

Demonic spaces : notes toward an architecture of evil

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David Spurr

Demonic Spaces

Notes Toward an Architecture of Evil

In the eighth chapter of Matthew, Jesus is reported as travelling in the land of the Gadarenes, where he is confronted by two men possessed by demons (*daimoniosomenous*), 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 casts 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 (Matthew 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. In Luke 8:27, 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. It is as if there were a hidden demonic possession within the space of memory itself, so that the emergence of the possessed from out of the tombs figures as the unveiling of a terrible secret.

Second, the biblical passage shows us that in the Christian dispensation, the ancient Greek notion of the *daimon*, which Homer uses to denote a god, 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 essay, 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 three past 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.

Among the dynamics already present in Matthew is one that proves essential to the demonic spaces that form the connecting points of the Marquis de Sade's narrative in *Justine, ou les malheurs de la vertu* (1791): that of concealment. 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 convent 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," and 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 which one of her earlier tormentors has referred to as "l'antre obscur" and "le temple le plus secret".¹ Sade registers the experience of the constructed environment as itself 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 that 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 six thick hedges which entirely conceal it 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 to 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".² 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

1 Donatien-Alphonse-François, Comte de Sade, *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu*, Paris, Gallimard, Collection "L'imaginaire", 1981, pp. 92-3.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 262.

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.³ Sade's choice of a monastery for these scenes can also be read as a fantasmatic 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 re-enacted 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 it is to be found not merely in the libertine tastes of the monks, but also in the architectural form of the monastery. Their strange tastes 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.

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".⁴ Thus, for Blondel, the proper character of a temple is that of *décence*, of public buildings *grandeur*, of monuments *somptuosité*, of promenades *élégance*, etc. 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 Rousseauist vision of a benevolent Nature as the model for all human constructions. The primitive hut is the original and

3 *Ibid.*, p. 423.

4 Jacques-François Blondel, *Cours d'architecture ou traité de la décoration, distribution et construction des bâtiments*, Paris, 1771-77, tome 2, p.229.

truest of shelters, from which all architectural principles must be derived. Architectural crimes 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”.⁵ Whether judged by the classicism of Blondel or the nascent Romanticism of 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, they put in opposition the normally inseparable principles of truth and function. On one hand, the monastery of Saint-Marie-des-Bois is perfectly functional, if one admits that its true function is that of torture, rape, and imprisonment. 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.

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 d’être* based on the momentary desocialisation of crime.⁶ Within the confines of his secured space, the Sadean figure acts with complete freedom, without restraint, without limits, without fear of being called to account. Without meaning, even, if by meaning is implied 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, although predicated on an ideal isolation from the social world, reveals itself to be wholly preoccupied with the conditions of his own time and

5 John Soane, *Royal Academy Lectures* (1810-19), cited in Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings: A Vocabulary of Modern Architecture*, London, Thames and Hudson, 2000, p. 126.

6 Roland Barthes, *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, Paris, Seuil, 1971, p. 20.

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 revolutionary 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 anti-clericalism in particular; they could only add to the reputation of *provocateur* that de Sade had gained during the storming of the Bastille when he harangued the crowd, crying out that the guards were slashing the throats of his fellow prisoners.⁷

Sade, however, 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. 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.⁸

Writing on this subject six years after Bataille, Maurice Blanchot also cautions against identifying Sade too closely with the Revolution:

Sade, s'il a pu se reconnaître dans la Révolution, c'est dans la mesure seulement où, passage d'une loi à l'autre, elle a pendant quelque temps représenté la possibilité d'un régime sans loi.⁹

Sade is quoted as saying that "la règne des lois est inférieure à celle de l'anarchie." And yet, the interminable discourses that accompany Sade's scenes of cruelty and domination are en-

7 Georges Bataille, *La littérature et le mal*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, p. 122.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 118.

