory.

The biblical passage also shows us that in the Christian dispensation, the ancient Greek notion of the *daimon*, which Homer used to denote a divine being, has been degraded to the status of an evil spirit. From a modern perspective we can see this as an intermediate stage in the evolving relation between the demonic and the human. Homer’s *daimon* was a divinity, independent of mortal being. Matthew’s *daimon* inhabits men in the form of an evil or unclean spirit, but only in a relation of exteriority to the human; the *daimon* may speak through the person it possesses, but it can also be cast out. Modern literature brings us to the final stage of this evolution: demons no longer inhabit or possess human beings; they are human, and the space of demonic habitation is the world as constructed by human beings.

In this chapter I want to show a number of different ways in which modern writers make a space for the demonic in the constructed world. The three writers I have chosen belong, respectively, to the past three centuries of the modern era, each having a conception of the demonic that reflects a particular historical context within the larger framework of modernity. Insofar as the constructed world of modernity is the concrete manifestation of human will and desire in an age of rational enlightenment, the manner in which the demonic inhabits this world has the function of calling into question the precise nature of that enlightenment. The implicit question posed is not so much whether the post-Enlightenment world continues to be haunted by uncanny forces that defy rational understanding. Rather, it is a question of whether the increasing dominance of reason does not reveal, the more completely it prevails, the secret space of the demonic at its center. The quite different ways in which this question is negotiated by the literary works I propose to examine here reflect a plurality of responses to a common preoccupation that is symptomatic of modern literature in general.

From an architectural perspective, the notion of demonic spaces raises the question of architecture’s ethical function. The question is inherited from Vitruvius, who stressed the importance of moral philosophy in the architect’s formation and the essential propriety of architectural form in its relation to nature and use (Book I, chapter 2). In the modern period this question takes on a degree of urgency such that both Ruskin and Adolf
Loos speak of crime in architecture and Giedion devotes one of his chapters to “The Demand for Morality in Architecture.” Karsten Harries begins his *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (1997) by asking, “Should architecture not continue to help us find our place and way in an ever more disorienting world?” He defines the function in question as that of architecture’s task to help articulate a common ethos, a way for human beings to exist in the world (4). The ethical function of architecture is that of a concrete interpretation of the question “how to live.” I shall argue that the presence of demonic spaces in the modern literary imagination can be understood as symptomatic of the lack of any reassuring answer to this question.

Among the dynamics already present in Matthew is one that proves essential to the demonic spaces that lie at the center of the Marquis de Sade’s narrative in *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu* (1791): that of concealment. In Sade, the demonic takes the form of the instinctual violence of human passions, which require a space of secrecy in order to be fully unleashed. In psychoanalytic terms, such spaces can be compared to the mechanisms that seal the subject off from the realm of the real in order to give full rein to the delirium of sadistic fantasy. One of the many trials of Justine begins when, having escaped from the tortures of the surgeon Rodin, she seeks refuge at Sainte-Marie-des-Bois, a Benedictine monastery hidden in the midst of a vast forest somewhere south of Auxerre. In the church attached to the monastery, the monk Dom Severino receives her confession and, on discovering that she has no protectors, seizes her for service in the seraglio of the monastery. Justine is taken behind the altar into the sacristy and from there through a secret door into a dark and narrow passageway. Inside this passage, she is driven through “détours dont rien ne peut me faire connaître ni le local, ni les issues,” labyrinthine passages that made it impossible to know either the place she was in or the way out. In the course of this subterranean transfer, the monk stops her from time to time in order to perform preludes to the acts of sodomy to which she will henceforth be subjected daily. In this way, her introduction to the mysteries of the institution through a secret tunnel corresponds to the penetration of her own body through the orifice that one of her earlier tormentors has referred to as “l’antre obscur” and “le temple le plus secret,” the dark lair and most secret temple (92–93). Sade registers the experience of the constructed environment as itself obscenely erotic, based on certain elements that this environment has in common with the architecture of the human body. The analogy between body and building follows, however perversely,
in the tradition of architectural discourse dating from Vitruvius, which understands and measures the built environment according to the proportions of the human body.

At the end of the tunnel, Justine finds herself in a hidden annex, which is revealed to her as the site of the monks’ orgiastic rituals. It is a building of four stories, half underground and surrounded by a concentric series of six hedges thick enough to conceal it entirely from any exterior view. A deep, circular ditch renders it even more secure from those who might wish to enter or escape. The principles of isolation and concealment are repeated inside the structure: Justine and her fellow captives are held in isolated cells and can communicate with one another only at the monks’ pleasure. When, after several months of captivity, Justine finally escapes, she is able for the first time to look from the outside in, through the windows of the floor below the one to which she has been confined. It is at this point that she discovers, to her and the reader’s horror, another scene of debauchery, identical in kind to those in which she has been forced to take part, but with other young women, until now unseen by and unknown to her and her companions: “d’autres malheureuses inconnues de nous” (other sufferers unknown to us). To the principles of confinement and isolation, Sade adds that of spatial repetition corresponding to the temporal repetition of orgiastic ritual.

In her notes to the Gallimard edition of Justine, Noëlle Châtelet points out that the monastery is the perfect site for Sade’s immorality. As a religious institution, it is the ideal place for sacrilege, so that the very objects of the sacrament are here made instruments of torture and debauchery. Moreover, as an ordered and enclosed space, it lends itself to the staging of erotic rituals of the kind that Justine and her female companions suffer at the hands of the monks. Sade’s choice of a monastery for these scenes can also be read as a phantasmic vision of the Church’s doctrinal and historical mortification of the human body, especially in its monastic tradition. It is as if the Crucifixion had to be reenacted on an endless series of sacrificial innocents and reinterpreted in an endless series of erotic variations in a frenzied desire to feel the full weight of its meaning, both for the crucifier and the crucified. However, if one asks, as Justine does, how men could abandon themselves to such depravity, the answer is to be found not merely in the libertine tastes of the monks but also in the architectural form of the monastery. The strange tastes of the monks may be the cause of their vice, but the equally strange design of their habitation—unseen,
unknown—is the condition necessary to its full indulgence. More than this, Sade implicitly poses the question of the natural consequences of human power and desire in a space whose absolute secrecy confers absolute freedom on those who to whom it belongs. The concealed and buried seraglio is an architectural figure for the demonic unconscious in its unbridled freedom to make happen whatever it desires.

