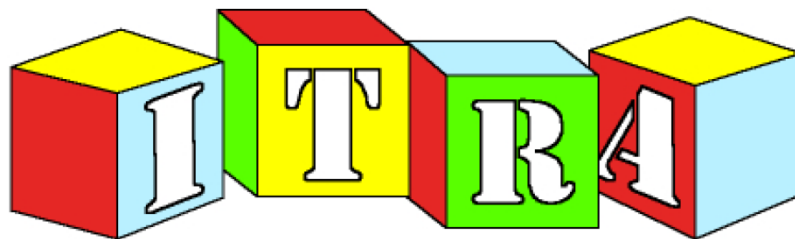


ITRA NEWSLETTER

Vol. 2. No.2

Spring/Summer 1998



**INTERNATIONAL TOY
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**

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ITRA NEWSLETTER
International Toy Research Association
Vol. 2 No 2 **Spring/Summer 1998**

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Message From the President

Toy research is a growing discipline thanks to the qualified and eager work of an increasing number of toy researchers all over the world. It is the task of ITRA to offer these researchers an organization that can support their work and to organize activities where they can find and meet with other toy researchers.

Furthermore, the development of ITRA, new networks, institutions at universities will strengthen the infra structure of a world wide web of toy researchers. It is of utmost importance that the research on toys as well as on other subjects is carried out with high quality.

It is essential that all scientific work stands by it self without leaning on authorities The ITRA network, however, could support its members in their efforts to achieve a Ph.D. by offering comments and guidance in their work.

It is not the subject of ITRA as an organization to judge or evaluate the scientific quality of a doctoral dissertation. That must be the responsibility of the Universities.

Krister Svensson
ITRA President

A Historic Newsletter

ITRA Newsletter Spring/Summer 1998 is somewhat historical, being the first since the International Toy Research Association (ITRA) was officially registered as an international association during the late Spring of 1998. The registration is a result of several months of hard work on the diplomatic level of our first ITRA President Gilles Brougere.

From November 1997, Gilles is holding the post as Vice President with the responsibility to assist our new President Krister Svensson to continue the important work of the only toy research association in the world. Being the first Newsletter from the association since the registration, an ITRA chronicle will be given in this Newsletter, together with a brief look at NCFL in the rear mirror, as the two organizations are now closely related and have been since their start in 1993.

Official Registration of ITRA

April 1998, the confirmation of the registration was sent to us from Mme Stephanie SOULIER, Colloque International sur le Jouet, on behalf of Centre Universitaire de la Charente, M.S.T. Marketing des Produits de L'Enfant, "La Croix du Milieu" La Couronne, France.

"Dear Madame,

I am pleased to inform you that The International Toy Research Association is now registered at the Prefecture. The prefecture sent us the acknowledge of receipt (enclosed). The registration of ITRA will be published in "Journal Official" in April."

Later the secretariat received the following abstract from Journal Official de la Republique Française:

"#450 - Declaration a la prefecture de la Charente. Association Internationale Pour la Recherche Sur Le Jouet (The International Toy Research Association.) Objet: stimuler et encourager la recherché sur le jouet et les objets ludique, dans le monde entier. Siege social: centre universitaire de la Charente, La Croix du Milieu, B.P. 38, 16400, La couronne. Date de la declaration: 13 mars 1998

[Declaration by the prefecture of Charente. The purpose of the association is to stimulate and encourage the research on toys and play all over the world. Social Place: the University of Charente, La Croix du Milieu. B.P.38, 16400 La Couronne. Date of declaration: March 13, 1998].

The above information reached ITRA Secretariat in May 98, together with a three-page document describing the constitution of ITRA. The document will be found in English and in French on ITRA home page, connected to NCFL web site <http://www.hh.se/dep/ncflweb/index.html>.

ITRA ANNUAL FEE

The member meeting in Halmstad in 1996 decided that members of ITRA would be asked to pay an annual fee of \$50 to help finance the Secretariat, the printing - and distribution costs and other expenses needed to run the Association.

When paying your fee, please instruct your bank to forward Payments Orders, Collections and Documentary Credits direct to:

SWEDBANK, S-105 34 STOCKHOLM
SWIFT ADRESS: SWEDSESS, TELEX:
128 26 SWEDBNK S, Account: 8169-5,
993.860.016.