9 Maurice Blanchot, *Lautréamont et Sade*, Paris, Minuit, 1963, p. 24.

tirely 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. 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?¹⁰

As Blanchot points out, Sade's philosophy is elaborated in relation to contemporary theories concerning liberty and the equality of individuals before nature and the law. His peculiar version of this theory 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 découvrirait davantage: c'est un pavillon isolé, enterré, que six murs d'une incroyable épaisseur environnent de toutes parts.¹¹

In fact this will turn out to be a slightly exaggerated description of the building's inescapability. But in the present case an imagined architecture functions 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 in her role as perpetual victim, Justine can be compared to the character of Little Nell

10 Donatien-Alphonse-François, Comte de Sade, *Justine ou les malheurs de la vertu*, p. 244.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 192-3.

in Charles Dickens' 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' 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. The difference between the old shop and the newly-forged world that casts them out 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 waste land. For example, on one hand, a "Catholic town of 1440," with its dreaming spires and echoing greens; against this, "The Same Town in 1840," a place of dark satanic mills, soot-blackened air, and polluted streams.¹² 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 not the polemicist that Pugin is, 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," that houses an industrial forge. There is an infernal din from "the beating of hammers and roar of furnaces," while

12 Augustus Welby Pugin, *Contrasts: or, A Parallel between the Noble Edifices of the Middle Ages and Corresponding Buildings of the Present Day; Shewing the Present Decay of Taste*, Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1969, p. 105.

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.¹³

One of the furnaces burns perpetually, watched day and night by a man who has spent his entire life with no other aim. Dickens' 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. 1).



Fig. 1
George Cattermole:
*Watching the
Furnace Fire*

In contrast to the Gothic cathedrals admired by Pugin and John Ruskin, Dickens' industrial mill is a kind of anti-cathedral: large and lofty, but with pillars of iron not stone, full of deafening noise and gloom instead of silence and light. At the center of its rituals, 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".¹⁴

In an essay on this novel written in the early 1930s, Theodor Adorno finds that the strongly allegorical quality of

¹³ Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, London, Oxford University Press, 1951, pp. 329-30.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

such scenes belong to a “versprengten Barock” aesthetic: “Die vorbürgerliche Form der Romane von Dickens wird zu einem Mittel der Auflösung eben der bürgerlichen Welt, die sie darstellen.”¹⁵ 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 pre-modern 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 or Dickens. What Adorno calls Dickens’ “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”,¹⁶ 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 a realism that in Dickens is pushed to the limits of the surreal. Dickens’ 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.¹⁷

Moving through this space of ruined habitation, Nell and her father appear as a dark parody of Dante and Virgil touring Hell; 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

15 Theodor Adorno, “Rede über den ‘Raritätenladen’ von Charles Dickens”, in: *Noten zur Literatur IV, Gesammelte Schriften*, Band II, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974, pp. 515-16.

16 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1973, pp. 163-4.

17 Charles Dickens, *op.cit.*, p. 335.

father, beset with madness. There is no Beatrice to watch over her. 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 version 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' oppressive mills are the modern manifestations of capital or, more precisely, the sites of production in the industrial capitalist order, he chooses, curiously, to allegorise the spirit of capital in a pre-modern and even folkloric figure. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, this spirit is personified by Daniel Quilp, the malicious money-lender whom Dickens calls a dwarf. Adorno argues convincingly 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 pre-modern spirit of capital which, like Nell and her father, has been surpassed by the world in which it survives as an uncanny vestige of the past. The habitations of this spirit are flimsy, precarious structures: Quilp stays in a mouldy 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".¹⁸ 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".¹⁹ This is the imagery that T.S. 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*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

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 which takes its toll on the human through poverty, homelessness, disease, and starvation: greater suffering than even that inflicted by Sade's torturers. Nell is powerless in the face of this newly demonic character of the world. This fatal powerlessness is signalled 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: "Weil sie die Dingwelt des bürgerlichen Raums nicht zu ergreifen vermag, darum ergreift die Dingwelt sie selbst, und ihr Opfer wird vollzogen."²⁰

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.

Kafka has been called a "parabolist of impenetrability" (*Paraboliker der Undurchdringlichkeit*).²¹ This phrase picks up on Walter Benjamin's observation 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 122). This is one of the things that accounts for the sense of impenetrability that Kafka rehearses as an element of his fictional universe. The Castle (in *Das Schloss*, 1926) stands

20 Theodor Adorno, "Rede über den 'Raritäten' von Charles Dickens," *op.cit.*, p.522.

21 Theodor Adorno, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka", in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977, vol. 10, p. 261.

as an architectural and institutional figure of this impenetrability. Kafka's Castle is in some sense a counterpart to Sade's monastery or the Château de Silling in *Les cent-vingt jours de Sodome*, but with an opposing function: whereas Sade's structures are designed for the confinement of their victims, Kafka's Castle is designed to keep people out. Even as it imposes its presence on everything around it, the Castle in its impassivity seems to deny apprehension even to the gazing eye:

