

# **NEWSLETTER**

The International Toy Research Association

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ITRA NEWSLETTER EDITOR

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This is the first Newsletter from The International Toy Research Association (ITRA). The aim is to present ITRA and to give information about toy research activities in different parts of the world. Each Newsletter will include Letters to the Secretariat, New and Forthcoming Publications, Queries for Members, Book Reviews, and Conference Papers.

If you have News, Articles and other written material on toy research that you would wish to see included in the next ITRA Newsletter, please send it to the ITRA Newsletter editor:

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### **What ITRA IS**

The following description of ITRA is taken partly from a press release written by Jeffrey Goldstein, September 12, 1993, after the first meeting and forming of ITRA in Utrecht, Holland, September 10, 1993, and partly from an interview with Gilles Brougere, Maitre de Conference en Sciences de l'Education Universite Paris-Nord, France, published in "La Revue du Jouet", No 237, 1994.

The initiative to form an association for toy research was taken by Professor Emeritus Brian Sutton-Smith, U.S.A, Professor Jeffrey Goldstein, Holland, and cand. phil. Jorn-Martin Steenhold, Denmark. Grants from the Toy Manufacturers of Europe (TME, Brussels) and the Toy Manufacturers of America (TMA, New York) enabled 16 researchers from 11 countries to meet in Utrecht, Holland, September 10th and discuss aims and rules for an association for toy researchers. The meeting decided to form a work group for an international research association. The association was founded by the following toy researchers:

Kathleen Alfano, Fisher-Price, E.Aurora, NY, USA  
 Birgitta Almqvist, Uppsala University, Sweden  
 Gilles Brougere, University Paris-Nord, France  
 Greta Fein, University of Maryland, College Park MD, USA  
 Jeffrey H. Goldstein, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands  
 Waltraut Hartmann, University of Vienna, Austria  
 Joop Hellendoorn, University of Leiden, The Netherlands  
 Rachel Karniol, Tel Aviv University, Israel  
 Stephen Kline, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada  
 Anthony Pellegrini, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA  
 Hein Retter, Technische Universitat, Braunschweig, Germany  
 Jean-Pierre Rossie, University of Ghent, Belgium  
 Peter K. Smith, University of Sheffield, England  
 Gisela Wegener-Spohring, Gottingen University, Germany  
 Jorn Martin Steenhold, Bryrup, Denmark  
 Brian Sutton-Smith, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA  
 Cleo Gougoulis (Greece) and Jacqueline Jukes (U.K.) were unable to attend.

### **ITRA Secretariat**

The meeting nominated Dr. Birgitta Almqvist, Uppsala University, Sweden, and cand. phil. Jorn Martin Steenhold, Denmark, as co-secretaries of the International Toy Research Association. The secretariat will receive, collate and distribute bibliographies, reprints, and preprints. Both Birgitta Almqvist, who was formerly at the Department of Education at Uppsala University, and Jorn Martin Steenhold, are from July 1994 stationed at the Centre for Research on Toys and Educational Media, University of Halmstad, Sweden.

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### **Aims and future plans of ITRA**

The fundamental reason for creating an association exclusively for toy research is that, while play research has a long tradition and is well established, research on the role of toys in children's play and development is still limited. Toys are used by children all over the world and constitute quite a massive international industry. Little is known about toys in less industrial countries. Gilles Brougere explains that the aim of ITRA is to make toy research progressive all over the world and that academic studies of toys should be of great interest also for toy producers as it will give them the opportunity to obtain a "savoir-faire" concerning their production of toys.

One ambition among the members of the work group is to obtain a network of toy researchers in order to follow, update and inform about current research on children and toys. The prime ambition is to spread and broaden the knowledge about toys and play materials and to support the development of good toys for children.

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### **Ongoing projects**

The group already has several projects planned; one concerning exploring vs. playing with toys, with the purpose to find out what determines 'play value', while another focuses on global toy marketing with questions such as "do children play with the same toy in the same way in different countries?", and "does a toy commercial have the same meaning to children and parents in different countries?"

A third project concerns parent and teacher attitudes toward 'aggressive play' and will also compare aggressive play with manufactured vs. home-made toys, such as found in Morocco, Brazil, and less industrialized countries. Data will be gathered in European countries, Morocco, Israel, Brazil and, perhaps, in South Africa.

