

Ericka Beckman in conversation with Lionel Bovier & Fabrice Stroun

Lionel Bovier & Fabrice Stroun: In your films and photographs, there is a very strong sense of a technology- based artificiality. Yet, your images are obviously handcrafted. Even today, while you could use computer gene- rated imagery, you still rely on cardboard models and stop-motion animation.

EB: The sense of artificiality comes from the fact that everything in my films is a model or a replica of so- mething. The objects I animate are symbols. I am interested in how we form mental images and how we can communicate them without words. My work is based on action, wether I use stop-motion animation, perfor- mance, silent film acting or sports. The physical process of making an object or a film brings with it a certain kind of concentration that I do not find when I work with an interface.

Since 2000 my work has been the product of a direct interaction between my camera and the space I shoot in. I shoot for very long concentrated periods of time, where I deconstruct the architecture with my camera lens, creating animation sequences that follow the lines of the building's design. My goal is to make the architecture move as if it had its own volition. I do use more sophisticated robotic equipment when I work with model animation, but that work is secondary to my live action work where I perform with the camera. Film can have all the physical action cues you need to believe it is real, yet at the same time, films can produce an unfamiliar perceptual experience.

LB & FS: The Super-8 Trilogy (We Imitate; We Break Up, 1978, The Broken Rule, 1979, Out of Hand, 1980) makes direct references to Jean Piaget's theories of learning processes. How did you become interested in these questions and how did they come to structure your early works as a whole?

EB: As a young artist I was looking for a language to explain the relationship between knowledge of self and movement in the physical world. I knew that movement was a language we learned long before the language we speak. I discovered by making short experimental works that sound and image could be substituted for each other as long as the viewer understood the temporal and spatial coordinates of the scene. Somehow physical reality is a system more deeply ingrained in our consciousness than language, images or even music. So I aban- doned all my philosophical readings and delved into Piaget. That's when I started the Super-8 Trilogy. The first film, We Imitate; We Break Up, deals with the process of imitation and the creation of a stable identity. The film is a display of physical actions between characters, or characters and obstacles, which starts out by

being unco-ordinated, gradually reaches an equilibrium, only to become uncoordinated again. I try to illustrate through a cinematic process how action becomes a memory, which in turn becomes the basis for a stable identity.

In the second film, *The Broken Rule*, I set out to show how rules are formed. On one hand there are rules or truths that you live by that are formed by a social consensus through the process of testing and acceptance. Then there are rules that are created by the individual that provide a sense of purpose and self worth. They both carry real consequences. *The Broken Rule* was also, in part, a celebration of the artist Mike Kelley, who I had just met in California, and whose work and energy I felt represented a commitment to self-established rules. I created the final performance for him. *Out of Hand*, the third film depicts how a symbol is formed. The boy in *Out of Hand* is the quintessential Peter Pan, who can't move into adolescence and holds back to retrieve a nostalgic object from his childhood. To move into adulthood, he must abandon his attachment to this object and embrace a symbol that will represent childhood in his memory.

At this time in my life when I made the Super-8 Trilogy, I read Piaget's books very loosely, almost with a poetic freedom to just enjoy his tests and his children's responses to his tests. But I also tried to absorb his definition of the successive levels of intelligence leading up to the acquisition of language. This reading of Piaget's scientific process gave me confidence to build my own logical systems.

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