Das Schloss, dessen Umrisse sich schon aufzulösen begannen, lag still wie immer, niemals noch hatte K. dort das geringste Zeichen von Leben gesehen, vielleicht war es gar nicht möglich aus dieser Ferne etwas zu erkennen und doch verlangten es die Augen und wollten die Stille nicht dulden.²²

The effect of this stillness and inviolability at the center is a kind of excessive nervousness and permeability of limits in the surrounding world. At one moment, the surveyor has no sooner driven his bothersome assistants from his room than they climb back through the window, an occurrence so routine that it is mentioned without further comment: "die Gehilfen waren miteingedrungen, wurden vertrieben, kamen dann aber durchs Fenster wieder herein. K. war zu müde, um sie nochmals zu vertrieben".²³ Benjamin remarks on the ease with which K., the newly-arrived land-surveyor, conquers the young women of the village: "He encounters them at every turn; the rest give him as little trouble as the barmaid" (115), with whom K. finds himself locked in embrace, "in dem kleinen Pfützen Bieres und dem sonstigen Unrat, von dem der Boden bedeckt war".²⁴ The lack of resistance put up by women like Frieda has its architectural parallels in the deceptive assailability of the built structures of the village – deceptive because it in no way alters the profound impenetrability of K's predicament. A woodshed is easily if scandalously broken into in order to provide heat in the

22 Franz Kafka, *Das Schloss*, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Verlag, 1982, p. 156.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 71.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

schoolroom where K., Frieda, and K's assistants spend the night: "Nach kurzer Zeit war die leichte Tür erbrochen."²⁵ They are nonetheless forced to spend the night on the floor of the schoolroom, and awaken the next day to find themselves, half naked, surrounded by curious schoolchildren and an angry teacher. To avoid the gazes of the children while dressing themselves, they must construct a little room out of a blanket thrown over the parallel bars and the vaulting horse. Such examples of boundaries that are ill-defined, shifting and uncertain, have a particular irony when we consider that K. has been summoned to the village by the Castle as a land surveyor, i.e. one whose professional activity is to define clear boundaries and limits as a way of avoiding conflict in claims of property rights. But of course K. is unable to receive an actual assignment, or to find any surveying to be done.

Given the inaccessibility of the Castle itself and the hierarchical nature of its structures of authority, one might suppose that its own precincts were divided by boundaries more definite than those of the town. However, Kafka destabilises 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.:

Diese Barrieren darfst Du Dir auch nicht als eine bestimmte Grenze vorstellen, darauf macht mich auch Barnabas immer wieder aufmerksam. Barrieren sind auch in den Kanzleien, in die er geht, es gibt also auch Barrieren die er passiert und sie sehn nicht anders aus, als die, über die noch nicht hinweggekommen ist und es ist auch deshalb nicht von vornherein anzunehmen, dass sich hinter diesen letzteren Barrieren wesentlich andere Kanzleien befinden, als jene in denen Barnabas schon war. Nur eben in jenen trüben Stunden glaubt man das.²⁶

It is depressing for the villagers to think that whatever the status of the barriers as such, there is no point to them, that

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 275.

they do not in fact protect some inner sanctum of power and truth – that the impenetrable once penetrated would answer no questions, yield no revelation, and this not because it would continue to hold its secrets, but because there would turn out to be none to have withheld.

Olga's account of the inner precincts of the Castle recall a parable of Kafka's entitled "Vor dem Gesetz" (1915), the text of which also appears as part of *Der Prozess* (1925). In this story, a countryman appears "before the law," but the way in is barred by a doorkeeper, who tells the countryman that he cannot grant admittance just now, though it is possible that permission may be granted later. Despite this discouragement, "bückt sich der Mann, und durch das Tor in das Innere zu sehn," but he is warned by the other:

Ich bin mächtig. Und ich bin nur der unterste Türhüter. Von Saal zu Saal stehn aber Türhüter, einer Mächtiger als der andere. Schon den Anblick des dritten kann nicht ich mehr ertragen.²⁷