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## **LETTERS TO THE ITRA SECRETARIAT**

### **UNESCO PROJECT - CHILDREN'S RIGHTS TO PLAY**

#### **A Letter from Brian Sutton-Smith**

One outcome of the 1992 Paris combined meeting of the American Association for the Study of Play (TASP) and the European International Council for Children's Play (ICCP), was that discussions between John Bennet of UNESCO and some of us led to a movement on his part to generate a document about play. His position is that there is a need to safeguard children's rights to play in the face of obvious changes in the nature of the modern world, its technology, and developments in the third world etc.

And what he hopes for is a document to be circulated to the governments of the world crystallizing the best advice on all matters having to do with child play.

He nominated Andre Michelet the President of ICCP and Brian Sutton-Smith of the USA to be the editors of such a document and commissioned the World Organization of Early Childhood Education (OMEP) to organize the development of the product. The OMEP President Dr. Candide Pineault of Canada then brought together in Quebec, Michelet, Sutton-Smith and two Canadian play researchers, Drs. Denise Garon and Jacqueline Theriault.

Their conjoint discussions in early October 1993 led to the circulation of a survey on play to some 450 persons throughout the world who were involved either practically or as researchers with children's play. The questionnaire was intentionally kept very general in order to extract whatever opinions or research findings the sample might wish to afford. It asked for commentary on such topics as play and development, the world's effects upon the imagination, cultural interactions (gender etc.), family play, peer play, toys, technology, traditional games, playgrounds, school acceleration, catastrophe, omissions and the future of play.

The responses have been arriving since February 1994 and the results should be available later this year. The intention is, as far as possible, to quantify attitudes for and against a variety of positions, quoting the various informants to indicate the range and complexity of the issues at stake. This is probably as serious a chance to have a practical impact upon the future of children's play as has ever been offered to a large group of play theory oriented people. It is my hope that others will feel as I have that this is not something that one can playfully disregard. I hope that if they have not already done so, they will move now to respond to the questionnaire they have received.

Note my permanent address is now Brian Sutton-Smith, 4074 Via Mirada, Sarasota, Florida 34238, and my phonefax is (813) 927 3907.

## **PLAY IN GREECE**

### **A letter from Cleo Gougoulis**

Games and Contests in Ancient Greece is the title of a research project which began in 1992 in Salonica under the supervision of Professor of Classics, Ioannis Stefanis. It is the first systematic attempt to record and document play in Greece diachronically from antiquity to modern times.

The project's organizers expect to attain considerable evidence attesting to the cultural continuity of Ancient and Modern Greece as the remarkable continuity in some "humble cultural forms" such as children's games suggest. Organized, public games are also included in the project which aims at creating a chronological and geographical corpus of games noting geographical distribution, local repertoires and programmes.

For more information on the project (which may be facing severe financing problems) contact: Professor Ioannis Stefanis, Department of Ancient Greek Philology, Faculty of Philosophy, Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, 540 06 Thessaloniki.

Cleo Gougoulis, Peleponnesian Folklore Foundation, 3 Victoria Square, 104 34 Athens, Greece.

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## **QUERIES FOR MEMBERS**

To be able to work effectively as a channel between members and to distribute ITRA information, the secretariat requests your E-mail addresses and/or fax numbers. We would also be grateful to have your:

- suggestions for admitting new members
- whether to require dues for members
- information about your current work, plans or reports on completed studies,
- suggestions for future activities, such as co-operation between countries for carrying out comparative studies, ideas on projects and so on.

### **A Swedish Toy Research Centre - CFL at the University of Halmstad**

The Centre for Research on Toys and Educational Media (in Swedish: Centrum for Forskning om Leksaker - CFL) officially opened in September 1993. The aims of CFL are to initiate and carry out research projects, but also to give courses, supervise students and host foreign guest researchers.

The initiative to forming a centre for research on toys and educational media was taken a few years ago by Krister Svensson, director of studies at the Department of Social Science at the University of Halmstad, and Staffan Selander, Ph.D. Associate Professor at the Department of Education, Uppsala University. Krister Svensson is now the administrative leader and Staffan Selander the scientific leader of the centre, which is the first of its kind in the whole of Scandinavia. Moreover, there is to our knowledge no University centre specializing on toy research anywhere else in the world.