The difficulty in reading Sade is that any ethical perspective on his world is both anticipated and opposed by the force of violence, which, in Sade’s thinking, lies at the heart of reason. This problem applies to the ethics of architecture, which in his work is reduced to the function of serving the logic of power and desire. Sade’s hidden prisons and underground horror chambers are reminiscent of Piranesi’s *carceri*: both architectural imaginations destabilize the classical values according to which the construction of a building reflected the ideal nature of human society. Nonetheless, Sade’s design for Sainte-Marie-des-Bois, like that of the Château de Silling in *Les Cent vingt journées de Sodome*, corresponds to an eighteenth-century debate over truth and ethics in architecture. Theorists such as Jacques-François Blondel had elaborated the notion of *caractère* or the expressive function of a building as distinct from its purely utilitarian function: *caractère* “announces the building to be what it is” (2:229). Thus, for Blondel, the proper character of a temple is that of *décence*, of public buildings *grandeur*, of monuments *somptuosité*, of promenades *élégance*, and so on. The architectural style of a building is “true” when it conforms to its natural expressive function, or *caractère*. Alongside this essentially classicist doctrine, Marc-Antoine Laugier developed a theory based on a Rousseauian vision of a benevolent Nature as the model for all human constructions. The primitive hut is the original and truest of shelters, from which all architectural principles must be derived. Architectural crimes, then, are those that deceive, such as the pilaster, which presents the false appearance of a column. This conforms to a later formulation by the English architect John Soane, a contemporary of Sade, for whom every building “should express clearly its destination and its character, marked in the most decided and indisputable manner” (126). Whether judged by the theories of Blondel or Laugier, Sade’s imagined buildings would have been deeply troubling to architectural theorists of his own time because, part of their function being to conceal themselves and the truth of their functions, these buildings place in opposition to each other the normally inseparable principles of truth and function. On one hand, the monastery of Sainte-
Marie-des-Bois is perfectly functional, if one admits that its true function is that of imprisonment, torture, and rape. On the other hand, its deceitful appearance as a place of spiritual refuge, its secret passages, and the concealment of its monstrous prison-cum-pleasure dome—all of these make it, from the classical perspective, an architectural crime as well as a place of demonic transgression. In the wider historical context, Sade’s spaces register the uncertainty of architecture’s ethical function in a social world in which such notions as character, grandeur, decency, and truth no longer have the meanings assigned to them by classical value.

Roland Barthes has pointed out that architectural closure in Sade serves the practical purposes of isolation, but also that the utter secrecy produced by this isolation produces its own sensual thrill, a volupté based on the momentary desocialization of crime (20), on the pleasure derived from committing crimes in the knowledge of absolute impunity. Within the confines of his secured space, the Sadean figure is free to act without restraint and without limits—without meaning, even, if meaning implies the need to answer for one’s words and actions to the other, to some coherent symbolic order. One of the many paradoxes of Sade’s work, however, is that his demonic utopia of unrestraint, though predicated on an ideal isolation from the social world, reveals itself to be wholly preoccupied with the conditions of his own time and place. It is no accident that Sade wrote the manuscript of *Justine* in a prison cell of the Bastille: his text serves in large measure as a nightmare version of the ancien régime. We know as well that, for at least the years 1792–93, during the height of the Terror, Sade displayed a great deal of republican fervor as president of the revolutionary *section des Piques*. The sadistic monks of *Justine*, members of the richest and most powerful families of the ancien régime, seem designed to fuel revolutionary hysteria in general and anticlericalism in particular; they could only add to the reputation of provocateur that Sade had gained during the storming of the Bastille when he harangued the crowd, falsely crying out that the guards were slashing the throats of his fellow prisoners (Bataille, *La littérature* 122).

It has been pointed out more than once that Sade is at best an ambiguous spokesman for revolutionary ideals. Georges Bataille sees the scene of the Bastille as a sign of Sade’s fascination with the unchained passion of the crowd. For him, revolutionary ideology is only an alibi here for the destructive impulse lying at the heart of Sade’s work: his desire is to destroy not just the object-world and its victims but also himself and his own work. In contrast to the good news brought by the Gospel,
Son œuvre porte la mauvaise nouvelle d’un accord des vivants à ce qui les tue, du Bien avec le Mal et l’on pourrait dire: du cri le plus fort avec le silence. (118)

*His work brings the bad news of a pact between the living and what it is that kills them, of Good with Evil, and, one might say, of the most piercing scream with silence.*

Writing on this subject six years after Bataille, Blanchot also cautions against identifying Sade too closely with the Revolution: if Sade saw himself in the Revolution, it was only to the extent that by overturning one law after another, the Revolution for a time represented the possibility of a lawless regime (*Lautréamont et Sade* 24). However, the ambiguity of Sade’s writing is such that it can neither be fully identified with nor fully distinguished from the ideology of the Revolution. On one hand, Sade is quoted as saying that the reign of law is inferior to that of anarchy. On the other hand, the interminable discourses that accompany Sade’s scenes of cruelty and domination are entirely preoccupied with the fundamental concerns of revolutionary thought and the motives of revolutionary destruction: power, freedom, the laws of nature, and the pursuit of happiness. One of the many paradoxes of Sade’s work is that these values are defended by fictional characters who, historically speaking, belong to the feudal and monastic orders of the ancien régime. In fact Sade’s anarchic impulses are directed both against the ancien régime and against the Enlightenment ideals of the Revolution, insofar as the rational order of the Enlightenment represses the instinctive energies of the human while it conceals this same repression. Here Sade has certain affinities with William Blake, for whom, in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “Energy is the only life and is from the Body.” Sade’s philosophy is elaborated in relation to contemporary theories concerning liberty and the equality of individuals before nature and the law, but without the categorical imperative that, according to Kant, should determine a consciousness of right and wrong. It is as if Sade wished to expose the Kantian moral imperative as a mask that concealed the destructive forces of an unbridled rational mastery of nature that he saw as a consequence of the Revolution and its industrial counterpart. But Sade’s thinking is like the chapel that, seen from another angle, becomes a prison: it is strangely anamorphic. In his philosophy there is no place for what Blake calls Soul, and for this reason the elaborate machinery of Sadean imprisonment and torture, as well as the total objectification of its victims as both the raw material and the laborers in this machinery,
prefigures the social and philosophical conditions of modernity that will be more explicitly, if more sentimentally, exposed in Dickens.

The monk ironically named Father Clément is a perfect representative of this rationality. After having worked himself into a lather by whipping Justine, Father Clément explains to her that nothing is more natural than this subjugation of her body to his desires, however strange they may seem to her.

