

Preface

“After all this back-and-forth about the title for this book, have we ended up with the right one?”

“If only readers could come to it having some sense of what an architectural body is.”

“What was our last other choice for a title?”

“Constructing Life.”

“We couldn’t take it as the title because our work has more to do with recasting or reconfiguring life than with an out-and-out constructing of it.”

“We wanted it because it signaled the connection between what we do and work being done in the fields of self-organization, autopoiesis, artificial life, and consciousness studies.”

“The direction is the same. We’re on the same avenue. Even so, we’re doing something quite different.”

“Should we spell out the differences?”

“Not this time around.”

New York, 2002

Introduction

Having observed near and far how the body moves through its surroundings, having thought lengthily of still other ways to surround it, and having built a few tactically posed surroundings, we now notice ourselves to have been tracing an architectural body, or at least a landscape for one. We see architecture not merely as that which stands by and gets linked up with, as structures that life lightly avails itself of in passing; not passive, not passively merely hanging around to provide shelter or monumentality, architecture as we newly conceive it actively participates in life and death matters.

Architecture, in anyone's definition of it, exists primarily to be at the service of the body. The question arises as to how to be most fully at the service of the body. Who would not want to live in a world built to serve the body to the nth degree? The question arises as to what the body is in the first place. Serving the body to the nth degree will include as much as the body bargains for and more. It is mandated for the body that it fend off its own demise, and an architecture that would be unstinting toward the body, that would slavishly deliver up to the body all that it would seem to need, must take this as its mandate too.

Once people realize that the human race has not yet availed itself of its greatest tool for learning how not to die, they will cease being defeatists in the matter. Although our species, like every other species, has a characteristic architecture that serves its members well by increasing their chances of survival, it is far from having an architecture that could redefine life. The architecture we speak of in this book is within our species' reach. It will be a way to undo, loosening to widen and re-cast,

the concept of person. People will not be defeatists about a condition—the human condition—about which something can be done. The procedural architecture outlined in the pages that follow will function both as spur to and mainstay of an all-out effort to alter the untenable human lot.

Who or what are we as this species? Puzzle creatures to ourselves, we are visitations of inexplicability. What is in fact the case? We must surely go to all possible lengths to find out what we exist in regard to. I want to find out, and so do I, what indeed is the case for those who sniff around this planet as us. We, the members of this species, have thus far failed to come up with a set of explanatory statements that could be universally countenanced as the definitive figuring out of ourselves.

To figure ourselves out, to find out the operative basis of what moves as us and what we find fit to accord value to, we need to learn what makes the world tick. But whenever someone attempts to break open the world to see what makes it tick, to find operative hidden treasures, the world closes ranks as more world and that's it. Figuring ourselves out must include determining what coheres as sentience. But sentience would seem constitutionally unable to determine either how it came about or what coheres as it; sentience always delivers more sentience as world. What are the particles and what are the waves of sentience? We cannot get beyond the world to find out what operates as it, because it is of our making; it is us. And if, because we can never distance ourselves enough from ourselves to assess the whole in its particulars, because the world always gets in our way as still more world, should we not, then, judge as correct Wittgenstein's assertion that "The value of the world must lie outside of the world"? The world, all that comes our way as world, is contingent on we know not what, on what try as we might to get at we never can; breaking through to the we know not what upon which

the lived-world is contingent so that we may know its operative basis would seem impossible.

But Wittgenstein's assertion lacks the most important of axiological anchors. It is vague in regard to the assigner of values: For precisely whom must the value of the world lie outside the world? Those being led to contemplate an estranged value are most likely the only ones considering it. If we read the assertion as referring, up to and through some godlike entity in a godless era, to the human subject as assigner of value, it must be seen as committing the error of shutting out peremptorily the issue of our being puzzle creatures to ourselves. The asserter also doesn't take into consideration either the way our own existences are contingent on, take shape in respect to, the actions we take, or the way we comply with the universe to make the world. Perhaps it is not only impossible but also insufficient and unnecessary to approach finding out what the upshot of the world is, its ultimate value, through trying to get beyond or beneath the world. Perhaps the answers rest in, and will be forthcoming from, how the world rushes in as more world to cover the world, a complexity of within rather than one of beyond. Our species has thus far been at a loss as to how to make this work to good effect for the figuring out of itself, and the world, in its pulsing contingency, drowns us, as an ancient-modern poet put it to us. But an incredibly wonderful thing about the contingent is that it can be handled, and reconsidered, and reworked. Instead of trying to have it both ways at once, which is how Wittgenstein inadvertently tried it (the axiological judge that is elsewhere judges for us and through us), why not keep the axiological action right up close? Let the assigner of value pursue her own contingency to the point that it rains down value on her. For those who have no choice but to be contingent, the engineering of contingency is all that is the case: "The value (read *upshot*) of the world must lie in (the