A Swedish toy research centre is the more notable since research on children's toys, though quite industrious in a number of countries in Europe and the U.S., was virtually non-existent in Sweden before 1983 when Birgitta Almqvist, Uppsala University, began to outline the first Swedish toy research project financed by the National Ministry for Health and Social Affairs. September 1993, with Professor Emeritus Brian Sutton-Smith, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA, as opponent, the first doctoral dissertation in Sweden on children and toys was submitted at the Department of Education, Uppsala University (see New and forthcoming publications elsewhere in this newsletter).

Birgitta Almqvist was invited to help build up the Centre for Research on Toys and Educational Media at the University of Halmstad. Later also Jorn Martin Steenhold, Denmark, joined the centre.

Whereas Birgitta's research focuses on the role of toys in the education of young children, Jorn Martin's focuses on the role of toys in families with different life styles.

For further information about the Centre for Research on Toys and Educational Media, please contact Krister Svensson, CFL, University of Halmstad, Box 823, 301 18 Halmstad, Sweden. Email: Internet: Krister.Svensson@isb.hh.s

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### **NEW AND FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS**

The contents of three publications are reported:

1. Stephen Kline (1993). *Out of the Garden: Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing*
2. Jeffrey H. Goldstein (Ed.) (1994). *Toys, Play and Child Development*.
3. Birgitta Almqvist (1994). *Approaching the Culture of Toys in Swedish Child Care. A Literature Survey and a Toy Inventory*. Doctoral Dissertation.

I. Stephen Kline's *Out of the Garden: Children's Culture in the Age of TV Marketing* is available from the Verso Press, 6 Meard Street, London MIV 3HR, or 29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001-2291. Here are the contents:

Introduction: The Sovereignty of Consumerism Children in the Age of Marketing

1. Communication Analysis for the Age of Marketing
  2. The Making of Children's Culture
  3. From Literacy to Comics: The Origins of Children's Fiction
  4. Thralls of the Screen: The Rise of Mass Media for Children
  5. Marketing Toys for Children and Youth
  6. Building Character
  7. Limited Imaginings
  8. The Parables of Play: Policy, Strategy and Advertising Design
  9. Technicians of the Imagination
- Conclusions: Playing with Culture

II. Jeffrey H. Goldstein's anthology *Toys, Play and Child Development*, Cambridge University Press. Available from the Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB 2RU, UK. Phone (0)223 312393, Fax (0)223 315052., Telex 817256. Contents and authors are as follows:

Introduction (Jeffrey H. Goldstein)

1. Imaginative Play and Adaptive Development (Jerome L. Singer)
2. Play, Toys and Language (Anthony D. Pellegrini)
3. Educational Toys, Creative Toys (Birgitta Almqvist)
4. The War Play Debate: Current Issues (Peter K. Smith)
5. War Toys and Aggressive Play Scenes: Balanced Aggression (Gisela Wegener-Spohring)
6. Sex Differences in Toy Play and Use of Video games (Jeffrey H. Goldstein)
7. Does Play Prepare the Future? (Brian Sutton-Smith)
8. Play as Healing (Dorothy G. Singer)

III. Birgitta Almqvist's doctoral dissertation: *Approaching the Culture of Toys in Swedish Child Care. A Literature Survey and a Toy Inventory*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala Studies in Education 54, is available from Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, Sweden, 1994, but will be sent to all ITRA members later this year. The contents are as follows:

Part I: Introduction

1. Points of Departure
2. Toys in History and Research

Part II: Literature Survey

3. Introduction to the Literature Survey
4. Toys and Children's Development
5. Toys in Children's Fantasy Play
6. Toys and Gender-role Understanding
7. Children and War Toys
8. Comment on the Reviewed Research

Part III: Toy Inventory

9. Introduction to the Toy Inventory

10. Procedures

11. Results

12. Resume and Comments on the Toy Inventory

Part IV: Discussion

14. Approaching the Toy Culture in Swedish Child Care

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### Book review

Maria Argyriadi, *Dolls in Greek Life and Art from Antiquity to the Present Day*, translated by Alexandra Doumas, foreword by A. Delivorrias and D. Coleman. Athens: Lucy Braggiotti Publications, 1991. 160 pp, 119 color and 29 b/w photographs, bibliography 29x30 cm. Available in Greek, English and French. ISBN 960-7294-07-6.

Reviewed by Cleo Gougoulis, Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, 3 Victoria Square, 104 34 Athens, Greece.