Lorsque, préférant son bonheur à celui des autres, [l’homme] renverse où détruit tout ce qu’il trouve dans son passage, a-t-il fait autre chose que servir la nature dont les premières et les plus sûres inspirations lui dictent de se rendre heureux, n’importe au dépens de qui? (244)

When, putting his own happiness above that of others, man overturns or destroys everything in his way, has he done anything other than to serve nature, whose primary and surest inspiration tells him to make himself happy, no matter at whose expense?

Sade’s peculiar idea of liberty is that human equality gives every person the right to pursue his own desires regardless of the cost to others, with the understanding that he assumes the risks of such a course of action; liberty is the power to subjugate others to one’s will. The actual practice of this philosophy in Justine, however, has certain architectural requirements. As Dom Severino tells the novel’s heroine:

Jetez votre regard sur l’asile impénétrable où vous êtes; jamais aucun mortel ne parut dans ces lieux; le couvent sera pris, fouillé, brûlé, que cette retraite ne s’en découvrira davantage: c’est un pavillon isolé, enterré, que six murs d’une incroyable épaisseur environnent de toutes parts. (192–93)

Cast an eye over the impenetrable asylum where you find yourself; never has an outsider appeared within these premises; the monastery could be taken, searched, and burned down, while this retreat would still remain undiscovered: this is a buried and isolated pavilion surrounded on all sides by six walls of unbelievable thickness.

Severino’s assertion that no outsider has ever penetrated the precincts is later supplemented by Omphale, Justine’s fellow prisoner, who concludes her more detailed description of the prison with the words “la mort seule rompt ici nos liens” (only death breaks our bonds here) (195). Omphale,
who is in a position to know, explains that this inescapability guarantees for the monks absolute impunity for their actions, which, because they are unpunishable neither in this world nor the next, no longer have the name of sin. It is precisely this absolute impunity that inflames the monks’ imaginations and incites them to cruelty and tyranny.

The testimonies of both Severino and Omphale recall the scene in the *Inferno* where Guido da Montefeltro, one of the “evil counselors,” takes Dante for one of the damned, since “già mai di questo fondo / non tornò vivo alcun” (never from these depths has anyone returned alive) (xvii:62–63). The similarities between the fictional space of Dom Severino’s pavilion and that of the Inferno itself—another concentrically walled, buried series of torture chambers, has much to suggest concerning the medieval aspect of Sade’s imagination and the feudal world from which he emerged. In Guido’s case the absolute inescapability of hell, as in Severino’s the absolute impenetrability of the *pavillon*, allows for a complete and fearless freedom of expression. In the event, Severino’s account will turn out to be a slightly exaggerated description of his building’s inescapability. But an imagined architecture serves his purposes just as well as a real one: it is enough for Justine to believe in the utter impossibility of her deliverance to make her the perfect object of her tormentor’s *jouissance*.

In her relentless innocence and her role as perpetual victim, Justine can be compared to the character of Little Nell in Charles Dickens’s early novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841). Both young heroines are homeless, both are wanderers, and both are sacrificed to the powers of a world that reduces human beings to the status of objects. However, in Dickens’s novel, the space of the demonic is inspired not by the feudal and monastic orders of the ancien régime but by the ravages of capital, which take concrete form in the urban industrial landscape. In this landscape there is no place for Nell and her old father, both of whom are exiled from a more humane object-world of the past, that of the old curiosity shop. This shop, with its ancient suits of mail, fantastic carvings, tapestry, and strange furniture “that might have been designed in dreams” (14), has a more aesthetic and human significance than any commercial importance. It is particularly related to the baroque aesthetic of the Renaissance *Wunderkammer* or “cabinet of curiosities,” where objects were related to one another as respective emblems of the wonders of God’s creation. The old curiosity shop is thus a vestige of a premodern world in which objects, nature, and human history held in common a universal meaning.

The difference between the old shop and the newly forged world into
which Nell and her father are thrown corresponds to the antithetical scenes of A. W. Pugin’s *Contrasts* (1841), a polemical work of architectural theory that juxtaposes images of medieval England with those of the Victorian industrial environment. Pugin’s paired etchings show England “before” and “after” it was reduced to an industrial wasteland. For example, on one hand is shown a “Catholic town of 1440,” with its dreaming spires and echoing greens; on the facing page, this is pictorially opposed to “The Same Town in 1840,” a place of dark satanic mills, soot-blackened air, and polluted streams (105). Pugin’s book has a strongly moral and religious tone: for him, the Gothic architecture of the Middle Ages was the spontaneous expression of Christian revelation, whereas the tenements and factory chimneys of the present testify to the decline of authentic (Catholic) moral and religious values. Although Dickens is no Catholic and is not the polemicist that Pugin is, his novel tends to confirm Pugin’s sense that the Industrial Revolution is the modern form of the demonic. The architect’s “after” images could have served to illustrate certain scenes from *The Old Curiosity Shop*. In one such scene, Nell and her father seek shelter in “a large and lofty building, supported by pillars of iron,” which houses an industrial forge. An infernal din arises from “the beating of hammers and roar of furnaces,” while

in this gloomy place, moving like demons among the flame and smoke,
dimly and fitfully seen, flushed and tormented by the burning fires,
and wielding great weapons, . . . a number of men laboured like giants.

(329–30)

One of the furnaces burns perpetually, watched day and night by a man who has spent his entire life with no other aim. Dickens’s illustrator, George Cattermole, shows him as a haggard, wild-eyed figure, mesmerized by the flames of an industrial hell, as Nell bends over him in an attitude of mute interrogation (fig. 3). In contrast to the Gothic cathedrals admired by Pugin and Ruskin, Dickens’s industrial mill is a kind of anticathedral: large and lofty, but with pillars of iron instead of stone, filled with deafening noise and gloom instead of silence and light. At the center of its rituals, there is not the altar but a furnace fire, tended by a strange devotee who confides in Nell, “Such as I, pass all our lives before our furnace doors, and seldom go forth to breathe.” The repast he shares with his visitors is not the consecrated bread and wine of the host, but “a scanty mess of coffee and coarse bread” (332). In his duties the furnace watcher resembles the “filles
de garde” (girls of the watch) in Sade’s monastic prison; each of them must stand watch day and night over one of the monks, ready at any moment to administer to his caprices. In other respects as well, Sade’s universe prefigures the industrial system of labor: the women of the monastery are in fact highly regulated sex workers who conform to a strict spatial and temporal regimen in which even the gestures by which they gratify the monks’ desires are made uniform and repetitious.

