How to live? This is the question that modern literature implicitly poses in its interpretation of architectural form, in its testimony to the effects of that form on human relations and the mind, and in its imagination of alternate kinds of constructed space. It is also the question that modern architecture has put to itself with increasing urgency, both in the form of architectural theory and in actual construction, as the realization of architectural design. We witness in works of both literature and architecture an ongoing interrogation of the nature of the built environment as a design for living. What is specifically modern in this interrogation is the notion that the built environment must be continually reinvented. Peter Eisenman writes, “What defines architecture is the continuous dislocation of dwelling” (“Architecture” 177). Eisenman is warning against the dangers of the institutionalization of a certain way of living imposed by the way architecture occupies and organizes space. He is also speaking from within the philosophical tradition that defines dwelling not as a state of rest or habituation but as perpetual construction: dwelling and building, according to Heidegger, are bound within the same dynamic (“Building” 151). This is also to think of architecture as an art form, like imaginative literature, which must forever renew itself in order to retain its vitality. T. S. Eliot makes a similar point about literature when he says that a work designed to conform to existing standards would not really conform at all, for “it would not be new, and would therefore not be a work of art” (Selected 39). The nature of dwelling and its continuing redefinition has been a preoc-
ocupation of the present work in its exploration of the various modes of relation between architecture and literature. Closely related to the question of dwelling has been that of the modern world’s relation to the historical past, particularly as manifested in the built environment. Finally, both of these questions have been examined in the light of a third: that of modern subjectivity, including the manner in which architecture is rendered, in literature, in terms of memory, invention, and desire. With these questions in mind, let us cast one final glance over the ground that has been covered.

In one of the lectures he gave at the National Gallery of Art in Washington in 1967, Mario Praz claimed that by the end of the eighteenth century architecture had lost its leading role in European culture. It could now seek only to borrow ideas, like those of the beautiful and the sublime, that were better expressed in philosophy and literature. Of William Beckford’s extravagant project of Gothic revival, Praz says, “Fonthill Abbey tries to translate the poetic emotion of sublimity into stone” (153). This judgment resonates with Manfredo Tafuri’s designation of the same historical moment as one of “semantic crisis” in architecture, as well as with Derrida’s reading of architecture as a multiply layered text. However, this assimilation of the architectural to the textual has the effect of destabilizing two attributes traditionally regarded as essential to architecture: its organization around a myth of origin, and its tie to a “teleology of habitus” (Psyché 481). Put simply, there came a moment when architecture lost its sense of where it had come from, where it was going, and what it meant beyond its most basic functions. It is a defining moment of modernity, and one that we continue to inhabit.

The first chapter of this work documents a number of ways in which literary and philosophical works interpret this loss in terms of the human experience of dwelling. Victorian writers like Ruskin and Dickens give expression to a traditional myth of dwelling only to prepare the ground for this myth to be deconstructed. The high modernists—Proust, Joyce, and Woolf—recast the notion of dwelling as a continual process of displacement, while many of their formal procedures are analogous to contemporary developments in architectural modernism that also seek to redefine the notion of dwelling. The end of modernism marked by Beckett’s purity of negation is contemporary with an architecture of nihilism that cultivates absence as a kind of clearing in the midst of modern world that is too much with us. In general, what we witness in both literature and architecture is the search for a new sense of dwelling generated by the experience
of uprooting and displacement without seeking to escape from the truth of that experience.

In keeping with the idea of an ethical dimension to the built environment, the “demonic spaces” of the second chapter belong to a series of critical responses to modernity as the product of Enlightenment reason. In Sade, the Enlightenment ideals of reason and the pursuit of happiness are pursued to their terminal points of absolute subjection, in hidden chambers that represent the secret space of the demonic at the center of the rational, modern world. In Dickens this space is literally that of industrial production itself, at the heart of modern capitalism. If the respective fictional worlds of Sade and Dickens both oppose innocence to the demonic, Kafka’s more radical demolition of value takes place among architectural spaces that defy the surveyor’s measure; they correspond to Lacan’s notion of the real as what doesn’t add up, what can’t be made to fit the order of language. To do this without mystification, and without reference to a transcendent order beyond language, is a modern gesture in itself.