In the rapidly growing international literature on dolls very little has been written on regional dolls, a fact commented on by D. Coleman in her preface to the book. Argyriadi's work - the first Greek publication on dolls - contributes to the broadening of our knowledge on this topic and consequently on local material cultures by attempting, in a fairly descriptive manner, a history of dolls in Greece. As is evident in the title and partly discussed in the introductory note, the author adopts a broad definition of the doll as plaything, collectable bibelot, work of art and human effigy used for sacred or profane purposes (e.g. folk rites, puppet theatre, etc.)

Being a doll collector herself (possessing one of the most important doll collections in Greece, which has been recently donated to the Benaki Museum), the author focuses on the doll as an object *per se*, providing more information concerning production (construction centres, date and place of construction), construction technique (form of dolls, material etc.), and distribution of the dolls and less on its use, particularly in children's play.

The book is, apparently, divided in two sections (unfortunately there is no table of contents): The first section includes a brief text (29 pages with 29 b/w photographs) organized in a chronological order (not always without structure problems) in six chapters: 1. Dolls in Ancient Greece, 2. Dolls in Roman and Byzantine Times, 3. Dolls in the Period of Ottoman Rule), 4. Dolls in Modern Times, 5. Dolls in Folk Ceremonies and Customs), 6. Theatrical Dolls from Antiquity to the Present Day. The second and bigger section comprises 119 colour photographs followed by an appendix on Greek dollmakers, doll artists, material for doll making and toyshops and concluding with an extensive list of references.

It is mainly in the second section that the strengths of the book lie, as it presents very interesting and well documented material in photographs of excellent quality with detailed captions. Moreover the appendices (unfortunately not listed as such) present for the first time original information on toy retailers, toy makers and toymaking in Greece.

While reading the first section, two perspectives become apparent in the line of presentation: that of the collector, who is first and foremost interested in the documentation of his/her material and that of the folklorist. It is in the latter perspective that the drawbacks of the book lie, as Argyriadi shares with the majority of Greek folklorists - even today - a number of theoretical and methodological shortcomings, which can only be understood in the history of the foundation of Greek Folklore as a discipline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Folklore was established as a discipline within the context of a newly founded Greek State and a nationalist movement which demanded the projection of the unity of the Greek nation in the dimension of time. When the German historian J. P. Fallmerayer rejected the very notion of Greeks as Europeans, folklorists undertook the task of proving the historical continuity with Ancient Greece on the basis of

ethnographic evidence. Folklore studies focused on the collection of mostly oral literature, which was subsequently compared to analogous ancient Greek texts. It should be noted here that collections of children's games in the 19<sup>th</sup> c. were published under the title "Living monuments". The projection of continuity meant - and still means - a) treatment of data as texts without context, b) stress of unity at the expense of evidence on pronounced regional variation of Greek culture which has been luckily recorded by anthropologists, c) little interest in documentation of change - as it was taken for granted that folk culture remained unchanged for centuries. It is the latter assumption that underlies Greek folklorists' neglects to date their material.

Trapped in this tradition, Argyriadi does not always avoid the following type of errors:

a) arbitrary generalizations, e.g. p. 23: "Bride dolls acquired the significance of an amulet and should be always kept among the girls dowry". Apart from the fact that questions such as, which bride dolls? where? when? who records this piece of information? are left unanswered, this type of statement is moreover typical of an adult bias in discussing playthings. I doubt that bride dolls constructed by girls for the staging of mock weddings were kept among their dowry items in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

b) failure to specify source of information or analytical statement, e.g. on p. 14 we are left unclear on the origin of the classification of dolls according to their potential for movement. Is it the author herself or Higgins? Similarly the extremely interesting account of the process of commercialization of Greek toys in chapter

4, is obviously based on the author's own fieldwork. Unfortunately the fact remains unmentioned.

c) weak documentation of data, mostly in chapter 3, where the questions where, when, who records are not always answered, e.g. p. 23: "A girl often received a wooden doll from her father when she was between five and ten years old", while uncritical use of

problematic sources (e.g. travellers' accounts or extremely vague folklore sources) is not avoided, d) unwarranted assumptions, e.g. p. 18: "Throughout the Roman period children's toys were religious and symbolic in character". On page 23 the presenting of adolescent girls - during the entire period of Ottoman rule? and where? etc. - with hand made bride dolls is commented as a certain echo of the ancient *kores*, " ... which were not just toys but symbols of chastity and marriage and were offered at puberty to the goddesses of fertility and the hearth".