In an essay on *The Old Curiosity Shop* written in the early 1930s, Adorno finds that its strongly allegorical quality belongs to a “dispersed baroque” aesthetic, a “prebourgeois form” in Dickens’s novels that serves to “dissolve the very bourgeois world that they depict” (*Notes 2:171–72*). In other words, Dickens’s universe contains vestiges of a world in which the individual has not yet attained either full autonomy or the isolation that goes with it; the destiny of the fictional character is determined not by individual psychology but by a fate tied, however obscurely, to the objective nature of the world itself. This essentially “baroque” world is dispersed...
throughout Dickens’s work as a ghostly presence. According to this reading, social reality in Dickens is not merely represented; it is invested with the mythical power of the demonic. By retaining a premodern sense of estrangement from the modern world, Dickens is able to convey the horror of social reality without resigning himself to it as the natural order of things. This is what distinguishes Dickens from a merely naturalist writer like Zola. What Adorno calls Dickens’s “dispersed baroque” can also be described in terms of narrative technique, as the contrast in Dickens between a naturalist background and a surface narrative composed in the register of the fantastic. Although Raymond Williams rightly remarks that Dickens was able to perceive “the critically altered relationship between men and things, of which the city was the most social and visual embodiment” (163–64), this is not what makes the particularity of Dickens. What needs to be added to this reading is a recognition of the allegorical nature of realism that in Dickens is pushed to the limits of the surreal. Dickens’s urban landscape is not just modern and realistic; it is a timeless space of desolation, a “cheerless region,” where

Dismantled houses here and there appeared, tottering to the earth, propped up by fragments of others that had fallen down, unroofed, windowless, blackened, desolate, but yet inhabited. (335)

Moving through this space of ruined habitation, Nell and her father appear as a dark parody of Dante and Virgil touring hell; in this respect they are allegorical figures of the second degree, as the persons of the Divina Commedia are already allegorical. Against Dante the pilgrim Dickens puts Nell the wanderer. Dante is accompanied by Virgil, spirit of reason; Nell by her father, beset with madness. But there is no Beatrice to watch over Nell. Her destination is a lost paradise: the place where she dies is an ancient tenement attached to a Gothic church; but its oriel windows and stone arches have fallen into ruin and are fast being reclaimed by the surrounding vegetation. In his nineteenth-century rewriting of the Inferno, Dickens is able to revive an ancient sense of the demonic by allegorizing the modern object-world as the concrete manifestation of evil, created by the spirit of capital.

If Dickens’s oppressive mills are the modern manifestations of capital or, more precisely, the sites of production in the industrial capitalist order, he chooses, curiously, to allegorize the spirit of capital in a premodern and even folkloric figure. In The Old Curiosity Shop, this spirit is personified by Daniel Quilp, the malicious moneylender whom Dickens calls a dwarf.
Adorno argues that Quilp is more accurately called a kobold: a mischievous familiar spirit who haunts houses or lives underground, a gnome. As such, the figure of Quilp allows us to see the origins of modernity in a figure out of fairy tale who, like Nell and her father, has been surpassed by the world in which it survives as an uncanny remainder of the past. The habitations of this spirit are flimsy, precarious structures: Quilp stays in a moldy cabin where he sleeps in a hammock, and where, as he says, “I can be quite alone when I have business on hand, and be secure from all spies and listeners” (373). He entertains his rare visitors at a place called the Wilderness, a wooden summer house “in an advanced state of decay, and overlooking the slimy banks of a great river at low water” (381). This is the imagery that Eliot will later employ in *The Waste Land* (1922) as symptomatic of a modern spiritual wilderness. In Dickens, the leaking, weather-blown habitations of Quilp suggest that, if the means of production of modern capital are powerful enough to create a modern Inferno, the spirit of capital nonetheless remains poor—poor in spirit, badly housed in a world created after its own image. Quilp is but an early version of that weightier, more modern Dickensian capitalist Paul Dombey (in *Dombey and Son*, 1848), whose bourgeois mansion crumbles around him in a stony allegory of his own spiritual desolation. The fate of all of these characters, however, is determined by their relative power to master an object-world that takes its toll on the human through poverty, homelessness, disease, and starvation: suffering on a much greater scale than that inflicted by Sade’s torturers. Nell is powerless in the face of this newly demonic character of the world. This fatal powerlessness is signaled early in the novel, when Quilp turns her and her father out of their home: “There were some trifles there—poor useless things—that she would have liked to take away, but that was impossible.” Adorno remarks on this passage, “Because she is not able to take hold of the object-world of the bourgeois sphere, the object-world seizes hold of her, and she is sacrificed” (2:177).

In Sade and Dickens we are given, on one hand, a vision of the demonic inspired by the architectural spaces of the Church and, on the other, an equally demonic vision inspired by the architecture of modern industrial production. By adding Kafka to this scheme, we obtain a threefold vision of the demonic spaces of modernity: historically, they range through the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries; institutionally, they implicate the Church, bourgeois capital, and the state; architecturally, they are figured in the monastery, the factory mill, and the Castle as bureaucratic office space.
Kafka is close enough in spirit to Dickens, to his sense of the uncanny and to the ghostly presence of the dispersed baroque, to want to mark his distance from the older writer. In a notebook entry of 1917 he complains of Dickens’s extreme prodigality and the barbarous impression created by the “extravagant ensemble” (unsinnigen Ganzen) of Dickens’s novel, qualities that Kafka himself has been able to avoid, he says, thanks to his relative lack of vigor and his status as an imitator (Epigon) (Tägebucher 841). But the obvious difference in style is symptomatic of a more substantial difference between Dickens and Kafka concerning what might be called the ontological condition of the demonic. For if Dickens has transported elements of the premodern baroque universe into the modern industrial world, he does so in order to redefine the demonic in terms of the inhuman social conditions created by that world.