complex managing of) its contingency.” This book deals with contingency in all its vivacity, with a linking and re-linking of the body and the world to one another—not that the two have ever been apart. Through a newly conceived architecture, the world gets invited in to be a different world. Rearrangements of the world should be able to cause the value (read *upshot*) of the world to become apparent right here in the midst of things.

What, if anything, can constitute the figuring out of ourselves? We contend that philosophical puzzles cannot be solved short of a thorough architectural reworking. It is necessary to track how a world comes to be organized in the vicinity of the human organism. Questions need to be asked in a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree way. Context is all, and all contexts lead to the architectural context, newly conceived. Surroundings can pose questions by virtue of how their elements and features are posed. All that follows here will prove this to be no mere play on words. Depending on what activates what in question-posing surroundings, or on what stimulates bodies to move through these surroundings, answers will tentatively surface, or further questions will.

Without doubt, the human race has hideously acquiesced in regard to its own abysmal fate. Underlying all cultures, in East and West alike, is this assumption or attitudinal stance: we—each and every one of us—must die, no doubt about it, for all those who lived before us died. So unquestionably mortal are we that we have even come to call ourselves mortals, for God’s sake. Everyone everywhere wants to insist on this. A bunch of defeatists all. Nobody wants to be caught not getting the “real” straight, for not accurately registering what comes to pass puts one at odds with society. How could what so evidently stares one in the face not be, after all, what it rings true as? We contend that the whole crowd has it all wrong.

Questions about the nature and purpose of our species can-

not be answered through reflection alone. Questions and answers are always handled body-wide, whether or not this is recognized to be part of the questioning process at the moment of questioning. Depending on reflection alone represents too drastic a reduction, one that unnecessarily distorts the picture, when it is the body that is being queried as to itself. How does the human body—together with its environment—accomplish what it manages to? How is it possible that she who is a body walks and talks? How much does the body avail itself of its environment when, in the course of behaving in all respects as if it were a person, it serves up thoughtful behavior or comes up with an idea? The body can yield answers through that which it subsists as, through the whole of itself, inclusive of its sequences of actions and the surroundings into which, in a variety of ways, it extends itself. The investigative work that can yield answers cannot be done in the abstract; it must, on the contrary, be done on-site where living happens. Only subsequent to there having been an architectural revolution, a thorough re-visioning of architecture, will difficult questions such as those above call forth answers in the bodies of our contemporaries.

That mortality has been the prevailing condition throughout the ages does not mean it will always have to be. Any resistance mounted thus far against mortality, that ineluctable asphyxiator, has been conducted in too piecemeal a fashion. How can human beings rid themselves of the defeatist attitude that leads them to accept unquestioningly their own inevitable obliteration? Be unrelenting when faced with the relentless. The effort to counter mortality must be constant, persistent, and total. The wish and will to do this must be in the air we breathe, having been built into the places within which we live and breathe. Architecture must be made to fit the body as a second, third, fourth, and, when necessary, ninth (and counting) skin. We believe that people closely and

complexly allied with their architectural surrounds can succeed in outliving their (seemingly inevitable) death sentences!

There continues to be something fundamentally wrong with the way our species approaches the puzzle of itself. Generation after generation, our species, not trying all that it could on its own behalf, has made nice with its glaring vulnerability. At best, we move in a morass of inconclusive investigations and fragmentary pursuits; at worst, it is assumed that our species will always remain a mystery to itself. It has of course by now been ascertained that the more a person learns about herself as a functioning organism, and the more she takes cognizance of what she learns in this regard, incorporating it into her routine, the less likely will she be to harm herself. We therefore ought to take pains not to limit ourselves in any way in this respect. It must never be forgotten that we don't know what we are in the first place.