The countryman decides to wait outside the door until he has permission to enter. He waits for his entire life, growing to an old man before the door. In his last moments it occurs to him to ask why no one else has ever sought admittance. The doorkeeper replies, "Hier konnte niemand sonst Einlass erhalten, denn dieser Eingang war nur für dich bestimmt. Ich gehe jetzt und schliesse ihn."²⁸

In Jacques 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 "le dedans des lieux apparemment vides et provisoirement interdits,"²⁹ but not physically impenetrable. What prevents the countryman from entering is what Derrida calls the *topique différantielle* of the law, its organisation into a time and space that perpetually defers access to its essence: year after year of waiting for the

27 Franz Kafka, "Vor dem Gesetz", *Erzählungen, Gesammelte Werke*, hg. v. Max Brod, Frankfurt am Main, Fischer Verlag, 1976, vol. 4, p.120.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 121.

29 Jacques Derrida, "Préjugés: devant la loi", in: *La Faculté de juger*, Collection "Critique", Paris, Minuit, 1985, pp.120-21.

permission that would, if granted, allow one to pass from room to room towards an ever-deferred, never penetrable essence. Derrida's notion of *différance* here takes the form of an insidious spatial effect which in fact conceals the essence of the law, which is that the law has no essence: the law is "le rien qui s'interdit".³⁰ Its forbidding power, however, relies on an effect of spacing. The door before which the petitioner stands, like Barnabas in the Castle, looking toward room after room, guardian after guardian, is "une limite interne n'ouvrant sur rien, devant rien, sur l'objet d'aucune expérience possible".³¹ 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.

There is a similar play on the notions of structural encrypting and accessibility in the scene near the end of *Das Schloss* (or of what we have of it), where K. is at last summoned for an interview with Erlanger, secretary to the mythic Klammer. The scene takes place at the inn known as the Herrenhof, where the *Herren* from the Castle stay when doing business in the village. In looking for Erlanger's room, K. finds himself in a low passage, 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 in which gestures and speech in Kafka are always slightly *off*. But the 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. It is 5:00 a.m., and things begin to stir on both sides of the passage, producing a babel of voices:

Der Gang selbst war zwar noch leer, aber die Türen waren schon in Bewegung, immer wieder wurde eine ein wenig geöffnet und schnell wieder geschlossen, es schwirrte im Gang von solchen Türöffnern und -schliessern, hier und da sah K. auch oben im Spalt

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

der nicht bis zur Decke reichenden Wände morgendlich zerraupte Köpfe erscheinen und gleich verschwinden.³²

As this *Stimmengewirr* increases, the situation becomes more farcical. A servant attempting to distribute files has the contents of a wash basin poured on his head from the gap at the top of the wall. In this same space between wall and ceiling faces again appear, but now oddly masked with scarves, only to quickly disappear again. K. witnesses this scene with increasing anxiety and fatigue, but remains there 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: "der Gebärde des Menschen nimmt er die überkommenen Stützen und hat an ihr dann einen Gegenstand zu Ueberlegungen, die kein Ende nehmen,"³³ except that here the principle applies to architectural space as well.

If, in Kafka, speech and gesture are torn loose from their traditional supports in experience as *Erfahrung*, the design and function of the built environment are symptomatic of the same condition. Why should the functionaries from the Castle be doing their routine business at the inn, and at night? Once there, why should they be housed in narrow rooms partitioned by walls that do not reach the ceiling? Is it merely a matter of shoddy workmanship, or some parodic version of the modern office cubicle designed to give minor functionaries the illusion of privacy without entirely removing them from the field of surveillance? Again, we do not have the doctrine that such scenes might be said to interpret. What we have instead are consequences that can be understood only according to the kind of independent logic belonging to a dream, a logic that makes perfect sense as long as it is not subjected to analysis or interpretation. The officials do their business in the village in order to protect the Castle from in-

32 Franz Kafka, *op.cit.*, p. 430.

33 Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: Zur zehnten Wiederkehr seines Todestages," in: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp Verlag, Band II-2, p. 420.

trusion by the villagers. Even in the village, however, they are extremely shy of contact with members of the public, the sight of whom by day would be unendurable to them. Only slowly does K. begin to understand, thanks to the 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. His witnessing of the distribution of the files alone is a profound sacrilege. The gap between the top of the wall and the ceiling, then, does have its function in the strange logic of Kafka's universe: as a form of offensive communication, in several senses of the word. In the architectural sense the gap communicates troublesomely between room and passage. Because of the gap, K.'s presence in the passage is communicated like a contagious disease to the *Herren* in their respective rooms, while their increasing agitation is in turn communicated to him by the commotion they make, although he does not understand that he is the cause of it.