The meaning of Dickens’s allegory is thus relatively clear, whereas Kafka presents us with something else entirely. Benjamin observes that Kafka’s writing takes the form of a parable, like the story of Jesus and the demons in the land of the Gadarenes. But unlike the parable, the meaning of Kafka’s stories does not unfold for us; we do not have the doctrine, if there is one, that is being interpreted (Benjamin, Illuminations 122). There is an unbridgeable gap in Kafka between material form and doctrine, and this accounts for the sense of impenetrability that Kafka rehearses as an element of his fictional universe. In contrast to the figures that inhabit Dickens’s work, however ghostly and uncanny they may be, Kafka’s fictional universe implies a much more enigmatic relation of the demonic to the human and object worlds. The nature of this enigma has been defined in various ways. Roberto Calasso remarks that Kafka finds his narrative substance in an archaic state of being that precedes the separation of demons from gods (54), that is to say, before the symbolic repartition of being into the ontological distinctions necessary to assign meaning, or even to formulate a doctrine of good and evil. Benjamin says something similar by observing that “laws and definite norms remain unwritten in [Kafka’s] prehistoric world” (Illuminations 114). Such observations go a good way toward explaining the way things in Kafka are both familiar and strikingly other, but how can we take into account the specific modernity of Kafka’s work? In order to do so, we need to consider the degree to which Kafka was instinctively in tune with, and even in advance of, the philosophical currents of his own time, especially those concerning ontology, the question of being.

My reading of demonic spaces in Kafka starts from a passage in Hei-
degger’s *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) that specifically addresses the condition of Europe in the twentieth century. This condition is characterized by what Heidegger calls *Entmachtung*, the destitution of the human spirit (*Geist*): the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of the people into the masses, the disintegration of spiritual forces, the refusal of any original questioning of the fundamentals of being, and finally, the concealment and denial of this state of affairs (*Einführung* 49). Somewhat cryptically, Heidegger attributes this disintegration of spirit to the invasion of what he calls the demonic (das Dämonische) in the sense of a destructive malevolence (zerstörerisch Bösartigen). A problem for readers of Heidegger has been that he does not name the source of this demonic malevolence toward the human spirit. Derrida, however, finds this source in Heidegger’s very conception of spirit, which is capable of a torment that turns it against itself: the spirit is double and therefore capable of destroying itself (*De l’esprit* 102). The demonic, which in antiquity stood for an intermediate form of being between the human and the gods, is now that which confounds and obscures the real relation between consciousness and being. As Ned Lukacher puts the matter in his Heideggerian reading of Shakespeare, the demonic is “the figure for the incontrovertible ghostliness, the familiar strangeness, that dwells between the perceptions and reflections of consciousness and the enigmatic ground of Being itself”(2). This space of the demonic, as the unbridgeable gap between consciousness and being, is the space occupied by Kafka’s writing.

While Heidegger’s notion of the demonic provides a historical and metaphysical context for the conditions of Kafka’s writing, my own reading of Kafka takes place on a more practical level, where the terms of consciousness and being are replaced by those of meaning and material form. More precisely, I wish to show that in Kafka there is a studied lack of fit between what things are, materially, and what they mean, in functional or symbolic terms, and that this lack is made manifest in the figuration of architectural space. The consequences of this lack, moreover, are a generalized sense of homelessness, an absence of shelter in every sense of the word.

Kafka often described his own writing in architectural terms. A notebook passage written in 1922, at a moment when his progress in writing *The Castle* was at a standstill, begins with the statement, “Das Schreiben versagt sich mir” (writing refuses itself to me). He then speaks of his writing as a process of construction (*aufbauen*) but in a way that also makes this a construction of the self. I want to construct myself (*will ich mich*...
dann aufbauen), says Kafka, like someone who has an unsafe house and who wants to build a new one next to it by using the materials of the old house. But it is bad (schlimm) if while he is doing so his strength gives out, so that now instead of having an unsafe but fully built house, he has one that is half destroyed and another only half built, and so nothing (Nachgelassene 2:373).²

The first thing to notice about this passage is the degree of intimacy between writing and the self, as if only through the constructive process of writing could Kafka himself come into being, not just as a writer but as a human being. The second thing is that Kafka is testifying to a kind of spiritual homelessness. The metaphor of the unsafe (unsicher) house suggests that, fundamentally, his being lacks a secure shelter and that in attempting to construct a new one through writing he risks losing whatever meager shelter he had to begin with. The constructive process of writing is therefore, paradoxically, a leap into the void because for its materials it must deconstruct the unstable architecture of a prior mode of being, with the danger that the very process of this deconstruction will exhaust the writer’s resources for beginning anew. Earlier Kafka spoke of his weakness (Schwache) compared to Dickens, while here he compares himself to a builder whose strength gives out (Kraft aufhört). It is as if Kafka saw his role as a writer as one of giving testimony not just to his own homelessness but to the spiritual destitution that Heidegger would later define as symptomatic of an entire civilization. The problem for Kafka is that this fatigue, this destitution, has robbed him of the strength necessary for the task of self-reconstruction. In the notebook passage on the two houses, what follows the destitution of the builder is an insanity (Irrsinn), which Kafka compares to a Cossack dance between the two houses in which the Cossack’s boot heels scrape and throw up so much earth that his grave takes form beneath him. This frenzied Cossack dance is the demonic figure for Kafka’s own writing, inscribed in the empty space between unbuilding and building, the unsafe and exposed space of shelterlessness.

The Castle (Das Schloss, 1926) becomes a parable for precisely this space, as its main character is repeatedly driven from one place to another in an endlessly frustrated attempt to find shelter, in both the material and the spiritual senses. Let us recall that this personage, K., is by profession a land surveyor who arrives in the village with what appears to be a commission from the Castle. In the normal order of things, he would make contact with the proper authorities, have his commission confirmed, and begin employment according to what he understands to be the work of a
surveyor. Let us for a moment consider exactly what a surveyor is. The professional activity of a surveyor is to make measurements that define clear boundaries and limits; these in turn serve to establish legal rights and responsibilities concerning property, while they are also designed to prevent conflict in claims of property rights. Most of all, they determine what the property is: its nature, precise location, and dimensions. Land surveying is thus an essential preliminary to architectural construction. Although the concept of land surveying is fairly simple, in fact it depends on a complex set of institutional and even ontological conditions: whereas the surveyor must enjoy complete professional independence in measuring an object, the juridical value of these measurements depends on the surveyor’s authority as determined by the state. Finally, the property to be measured must in fact be measurable; it must be localizable, visible, and stable, and there must be reliable instruments with which to measure it. Surveyors live in a relatively fixed world of empirical certainties. The problem for K. is that none of these conditions is met in the strange village where he hopes to begin his work. Simultaneously recognized and ignored by the authorities, he fails to receive an actual assignment, to be given any surveying to be done, at least in the sense of professional surveying for which his training has prepared him. On the contrary, he is thwarted at every turn in his attempt to survey, take the measure of the constructed space of the village from the vantage point of empirical knowledge; the village, and above all the Castle, will not be reduced to his gaze. The trials of K. are thus determined by two apparently simple but in fact insurmountable problems: to master the space into which he has wandered and to find a habitation. Both of these problems are presented in architectural terms.