Although the human condition is a crisis condition if ever there was one, few individuals and societies act with the dispatch a state of emergency requires. The fact that the human condition is a crisis condition gets routinely covered up, with culture invariably functioning to obscure how dire the condition is and to float it as bearable. The crisis—that we live in a state of crisis: that all goes down the drain, all—has been put on permanent hold, and the species, oblivious to its own desperateness, goes off on tangents.

Much of the liveliness on this planet registers numb. In the numb register—so much of this that we find around us. Muted life for fear of a terrifying death—all death is terrifying—is well documented. The defeatism of which we speak courses through all art and science, determining subject matter. All intellectual pursuits thus far, in East and West alike, have been largely stopgap measures, so much fiddling while Rome burns, that is, while people line up one after another to die. Adhering to a defeatist position, practitioners of every dis-

cipline, whether focused on figuring out life or on amusing or intriguing those who have life, stop before they ever reach the point of becoming radical, so convinced are they that we are destined to die. The defeatists are everywhere. Within the life sciences, they try to cure the human body or figure it out such as they find it to be, never attempting to reconfigure it altogether, never thinking to reorder the body radically so that it might elude mortality. Because most life scientists have, along with everyone else, dismissed out of hand any thought of a possible fundamental reordering of the body, they are at a loss as to how to judge the import of human cloning, for example, a method through which the body could conceivably be reconfigured for the better.

Researchers work together but do not pitch in to attack problems as fervently as they would if they felt their lives depended on it. The species deserves some credit for having sought to maintain a historical continuity, but too often one finds, as a result of haphazard or negligible follow-up, odd breaks in this supposed continuity; all too frequently, research initiatives are abandoned once their initial supporters have disappeared. Coordinating research projects from diverse fields requires knowing where to place the emphasis, and hardly anyone knows how to do this in our time. Even on those rare occasions when the emphasis has been rightly placed, that emphasis has not been sufficiently emphatic. Insensitive to its own immediate needs, to the nature of itself as the central problem, our species—mostly represented by those who speak the loudest or the longest—is so unboundedly proud of having built the cart that it permanently, in an ongoing fit of mad harnessing, features it before the horse. The horse: the animate. The cart: culture, be it modern or postmodern.

That human life is expendable as a matter of course, that we are mortal, that life comes thus blighted as a matter of fact, as a matter of hideously brutal fact, is antithetical to any ethics

putting the highest value of all on the preserving of life. An ethics that fails to take a stand against what counters it must be seen to have been subverted by it. It is illogical (and arguably unethical) for an ethical system that values life not to see mortality as fundamentally unethical. In thus arguing it would seem that you wish to make a mockery of our ethics, a critic might reply. There is death and then there is death. That life must not be extinguished, yes, that is our teaching. But when it comes to mortality itself, to try to uphold that standard would be equivalent to trying to stop a flood with a finger in the dam. No, no, one must give up on that score. And so, most ethical codes simply put to one side the issue of mortality and proceed to go on, we put it to you, quite unrealistically from there, starting off on the thither side of the crucial fact, and so, going along always to one side of the facts as they stand.

An ethics that permits no category of event, not even mortality, to be set apart for special treatment, and that considers there to be nothing more unethical than that we are required to be mortal shall be called a *crisis ethics*. Three decades ago, by wedding the word *reversible* with the term *destiny*, a supposedly set-in-stone sequence of events, we announced a war on mortality. Reversible destiny was our first step into a crisis ethics. What if it turned out that to be mortal was not an essential condition of our species? To repeat in a slightly different way what people are so unused to hearing: What if it turned out that members of our species were not forever slated to be mortal? Another way to read reversible destiny—a less radical way, but for some people, we are given to understand, a perhaps less terrifying and therefore more inviting way—is as an open challenge to our species to reinvent itself and to desist from foreclosing on any possibility, even those our contemporaries judge to be impossible.