ITRA Chronicle

As this ITRA Newsletter marks a milestone in the history of ITRA, it seems the right place and time to present a narrative of its forming and development from 1993 through 1998. The thought of a toy research association was not entirely new in 1993, but was first raised by Gilles Brougere and Birgitta Almquist at Toy License Fair in Cannes, France, in 1985.

However, nothing came out of it at the time because we considered the number of toy

researchers in the world so diminutive a number that it was not worthwhile. Therefore, it was with extra great expectation we both accepted Jeffrey Goldstein's invitation eight years later to come to Utrecht in Holland to meet with a group of other researchers interested in questions concerning toys, and to discuss the forming of an association exclusively for toy research.

The ultimate initiative to form an association for toy research was taken by Professor Emeritus Brian Sutton-Smith, U.S. A, Professor Jeffrey Goldstein, Holland, and 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 12 countries to meet in Utrecht, Holland, September 10th to discuss aims and rules for an association for toy research. The meeting decided to form a work group for an International Toy Research Association (ITRA

The ITRA pioneers were:

Kathleen Alfano, Fisher-Price. E. Aurora, NY,USA, Birgitta Almquist, Uppsala University, Sweden, Gilles Brougere, University Paris-Nord, France, Greta Fein, University of Maryland College Park MD, USA, Jeffrey 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, Hein Retter, Technische Universitat, Braunschweig, Germany, Jean-Pierre Rossie, University of Ghent, Belgium, Peter K. Smith, University of Sheffield, England, Gisela Wegener-Spohring, Göttingen University, Germany, Jorn Martin Steenhold, Bryrup, Denmark, Brian Sutton-Smith, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA

Also invited to the pioneer meeting but - because of childbirth - unable to come were Cleo Gougoulis of Greece, and Jacqueline Jukes of the United Kingdom.

The following is a brief taken partly from the press release written by Jeffrey Goldstein, September 12, 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 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 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 knowledge about toys and play materials and to support the development of good toys for children.

**August 1993:
A Toy Research Center Opens
in Sweden**

One month before the forming of ITRA, **Krister Svensson**, University of Halmstad, in cooperation with **Staffan Selander**,

Uppsala University and the University College of Harnosand, had started the Center for Research on Toys (CFL) placed under the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Halmstad.

**September 1993: Two Events in the Field
of Toy Research**

September 6 1993, the first Scandinavian doctoral thesis focusing on children and toys was officially defended at the Department of Education, Uppsala University. The thesis contained a toy inventory in Swedish childcare centers, and a survey of toy research literature over a period of 30 years.

September 11, The International Toy Research Association (ITRA) was formed in Utrecht, hosted by Jeffrey Goldstein (related elsewhere in this Newsletter).

1994: ITRA Goes to Halmstad

In 1994, a closer relationship between ITRA and CFL began with the placing of the ITRA Secretariat at the center. One activity or the secretary is the development of an international network of "toy people".

One of the most interesting aims of the secretariat is to find colleagues with mutual interests and suggest them to contact each other. One aim that has not been so successful is to initiate to and get funds for cross-national projects. Now that ITRA is officially registered it may be easier to find means for cooperation over the borders. The question of toys is indeed of global concern, and has lately proved to be of interest not only as connected to children but to people of all ages, not least the elderly.

**September 1994: CFL Becomes
NCFL**

September 1994, the young toy research center in Halmstad organized the Nordic Conference About Toy Research.

The conference gathered 11 lecturers from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Key speaker was Professor Jeffrey Goldstein, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands.

As a consequence of the Nordic conference the name Center for Research on Toys was changed to Nordic Center for Research on Toys and Educational Media [in Swedish: Nordiskt Centrum for Forskning om Leksaker och Pedagogiska Media = NCFL].

The addendum "Educational Media" is an important mark indicating that toys are not only objects to play with but have a number of different meanings.

One such meaning is to be learning tools in school, and that toys without having the obsolete label educational can be a means for little children to learn about their environments.

June 1996 - 1st International Toy Research Conference

It seemed quite logical that NCFL would organize the first International Toy Research Conference ever held. Also logical was to hold it in honor to Professor Emeritus Brian Sutton-Smith, who has probably contributed most to the positive attitude to play and toys. Many an established researcher probably has fBrian Sutton-Smith to thank for it

June 1996: 1st ITRA Member Meeting,

In connection with the first International Toy Research Conference organized by NCFL at the Halmstad University, Sweden, June 1996, a member meeting was held to formalize the Association by electing a board, setting up codes, decide on member fees, etc.