The two chapters on Gothic architecture in the nineteenth century are naturally concerned with defining the relation between modernity and the historical past, but the material under study there also prepares the ground for the modernist movements in both literature and architecture. In the various “allegories of the Gothic” from Goethe to Henry Adams, we witness a certain confusion in the face of the great architectural monuments to what Adams calls “an empty church” and a “dead faith” (186): on one hand, a sense of wonder and a willing effort toward the sublime; and on the other, a sense of exhausted possibilities giving way to expressions of the nonrational, ironic, fragmentary, and transgressive, with privilege finally given to the materiality of immediate experience over doctrine, reason, and ideas of metaphysical transcendence. The figures of Ruskin and Viollet-le-Duc are both symptomatic of this divided response to Gothic architecture, even if they oppose one another in philosophy and temperament. Ruskin’s evangelical spirit is at odds with his insistence on the irrevocable state of ruin, on the deadness of what is dead, without being able to imagine a new life for architecture. Viollet has an idealized vision of the past but one that, paradoxically, anticipates modernism in its adaptation to new materials and its readiness to put things together in new ways. Together, Ruskin’s sense of an absolute rupture with the past and Viollet’s pragmatic and functional designs prefigure the modernist movements in literature and architecture, respectively.
In both Proust and Joyce we see the formal elaboration of a tendency already present in nineteenth-century writing on architecture: the objectivity of subjective experience. Proust’s “interior” Venice figures as an introjection of the external built environment that structures the nature of the subject. The implications of this vision are that the subject exists only insofar as his or her consciousness is assimilated to the experience of objects in space and time. To the extent that these are built objects, Proust suggests, the subject is structured architecturally, complete with visible surfaces, passages from chamber to chamber, and places hidden even from consciousness itself. Joyce’s vision is even more radical than this, for in his work the subject and the object-world do not exist in opposition but are rather made coterminous: the content of Bloom’s musings is that of the city flowing past him; the content of Stephen Dedalus’s mind is not simply analogous to, but rather consists of, the historical forms layered within modern civilization but exposed to view like the layers of an archaeological dig.

In Frost and Stevens, the return to the problem of dwelling is made through a series of analogies between language and architecture. The works of these poets are ethical in the sense that they seek to define a way of inhabiting a modern world in which, to borrow Heidegger’s words, “the divine radiance has become extinguished in the world’s history” (Poetry 91). We have seen how both poets attempt to solve this problem through language, that is, through the forms of construction constituted by poetry as making. For these poets, language is not the medium through which the world is lived; language is what we inhabit. However, their modes of habitation are distinct from one another. Frost makes of his poetic construction a shelter from the surrounding chaos; Stevens, while acknowledging the extinction of divine radiance, seeks a solar language that will take its place. The nature of both of these projects is continually defined in terms of architectural metaphors.

The final chapter surveys the great wasteland of the contemporary built environment, along with the rueful reflections on this scene by two widely read writers of the past two decades. Ballard’s vision, as implied by the title of his last work, Kingdom Come, makes him an heir to the literary traditions of apocalyptic ruin in poets like Blake and Eliot: the shopping center replaces Jerusalem and Margate Sands. But Houellebecq’s fiction consciously evokes something closer in texture to the material of junkspace itself and is suggested in the English translation of the title of
his first novel, *Whatever*. No agony, no lament, just disconnection—from any coherent sense of self, as well as from the junkspace that is the world. In its annihilation of subjective value along with everything else, this is one more move toward the ultimate tabula rasa foreseen in Loos’s war on ornament and Beckett’s bare stage: the clearing of an empty space as the necessary condition for some other, as yet unapprehended way of writing and building.