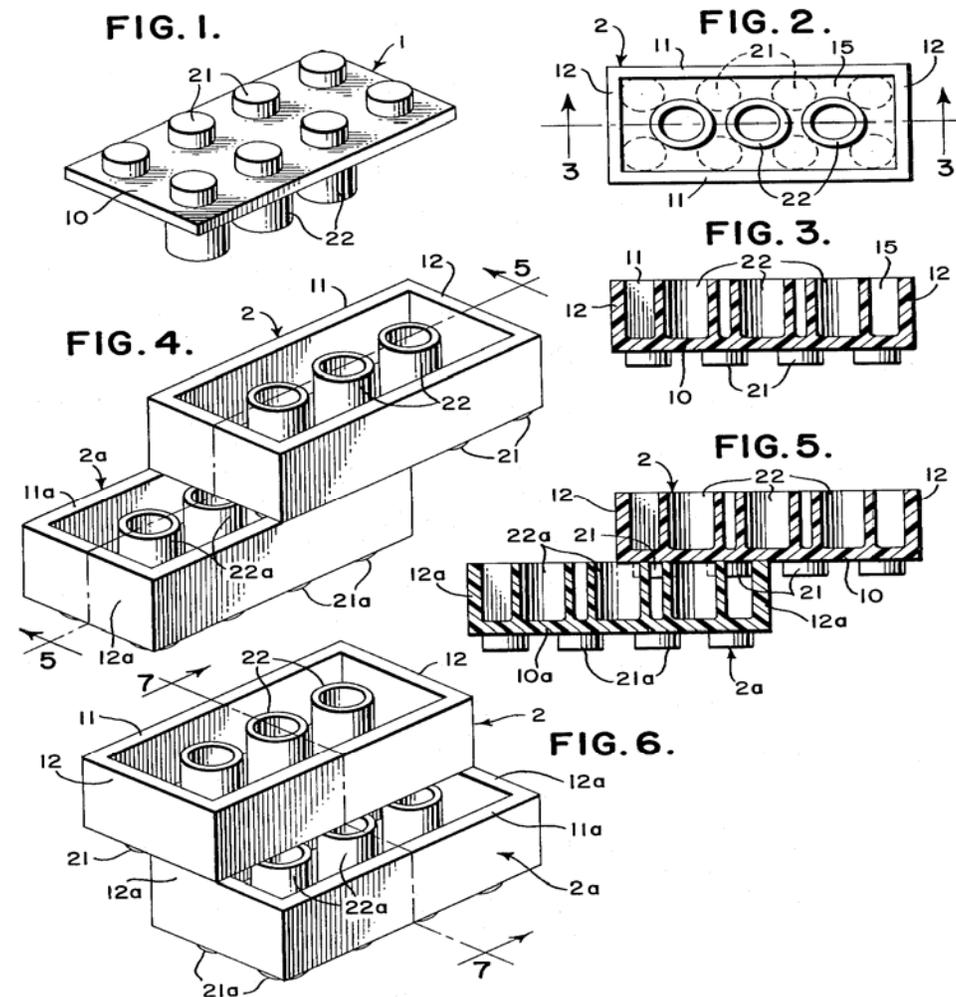


is quite unique—which brings us to the reproductive qualities of the organism.

Much remarked upon, the hermaphroditic nature of the creature is singular amongst the planet's variegated fauna. Each organism is at once male and female, though not in the usual sense—rather, the organism is in fact *two* organisms, one male and one female, each possessing a separate ganglion. Fig. 1 displays both sexual organs, male (21) and female (22)—males typically possess organs in even groupings and females in odd groupings, which interlock during the mating ritual (see Fig. 5 for a bisection of organisms in congress and Fig. 2 for an illustration of the interlocking pattern). Figs. 4 and 6 display two of the various possible mating arrangements (the sociological difference between these and similar arrangements, if indeed such a difference exists, is not known).

Each organism is symmetrical (see lines 3, 5, 7, and the bisection in Fig. 3) and mating usually occurs in combinations along these axes. Mating continues for periods of seemingly random duration, ranging from moments to years. The life spans of the creatures are lengthy, but often shortened in proportion to the amount of sexual congress—due to physical harm endured during mating—and a monogamous coupling might survive indefinitely. The multitude of organs also allows for group congress, which is common.

As noted previously, each organism is in fact *two* organisms, one of each sex, separated by a shared wall of tissue (1). Most fascinating is the fact that these symbiotic creatures appear *unaware of the presence of the other*.



The male (10) might mate with a female (11) and its symbiont with another male, or two—and so on—to form large, complex structures, the organism groups that have been observed in nature. Yet each creature will be aware only of its own mate(s)—and *unaware* of the existence of its symbiont or of the group.

The complex structures that have been observed—these large groups of organisms, often arranged in patterns of stunning beauty—are therefore, unless created in the laboratory, *entirely random*. Their occasional resemblance to human structures, then, is doubly astonishing.

This behaviour, of course, leads to problems of classification—as if the