The meeting was held June 21, at the closing of the International Toy Research Conference, and was attended by:

Kathleen Alfano, Fisher Price/Mattel, USA, Birgitta Almqvist, NCFL, University of Halmstad, Sweden, Giorgio Bartolucci, Centro Internazionale Ludoteche, Firenze, Italy, Lars-Erik Berg, University of Gothenburg and NCFL University of Halmstad, Gilles Brougere, Universite Paris-Nord, France, James Christie, Arizona State University, USA, Jeffrey Goldstein, University of Utrecht, Holland, Waltraut Hartmann, University of Vienna and Charlotte Biihler Institute, Vienna, Austria, Jackie Jukes, Hove, Sussex, England, Sudarshan Khanna, National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, India, Stephen Kline, Simon Fraser University, Canada, Anthony Pellegrini, University of Georgia, Athens, USA, Greta Pennell, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, USA, Jean-Pierre Rossie, University of Ghent, Belgium, Brian Sutton-Smith, Sarasota, Florida, Krister Svensson, University of Halmstad, Sweden, Wendy Varney, University of Wollongong, Australia, Siegfried Zoels, Fordern durch Spielmittel - Spielzeug fur Behinderte Kinder, Berlin, Germany.

ITRA members unable to attend the meeting were Vickii Jenvey, Australia, Gary Cross, USA, and Dongju Shin, Korea. Jorn Martin Steenhold, Denmark, was present only during the first part of the meeting when members of the board were elected.

Jeffrey Goldstein was chosen Chairman for this the first ITRA member meeting, and Secretary was Krister Svensson. The meeting decided that the ITRA Board was to consist of nine persons representing different parts of the world.

The following persons were chosen to represent the board of ITRA:

Birgitta Almquist, Sweden,
Secretary /Treasurer and Editor of ITRA
Newsletter,
Jeffrey Goldstein, Holland,
Waltraut Hartmann, Austria,
Dongju Shin, Korea,
Sudarshan Khanna, India,
Stephen Kline, Canada,
Anthony Pellegrini, USA,
Krister Svensson, Sweden,

It was agreed that Krister Svensson was to share the treasurer post with Birgitta Almquist, an arrangement based on practical reasons, namely that both are stationed at NCFL at Halmstad University. Gilles Brougere promised to hold the post as President of ITRA only until he had fulfilled his intention to organize an International Toy Seminar to take place in Angouleme, France, November 1997, the first official ITRA Board meeting November 14, 1997, in connection with the International Toy Seminar in Angouleme.

Present at the board meeting were (in alphabetic order) Birgitta Almquist, Gilles Brougere, Jeffrey Goldstein, Waltraut Hartmann, Sudarshan Khanna, Stephen Kline, Dongju Shin, Krister Svensson. Not present was ITRA Board member Anthony Pellegrini, USA.

Krister Svensson, University of Halmstad, Sweden, was elected President of ITRA for the coming three-year period. It was agreed that Past President Gilles Brougere would stay on as Vice President for some period of time to support Krister to further develop ITRA, and to have ITRA registered in France as an official international association.

Also decided was that ITRA President **Krister Svensson** and ITRA Secretary **Birgitta Almquist** were to open a bank

account in Halmstad, Sweden, where the ITRA secretariat is placed. Following an agreement from the Member Meeting 1996 in Halmstad, the Secretary/Treasurer Birgitta Almquist, and NCFL Director Krister Svensson will be the subscribers for the bank account and shall report any future incomes and costs to the ITRA Board.

ITRA LOGO CONTEST

Agneszka Mlicka, 9-year-old artistic daughter to a friend of **Jeffrey Goldstein**, Holland, sent in one drawing of laundry line with letters I T R A hanging on a laundry line, and one with a Teddy Bear seen through a magnifying glass.

Tarun Deep Girdher, final year student of **Sudarshan Khanna** in Communication Design at the National Institute of Design, Amedabad, India, suggested a drawing of a rocking horse standing on a sign with the word Itra in white letters on a black background square and **INTERNATIONAL TOY RESEARCH ASSOCIATION** in block letters underneath.

The third proposal came from **Anders Petersson**, publicity expert, often engaged by NCFL for creating folders and other printed material such as conference invitations and programs.

The originals of the three logo proposals were displayed to the board without the names of the artists. Finally the ITRA Board decided to choose the Logo with classical blocks that you have already met on the first page of this Newsletter. It is created by **Anders Petersson**, Halmstad, Sweden.