Both Bataille and Adorno have seen an element of the demonic in Kafka. Bataille's essay, which appears in a collection called *La littérature et le mal*, refers to Kafka's *humeur endiablée*.³⁴ For Adorno, the distorted logic of Kafka's world makes it seem as if the philosophical doctrine of categorical intuition had been "in der Hölle honoriert".³⁵ Both of these are metaphorical formulas, and indeed here one needs to make an important distinction: if the demonic Sade and Dickens is figural, in Kafka it is metaphorical.³⁶ That is, whereas the earlier writers personify the demonic in figures like Dom Severino and Daniel Quilp, Kafka refrains from this technique, because in his universe suffering is so pervasive that its source cannot be concentrated in a single figure. To do so would be both to render the demonic banal and to imply the possibility of transcendence over it, both of which Kafka im-

34 Georges Bataille, "Faut-il brûler Kafka?", in: *La littérature et le mal*, Paris, Gallimard, 1957, p. 179.

35 Theodor Adorno, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka", *op. cit.*, p. 263.

36 I am grateful to Markus Winkler for having made this observation in conversation.

plicitly 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 world in which the traditional distinction between good and evil has been grotesquely distorted, 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 to 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 kind of 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 (*Hässlichkeit*) of these brief, nocturnal interrogations can quickly be forgotten in sleep. K’s transgression in remaining in the passage in such a horribly unbecoming manner (*so entsetzlich unpassend*), is made all the more offensive in that, according to the landlord of the Herrenhof, 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.³⁷

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 ab-

37 Franz Kafka, *Das Schloss*, op. cit., p. 444.

sent when they might be expected or exaggerated out of proportion to whatever occasions them, so the reaction of the authorities to K.'s presence in the passage bears no relation to a known repertoire of human responses, rational or irrational, to such a situation. Nonetheless, K. is made to understand that he himself has been demonised as a being whose presence is unbearable to others. K. finds himself, here as elsewhere, perennially *de trop*, his very existence a matter of indifference or offense to others. The demonic in Kafka is, finally, a negation of the human. I leave the last word to Adorno: "Der Augenblick des Einstands, auf den alles bei ihm [Kafka] abzielt, ist der, da die Menschen dessen innewerden, dass sie kein Selbst – dass sie selbst Dinge sind."³⁸

38 Theodor Adorno, "Aufzeichnungen zu Kafka", *op. cit.*, p. 267.

Abstract

Une question générale posée par cette étude est de savoir comment la notion du démoniaque, à l'origine une catégorie métaphysique et théologique, est transformée par l'avènement de la modernité. Si la modernité représente un monde construit en tant que manifestation concrète de la volonté humaine à l'époque rationnelle d'une *Aufklärung*, la manière dont le démoniaque habite ce monde risque de mettre en cause la nature même de cet avènement. Serait-il possible, par exemple, que la force de la raison ne révèle, au fur et à mesure qu'elle domine l'espace moderne, un lieu caché du démoniaque au centre de cet espace? Une question plus spécifique porte sur la représentation spatiale et architecturale du démoniaque dans trois romans: *Justine*, du Marquis de Sade, *The Old Curiosity Shop* de Dickens, et *Das Schloss* de Kafka. Chez Sade il y a une vision du démoniaque inspirée par les espaces architecturaux de l'église, alors que chez Dickens il y a une vision tout aussi démoniaque inspirée par l'architecture de la production industrielle moderne. En ajoutant l'œuvre de Kafka à ce schéma, on arrive à une vision tripartite des espaces démoniaques de la modernité: sur le plan historique, ils sont créés respectivement aux XVIII^e, XIX^e et XX^e siècles; sur le plan institutionnel, ils représentent l'église, le capital bourgeois, et l'état; sur le plan architectural, ils sont concrétisés dans le couvent, la grande usine industrielle, et le château. Ainsi, les manières très différentes dont les œuvres littéraires qui font l'objet de cette étude traitent de la question du démoniaque reflètent la pluralité d'approches d'une préoccupation symptomatique de la littérature moderne en général.