If you want to do the impossible, should you be desirous of

tilting at windmills, why not build to your own specifications the windmills at which you wish to tilt? In the spirit of always taking things further, a spirit characteristic of those desiring to do the impossible, why not indeed build the whole of the world in which those windmills tilt? And furthermore still, why not build windmills that tilt back toward you knowingly and informatively? That is to say, first off, that we have seen our contemporaries looking at the two of us as if we were Don Quixotes. And indeed we tip our hats to a comparable indomitableness, even as we rush to contrast our impossibilities with his. For our part, we never approach anything impossible unless the setup is right. A right setup frames actions; within a right setup actions become more readily analyzable, repeatable, and able to be followed up on. We ask only that enormous sums of money be spent on constructing the world as a tactically posed surrounding for the benefit of the body. A procedural constructing of the world will constitute a way for our species to take evolution into its own hands. In some sense, any of the coordinating skills our species has been able to count as its own would have, prior to their having been acquired, been thought to be impossible.

A ruling concern is that nothing conceivably belonging in the picture (to be painted of the world) be left out of it. If bound to err one is, then choose always, when judging what merits inclusion, to err in the direction of being overly inclusive. When organisms-persons are the subject of study, that they subsist within architectural environments ought not to be ignored; specific features of environments, along with interactions they invite, belong in the picture. This emphasis on an all-inclusiveness, an inclination to attend to everything, naturally leads to more specificity, a searching out of exact placements of, and uses for, the elements and features of architectural environments.

Consider this: *An organism-person allied with, in close corre-*

spondence with, surroundings that guide skillful coordination of bodily actions ought to be able to escape so-called human destiny, the as-if-ordained downhill course of things. Not only will houses and towns that architecturally guide and sustain an organism-person help her to compose, execute, and coordinate actions more skillfully than was ever before thought to be possible, they will also automatically enlist her in a thoroughgoing architectural questioning of the purpose of the species. An architecturally guided and sustained organism-person should then be able to reverse that destiny known to have been the lot of billions of other members of her species; when it becomes possible for an organism-person simply to go on indefinitely, a reversible destiny shall have been achieved.

If you say no, or yes, to this automatically, who are you, then, and where does it get you?

Architecture is the greatest tool available to our species, both for figuring itself out and for constructing itself differently. For the crisis ethicist, the judge and the jury, the witnesses and their testimonies, the everything, is this body that each of us, in living, has in evidence. And the body, a complex organism that is always in the process of reading surroundings, needs to be defined together with that within which it moves; peering at it from the other way around, the surroundings need to be defined together with bodies moving within them.

To repeat: have the architectural surroundings themselves, by virtue of how they are formed, pose questions directly to the body. The unit for consideration, that which is to be measured and assessed, should be the body taken together with its surroundings. How to put all that one is as a body to best use becomes the chief ethical concern. Lives should be lived as case studies, and surely not isolated ones. No one should consider herself a finished product or a non-puzzle; everyone should live as a self-marmot (self-guinea pig). Self-marmots

will act as coordinators that keep discoveries from all fields of research actively in the arena. A self-marmot's urge to assemble knowledge, to effect a living synthesis, will be sparked by a recognition of the state of emergency in which she is doomed to live. Research should no longer be done off to one side, in a school, a library, a laboratory. Where one lives needs to become a laboratory for researching, for mapping directly, the living body itself, oneself as world-forming inhabitant.

What then is preventing us from inventing ourselves further? The answer comes quickly: the species has not yet learned how to have its members pull together to work communally at the same time they continue to form themselves as separate individuals. The species is in need of a common purpose, fueled by a sharp sense of a shared plight, and a concerted communal effort to address this purpose. And this is so, despite the fact that every individual has been formed communally, and that therefore all actions have communal echoes and repercussions (this is easily proven). For members of our species to arrive at having a great many more than the paltry sum of possibilities that is usually their due, there needs to be a communal devising, selecting, and combining of techniques that will strengthen organisms-persons and help them to regenerate themselves; results need to be pooled and compared.

To be insisted on: sentience assembles its swerving suite of cognizing stances depending on how the body disports itself—the whole of this text will prove this statement. Therefore, architecture ought to be designed for actions it invites. Theoretical constructs as to the nature of person can be assessed in a thoroughgoing manner through—and, in the end, only through—architectural construction.

Economic priority should be given to the resolving of existential puzzles: What is this species in the first place? What lives and what dies? It is admittedly costly for our species to

ask questions of itself through architecture, particularly if one determines it to be necessary to devote an entire room to the posing of a single question, or, for that matter, if it should turn out that two rooms are needed for that purpose, or even if the testing of a single hypothesis might necessitate that an entire house (or a city) be constructed. But if this is how and from where the answers can come at last, why worry over the expense?

Architectural Body