Despite its shortcomings - which will hopefully be overcome as the author gains confidence in her own work rather than relying on weak folklore material - this is an important book, which can easily appeal to a wider public as well as to play scholars. There is plenty of material, which can be used to investigate questions concerning cross-cultural comparison of folk-toys, the process of commodification of Greek toys, changing social attitudes towards play and childhood, play and national identity, play and the concept of otherness (e.g. costume or tourist dolls). Furthermore - despite omissions in reference to some sources - a wide range of primary sources (e.g. diaries, children's press, children's literature) on Greek children's playthings are presented for the first time. Finally, the fact that the biggest part of the book is occupied by photographs contributes to the visual representation of hence unknown Greek dolls, while at the same time pleasing the eye, for the aesthetic value of the publication should not be overlooked.

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### **A ready-to-start-project. A brief note from Anthony Pellegrini**

Tony Pellegrini, Georgia University, Athens, GA, USA tells me that "as part of my interest in kids' early literacy, I continue to look for play related forms of oral language that predict literacy". Now Tony is about

ready to start a project whose purpose is to look for the ways in which the narrative forms of language in play relate to similar forms in literacy. Five-year-olds are going to be observed in narrative eliciting contexts involving toys, books, paper, pencils, etc.

For further information please contact Tony Pellegrini, Georgia University, Athens, GA, 30602 USA.

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### **Conference Paper**

At "ler Congres de la Recherche en Education et Formation" in Paris, March 1993, Gilles Brougere, Universite Paris Nord, France, presented a paper titled *La signification d'un environnement ludique. L'ecole maternelle a travers son material ludique*. [The signification of a play environment. L'ecole maternelle (the French preschool) across its play material].

Unfortunately there is as yet no official English translation of his paper, but - with Brougere's permission - the editor will try to summarize the results of the study to give a picture of typical play materials in French preschools. Brougere's point of departure was the following question: what relationship is there between the play material and the teaching emphases in the preschool? A toy inventory in 226 preschool classes showed for example that baby-dolls and vehicles were found in 89% of them, outnumbering all kinds of miniature "personages" (e.g. toy animals, farm-play equipment, Playmobil, "poupees-mannequins" (Barbie and her likes), doll-houses, toy soldiers, and fantasy characters. While puzzles were found in practically all classes, the "mannequin-doll" was found in 10% and war play items in no more than 4% of the classes.



The dominance of educational material is noticeable, as is equipment for psychomotor training. Brougere maintains that the play material undoubtedly effects the play of the children. In an earlier study Brougere claims that the presence of a specific play material in a child centre, but particularly the placing of it (e.g. on open shelves vs. kept in a store-room), indicates the preschool teacher's play preferences. In this paper he emphasizes that, since adults are directly responsible for the play environment, educational materials like any play items transmit to the child both information and assessment. Though play materials permitting free play are found, in the lowest classes at least, the pedagogic dimension is well marked by the dominance of educational play on the one side and equipment for psycho-motor training on the other. The latter indicates that organizing physical activities comes before creating an environment for free play activities.

This brief account may give a hint of the significance of play material for children's play in French preschools. The results of this study are similar to those of a Swedish preschool toy inventory (Almqvist, 1994) which might indicate a "universal" toy preference among preschool teachers. But since, so far, we have data from France and Sweden only, we cannot be sure. So what about preschool toys in your country?

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### **Bibliography on Children and Toys**

In September 1989, Birgitta Almqvist presented a bibliography on international toy research from 1962 through 1987, *Children and Toys. A Bibliography*, Uppsala Reports on Education, 27, Department of Education, University of Uppsala. The bibliography is arranged both by specific topics and by author. Copies of the bibliography are available from the author or from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, No. ED 317268.

The bibliography now needs updating. The gathering of literature will be undertaken by way of both direct and computer search. However, it would be of great value to obtain information from toy researchers about own or colleagues' studies to be included in the extended bibliography. Please send any such information to the Editor.

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### **Stop Press!**

From a faded paper clipping recently found, the editor has learnt that in 1985 **Stein Erik Ulvund**, Institute for Educational Research in Oslo, Norway, presented a dissertation focussing on the role of toys in infants' cognitive development.

After receiving his Ph.D, Ulvund has left the issue of toys, but continues studying cognitive development of infants. His dissertation was 1989 published by Solum and Humanities Press under the title "Cognitive Development in Infancy".

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