Feature Scene VI

Overcoming the *Logos* – Overcoming Lego: From Imagined Space to the Spatial Imagination of Cyborgs

For several generations, the interconnecting plastic bricks called Lego represented not only an educative means of developing imagination but also one of developing children’s capacity of logical thinking. The first Lego catalogues from the early 1960s praise the small bricks as “good toys”. The reason can be found in the heading: because Lego is the “simplest thing in the world”.

Fig. 16: Bionicle

“Simple” – yes, but not for simpletons. During the 1960s and the 1970s, Lego built itself a reputation as a toy for people who aspire to advanced levels of grammar through the successful combination of abstract and concrete ways of thinking. Lego helps you to master your creativity like a language: being imaginative without losing sight of
the most basic rules of logic, you will manage to remain coherent even in complex situations. Playing with Lego does perhaps not make you a poet, but it enables you to master a practical as well as a theoretical “language” with a certain degree of sophistication.

The idea must have been that, once we reduce the elements of our children’s games to the healthy level of “the basic” (providing at the same time a maximum of modularity), children will become imaginative without becoming insane. Their imagination will develop “reasonably well” without losing itself in the wide space of “play” which remains, just because in this space things are only “imagined”, frightening because it is infinite.

For parents this has been extremely convenient because here play and fun were delivered with an incorporated self-control. This conception, unconscious as it might have been, was strong enough to provide Lego with the status of the “educative toy” as such. It was strong enough to inspire and lend its name to a large number of educative programs for children, various computer softwares, as well as training courses for business people attempting to enhance their business performance by using this brick-game as a thinking tool.

What it actually is that makes Lego “logical” is difficult to spell out. Secondary features might be as important as primary ones. Though the word “Lego” has been derived from the Danish “leg godt” (play well), its phonetic resemblance with Latin words like “logos” or “logic” might have helped from the beginning to lend it a more scientific air. Very early the company began to point out that in Latin “lego” also means “I study”.

Then there are the primary features. The basic elements (bricks) are rectangular and not round-shaped. Deciding to reject any amorphous shapes (you will not learn “logic” through pottery), Lego managed to force play (together with the intellectual capacity supposed to be shaped through this play), into more rigorous, geometrical structures.

The choice of colors had a similar function. Far from refusing colors straight-out (and thus killing imagination), Lego reduced colors to shadeless “basic” ones that remained abstract in the sense that – apart from the green for trees – they had no relationship with anything concrete.

But most obvious became the logical rigor within the organization of the play itself. Lego bricks stick together through an invisible structure, they create their structure so to speak out of themselves. This means that they provide the fragile brains of 2-14 years-olds just