As a building, the Castle stands as a figure of impenetrability, but the nature of this impenetrability is strangely out of keeping with its architectural form. Kafka’s Castle is neither a feudal fortress nor a remote, hidden complex of the kind found in Sade. Far from being an imposing structure, the Castle is designed to disappoint, in every sense of the word. When K. first sees the Castle at a distance his expectations are satisfied, but as he approaches nearer:

enttäuschte ihn das Schloss, es war doch nur ein recht elendes.... Städtchen, aus Dorfhäusern zusammengetragen, ausgezeichnet nur dadurch, dass vielleicht alles aus Stein gebaut war, aber der Anstrich war längst abgefallen, und der Stein schien abzubrecheln. (17)
the was disappointed in the Castle; it was after all only a wretched-looking town, a huddle of village houses, whose sole merit, if any, lay in being built of stone, but the plaster had long since flaked off and the stone seemed to be crumbling away. (Muir 15)

The source of disappointment here is that the Castle does not stand as a distinct object. It is only a nondescript group of village houses, distinguishable from its surroundings only by being made of stone. But even if there is a material difference between stone and wood or brick, it fails to make the Castle architecturally distinct from the rest of the village, thus reinforcing the impression of indeterminacy concerning the Castle and its architectural context. The sense of disappointment is renewed later in the tale, but in a different form, when K. gazes on the Castle in the gathering dusk. The problem this time is that the more K. concentrates his gaze on the Castle, the less distinct its contours become: “[T]he longer he looked, the less he could make out and the deeper everything was lost in twilight” (97). Taken together, these two passages tell us something about the function of the Castle in the labyrinthine space of the novel. On one hand, the utter ordinariness of the Castle, in its situation as well as its architectural form, makes all the more strange the fact that K. never finds the path to it and all the more incongruous its absolute ascendancy over every aspect of life in the village. On the other hand, the tendency of the Castle to elude the gaze of the onlooker is a sign of the impenetrability of these very mysteries concerning the nature of its relation, physical or institutional, to its surroundings. The impenetrability of the Castle lies not in its solidity but in the curiously insubstantial nature of its presence as an object. As castles were originally military structures, a military analogy might not be out of place here: Kafka’s Castle has the impenetrability not of a fortress, but of a village all too easily entered, where not only is it impossible to determine the difference between enemy forces and peaceful inhabitants; it is also doubtful whether such a difference exists. “There is no difference between the peasantry and the Castle,” the schoolteacher says (17).

There is, however, a tower. In one of the few references to his place of origin, K. compares in his mind the church tower of his native town to the Castle tower before which he stands. The church tower was “firm in line, soaring unalteringly to its tapering point.” It was “an earthly building (ein irdisches Gebäude)—what else can men build?—but with a loftier goal than the humble dwelling-houses (niedrige Häusergemenge), and a clearer meaning than the muddle of everyday life” (15). The tower before K. now is ac-
tually the tower of a house, “graciously mantled with ivy” but pierced with small windows that produce a kind of maniacal (etwas Irsinniges) glitter in the sun. The battlements at the top are “broken, irregular, and fumbling, . . . as if a melancholy-mad (trübseliger) tenant who ought to have been kept locked in the topmost chamber . . . had burst through the roof and lifted himself up to the gaze of the world” (16). The contrast is between the homely native village and the unheimlich, unhomely world in which K. has found himself. Kafka’s word for home, die Heimat, resonates in German with all the force that Heidegger will later give to his ideal of the authentic, if no longer possible, being of the human between earth and heaven. The church tower is above all firm in its architectural and spiritual definitions; visible in form, clear in outline, and lofty in purpose, it gives meaning to the everyday muddle of life. The Castle tower, by contrast, is demonic in form and character, its deceptively gracious ivy offset by the maniacal glitter of its windows, and by the half-destroyed, crazed aspect of its battlements. Despite his interest in Dickens, Kafka is unlikely to have borrowed an image from Dickens’s contemporary, Charlotte Brontë, and so one must suppose the resemblance between the imaginary madman of this attic and his female counterpart in Jane Eyre (1847) to be merely accidental. It is nonetheless worth noting the ways in which this madman is more demonic than Bertha Mason. The worst she can do is to burn down the house, maim her husband, and kill herself as prelude to a Victorian happy ending. The maniacal spirit of Kafka’s tenant, on the other hand, inhabits every corner of the village and endlessly defers any satisfaction that might be derived from an apocalyptic denouement.

Given the inaccessibility of the Castle and what turns out to be the infinitely hierarchical nature of its structures of authority, one might suppose that its own precincts were divided within themselves by boundaries more definite than those of the town. However, Kafka destabilizes the facile opposition reflected in such a notion. Most of K.’s information about the workings of the Castle come from the servant Barnabas, who is admitted into certain rooms of the Castle but may or may not be admitted into others depending on the uncertain state of the boundaries dividing them. His sister Olga tells K. that there are indeed barriers (Barriéren) inside the Castle but that these do not necessarily form dividing lines (Grenzen). The barriers Barnabas can pass at the entrance are not really different from those beyond which he has never passed, which makes it seem as though one ought not to suppose that the bureaus behind the last barriers are any different from those Barnabas has already seen. “Only
that’s what we do suppose in moments of depression (in jenen trüben Stun- den). And the doubt doesn’t stop there, we can’t keep it within bounds” (man kann sich gar nicht wehren) (165). In such passages Kafka constructs a complex network of relations among power, architectural space, and psychological effect. The bleak (trüb) feelings of Olga connect them to the gloomy (trübselig) tenant in the attic of the castle, as if this fantastic figure set the tone for the entire village. The unbounded melancholy of the villagers, however, is more directly inspired by doubts about the meaning and function of particular architectural spaces, and particularly about the definition of their boundaries. Olga’s doubts are such that she asks herself whether Barnabas is in fact in the service of the Castle: “[G]ranted, he goes into the bureaux, but are the bureaux part of the real Castle? And even if there are bureaux actually in the Castle, are they the bureaux that Barnabas is allowed to enter?” (165). The supposition is that the key to the code governing the form and distribution of these spaces would clarify the nature of the power that, by inhabiting them, casts its pall over the entire village. But this key is no more within the grasp of Olga, a native of the village, than of the stranger K.

Olga’s account of the inner precincts of the Castle recalls Kafka’s parable Vor dem Gesetz (Before the Law, 1915), the text of which also appears as part of Der Prozess (The Trial, 1925). In this story, a countryman appears “before the law,” but the way into the precincts of the law is barred by a doorkeeper who tells the countryman that he cannot grant admittance “at the mo- ment,” although it is understood to be possible that permission may be granted later. Despite this discouragement, the countryman “stoops to peer through the gateway into the interior,” but he is warned by the other.

[I]ch bin nur der unterste Türhüter. Von Saal zu Saal stehn aber Türhüter, einer mächtiger als der andere. Schon den Anblick des dritten kann nicht einmal ich mehr ertragen. (Drucke 267)

I am only the least of the doorkeepers. From hall to hall there is one door- keeper after another, each more powerful than the last. The third door- keeper is already so terrible that even I cannot bear to look at him. (Complete 3).

The countryman decides to wait outside the door until he has permission to enter. He waits for his entire life, growing old before the door. In his last moments it occurs to him to ask why no one else has ever sought admittance. The doorkeeper replies, “No one else could ever be admitted here,
since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.”

In Derrida’s essay on this story, he remarks that the interior (das Innere) is not concealed from view. The door is open even if access to what lies beyond it is not verbally granted; it allows a view onto “interior spaces that appear empty and provisionally forbidden” but is not physically impenetrable. What prevents the countryman from entering is what Derrida calls the topos différantielle of the law, its organization into a time and space that perpetually defers access to its essence: year after year one waits for the permission that would, if granted, allow one to pass from room to room toward an ever deferred, never penetrable essence. Derrida’s notion of différance here takes the form of an insidious spatial effect that in fact conceals the essence of the law, which is that the law has no essence: the law is “the nothing that forbids itself” (“Before” 209). Its forbidding power, however, relies on an effect of spacing. The door before which the petitioner stands, like Barnabas in the Castle, looking in toward room after room, guardian after guardian, is “an internal boundary that opens on nothing, before nothing, the object of no possible experience” (212). For the countryman, it is the door of his own life as endless deferral, brutally closed as an interruption, not an ending, at the moment of his death.⁴

In The Castle, this condition of endless deferral belongs to K.’s attempts to enter into the confidence of its authorities, as well as his efforts to gain access to the actual precincts of the Castle. Among the architectural figurations of this deferral is the scene in which K. follows the main street of the village, which makes toward the Castle without ever getting nearer to it. Increasingly weary, K. is amazed at the length of the village, which seems without end. “Again and again the same little houses, and frost-bound window panes and snow and the entire absence of human beings” (17).

The failure of the spatial form of the village to conform to rational expectations of direction and distance has its counterpart in the interior spaces of the village, where an uncanny relation exists between the conventional nature of these spaces and their function in Kafka’s narrative. Let us enter, for example, the taproom of the Herrenhof, the inn where functionaries of the Castle come to do business with members of the public, in order that the latter not be admitted to the precincts of the Castle itself. Frieda, the girl who works there, is one of Kafka’s strange women—alternately fierce, comical, and sentimental. When the servants of the functionaries linger too late in the bar, she takes up a whip and, with cries of “into the stall, all of you!” drives them out like cattle, “across the courtyard and into their stalls” (44). The metaphorical value of this formula is inde-
terminate, for there is nothing to suggest that the servants are not literally housed in cattle stalls. In the comic scene that follows, K., who is also present, slides under the counter of the bar to hide from the landlord while Frieda playfully conspires with him. In a few moments K. and Frieda are locked in an embrace “amid small puddles of beer and other refuse gathered on the floor” (45).

In addition to working in the bar, Frieda is the mistress of the revered functionary Klamm. But now she has suddenly “in a state of unconsciousness” (Gesinnungslosigkeit) become the mistress of K., in an act of sexual promiscuity that belongs to the more general erasure of boundaries in the scene. In each of the details of this scene, architectural figures—the taproom, the stall, the counter, the floor, the quasi-sacred precinct of the Herrenhof itself—provide the framework for a narrative of multiple transgressions: between the literal and the metaphorical, between the human and the animal, between consciousness and the unconscious, between public and private space, between the object of desire and that of waste. The sense of impermeability inspired by the Castle is accompanied by an equally frustrating sense of the excessive permeability of limits of every kind. At one point, K. has no sooner driven his bothersome “assistants” from his room at the Bridge Inn than they climb back through the window, an occurrence so routine that it is mentioned without further comment: “The assistants had pushed their way in too, and on being driven out came back through the window. K. was too weary to drive them out again” (47). For K., the cumulative effect of such conditions is one of profound homelessness; he is haunted by the feeling that he has wandered into a strange country, farther than ever anyone had ever wandered before. It is
eine Fremde, in der selbst die Luft keine Bestandteil der Heimatluft habe, in der man vor Fremdheit ersticken müsse und in deren unsinnigen Verlockungen man doch nichts tun könne als weiter gehen, weiter sich verirren. (55)
a country so strange that not even the air had anything in common with his native air, where one might die of strangeness, and yet whose enchantment was such that one could only go on and lose oneself further. (46)

Even the air is strange. The interior spaces of the village are intolerably stuffy, literally driving K. out-of-doors. The maids’ room at the Bridge Inn, where he finds temporary lodging with Frieda and the two assistants, is “dirty and stuffy” (schmutzig und dumpf) so that K. is glad to escape from
The tiny, windowless rooms in the Herrenhof where the gentlemen from the Castle work are “too stuffy,” so that one of them sits outside in the low, narrow, noisy passageway (228). The maids of the Herrenhof are packed away in a small room, “actually nothing more than a large cupboard,” in “stuffy air, with the heating always on” (276). The landlady’s small private office is overheated and almost entirely given over to her bulging wardrobe of outmoded, rustling, wide-skirted dresses. These interior spaces of stifling closeness serve as microcosms of the village as a whole, both in its measures of exclusion directed toward the stranger and in its internal promiscuity, where everyone is too closely involved in the affairs of everyone else, where vicious rumors circulate unchecked, where a look or a misplaced word can cause the ruin of an entire family. The putrid, overripe air of the village is, according to Benjamin, the air of exile: “This is the air that Kafka had to breathe all his life. . . . How was he able to survive in this air?” (*Illuminations* 126).

When K. does not instinctively flee from these too intimate spaces, he is driven from them into spaces of an opposing character—too cold, too public, too exposed. It is as if in the general anxiety reigning in this world, space could inspire only feelings of either claustrophobia or agoraphobia. An example of the latter is the schoolhouse scene. Having been turned out of their room at the Bridge Inn, K. and Frieda take up lodging in the schoolhouse where K. has been hired as a janitor. Together with the troublesome assistants, they move into a schoolroom, also used as a gymnasium, where they set up makeshift domestic arrangements. With only a single sack of straw for bedding, they spend a fitful night on the floor, only to awaken the next day to find themselves, half naked, surrounded by curious schoolchildren and the angry teacher. To avoid the gazes of the children while dressing themselves, they must construct a little shelter out of a blanket thrown over the parallel bars and the vaulting horse. However, they have forgotten to clear away the remains of their supper from the desk of the teacher. The teacher is a young woman named Gisa, “fair, tall, beautiful, but somewhat stiff” (125). Noting her blond beauty, her cruelty, and her hardness, Adorno sees her as a demonic figure stemming from “the pre-Adamic race of Hitler Jungfrauen, who hated the Jews long before there were any” (“Notes on Kafka,” 226). Clearing her desk of the fragile possessions of K. and Frieda, she sends them all shattering onto the floor with a single stroke of her ruler. Like Little Nell forced to abandon her poor useless trifles, K. and Frieda, “leaning on the parallel bars, witnessed the destruction of their few things” (125). This violent end brought to a pathetic
attempt at domesticity is characteristic of a world where the stranger is never allowed rest.

K’s sense of exile is heightened by the fact that he does not understand the protocols governing certain spaces that are easily penetrated in the material sense but whose meaning and function remain mysterious to the stranger. Seeking an interview at the Herrenhof with a functionary from the Castle called Erlanger, K. finds himself in “a low, somewhat downward-sloping passage,” not unlike that which leads to Justine’s place of imprisonment in Sade’s novel. This is the passage between the little rooms where the functionaries work during the night. It is just high enough for one to walk without bending one’s head, with rows of doors close together, almost touching one another, on either side. This description of the passage itself already consigns it to the logic of minor spatial distortion, in keeping with the way gestures and speech in Kafka are always slightly off. A particularity of this passage, apart from its closeness and narrowness, and somewhat in contrast with these features, is that the walls do not quite reach to the ceiling, so that noise sounds throughout the passage and the adjoining rooms. In the early morning hours as the files are being distributed, a babel of voices begins to stir, while heads, oddly masked with scarves, suddenly appear in the space between the partition walls and the ceiling, only to disappear just as quickly. K. witnesses this scene with increasing anxiety and fatigue but remains standing in the passage, a bit incongruously, in the vain hope that some light may be shed on his own bewildered destiny.

The situation corresponds to Benjamin’s analysis of the disconnection in Kafka between the gesture and its coding according to a system of signification: “He divests the human gesture of its traditional supports and then has a subject for reflection without end” (Illuminations 122)—except that here the principle applies to architectural space as well. Only slowly does K. begin to understand, from the furious remonstrances of the landlord, that he has been the cause of the disturbance around him, that his presence in the passage has been a grave impropriety, that he has visited untold distress on the gentlemen from the Castle. But even now K. is allowed no rest. He collapses onto the beer barrels in the taproom, only to be once more accosted by the landlord and landlady, and in his fatigue their talk takes on an exaggerated significance: “To be driven out from here again seemed to him a misfortune surpassing all that had happened to him hitherto” (270).
For Adorno, the logic of Kafka’s world makes it seem as if the philosophical doctrine of categorical intuition, according to which human consciousness has a fundamental perception of things in themselves, had been “honored in Hell” (“Notes on Kafka” 219; “Aufzeichnungen” 263). What he means is that the process of “demolition” enacted in Kafka’s writing replaces what in previous forms of literature registered the consciousness of reality in terms of metaphor, significance, or meaning. Here we need to make a distinction between what we have been calling the demonic in Kafka and its manifestation in Dickens. In Dickens, figures like Daniel Quilp personify the demonic allegorically, and this allegorical representation itself implies a rational consciousness of reality. To a certain extent this is equally true of figures like Dom Severino in Sade: the demonic figure is contained within structures of meaning as produced by a rational consciousness of reality. In Kafka these structures themselves are demolished, so that the source of the demonic in being cannot be concentrated in a single figure. To do so would be to render the demonic banal and to imply the possibility of transcendence over it, both of which Kafka implicitly refuses. That is, Kafka refuses the distinction between the demonic and its other because he assigns the demonic to being itself. Thus one can speak of the demonic in Kafka only by adapting this concept to a novelistic universe in which in which the traditional distinction between good and evil does not hold and by referring to a doctrine whose relation to the language, gestures, and spaces of this novel is undecidable. In Sade and Dickens such doctrines do exist as a way of generating meaning. Sade, in fact, stages a contest of doctrines between the unshakeable faith of Justine and the purely instrumental reason of her tormentors, whereas Dickens posits a doctrine of humanism against the logic of capital. Both authors test these doctrines on a “good girl,” an innocent victim who figures as an example of virtue against which the demonic can be defined. In Kafka there is no such person. Even K., for all his trials, hardly attains this status and instead occupies a kind of neutral position between the abject submission of the villagers and the inhumanity of the authorities. Moreover, there is a certain inverted demonism in the extreme shyness and delicacy of these authorities, who are willing to receive petitioners (Parteien) only by night and in artificial light because the sight of them by day would be unbearable and so that the ugliness of these brief, nocturnal interrogations can quickly be forgotten in sleep. K’s transgression at the Herrenhof, which consists of occupying the passage in what is regarded as an unbefitting manner, is
made all the more offensive in that, according to the landlord, the authorities themselves are too kind and sensitive to comprehend such perfidy.

Sie wissen nicht oder wollen es in ihrer Freundlichkeit und Herablassung nicht wissen, dass es auch unempfindliche, harte, durch keine Ehrfurcht zu erweichende Herzen gibt. (444)

_They did not know or in their kindness and condescension did not want to admit there also existed hearts that were insensitive, hard, and not to be softened by any feelings of reverence._ (266)

In any other writer this would be pure irony, but it is part of Kafka’s diabolical humor that he gives us precious little ground on which to make the distinction between irony and earnestness. Just as physical gestures in Kafka are either absent when they might be expected or exaggerated out of proportion to whatever occasions them, so the distribution, function, and use of built spaces in Kafka bear little relation to known repertoires. In these spaces K. finds himself perennially _de trop_, his very existence a matter of indifference or offense to others. The demonic in Kafka consists, finally, in its demolition of human value, perhaps in the name of a more secure edifice toward which his writing gestures but for the construction of which his strength, like ours, fails.