WORDS FROM THE PAST ITRA PRESIDENT

Comme nous l'avions decide lors de mon election, mon mandat de president a pris fin avec l'organisation du International Toy Seminar d'Angouleme en novembre 1997. Ce

fut pour moi tres agreable de terminer cette periode ou nous essayons de construire l'ITRA par une reunion qui, apres celle d'Halmstad, a permis de progresser dans la reunion de chercheurs sur le jouet.

Ainsi j'ai pu impliquer des chercheurs français et associer des chercheurs de differents pays avec lesquels nous n'avions pas encore de contacts comme le Turquie, la Slovenie, la Hongrie ou le Quebec (French Canada), et donner ainsi une dimension encore plus Internationale a notre association.

J'ai transmis le flambeau a Krister Svensson qui saura developper le travail deja engage, et je l'assisterai pour assurer la continuite en tant que Vice-President. Puis d'autres prendront le relais tant il importe dans de telles aventures que le maximum de personnes se sentient impliquees et que les diverses charges tournent autant qu'il est possible selon les occasions et les volontaires.

En attendant il importe d'assurer l'avenir avec l'enregistrement officiel de l'association en cours en France, ce qui permettra de donner une assise institutionnelle et financiere a l' ITRA.

Merci a tous pour le travail realise en pres de deux ans."
Amitie - Gilles.

Ed's translation:

As agreed at the meeting in Halmstad in 1996, when I was elected President of ITRA, my mandate was accomplished with the International Toy Seminar in Angoleme, France, November 1997. It felt just right to terminate this period during which we worked to constitute ITRA, with a meeting that, after the conference in Halmstad, June 1996, opened for future progressive reunions with toy researchers.

Thus, I have been able to involve French researchers and associate researchers from different countries, including Turkey, Slovene, Hungary and Quebec (French Canada), and herewith achieving one more international dimension to our association.

I have transmitted the 'torch' to Krister Svensson who will further develop ITRA, and being the Vice President I will assist him to assure the continuation of the previous work. After his period as President and mine as Vice President other members should take on the assignments so that a majority of members will become involved. Our work cannot out without the voluntary work of the ITRA members.

Meanwhile, it is important to secure the future of ITRA with an official registration to allow ITRA to be established institutionally and financially.

I want to thank you all for the work you have done during my nearly two years as ITRA President.

Sincerely
Gilles

WORDS FROM THE NEW ITRA PRESIDENT

Thank you Gilles Brougere, the first President of ITRA, who fulfilled his presidency by arranging the International Toy Seminar in. Through his work ITRA has now been officially registered as an international association. ITRA is registered in Franfe whereas the secretariat is still placed in Sweden, hosted by NCFL at the University of Halmstad.

At the ITRA board meeting in Angouleme I was elected the second President of ITRA. It is a great honor to be entrusted with the responsibility for an association containing the most skilled people to be found when it comes to toy research.

In accord with the codes established at the ITRA member meeting in Halmstad June 1996, I am to stay president of ITRA for a period of three years. During this period I will focus on the development of the activities of ITRA. I also think it is of importance that ITRA will be recognized as an organization valuable both to cooperate with and to be a part of Central for ITRA is to support the development of basic and applied research on toys. This includes making foundations, authorities and companies interested in funding toy research.

Another important issue will be to inform about ITRA and its activities to people and organizations outside our own territory. Such information will partly be found through Internet, with the NCFL web site which includes a list of ITRA members and the ITRA Newsletter.

Furthermore, I believe that ITRA should expand by continually finding, suggesting, recruiting and welcoming new members, a central task during the coming years. I also intend to encourage members of ITRA to arrange international seminars, workshops, and conferences.

Let us all try to accomplish these aims. I expect that the highly qualified board of ITRA is fully capable to achieve several of the goals I have set up. In my double role as President of ITRA and Director of NCFL, my ambition is to find ways to intensify the operation between the two organizations. It is also my earnest wish that cooperation between ITRA and other institutions all over the world will shall be fruitful in the mutual interest to initiate, perform, and develop research on toys all over the world.

Sincerely
Krister Svensson

MEMBER ACTIVITIES

Guest researchers **Sudarshan Khanna** of India and **Jean-Pierre Rossie** of Belgium and Marocco, have been working at NCFL, in May and June this year. Beside conducting a series of toy-making workshops for the children in schools in Halmstad, followed by a workshop which was held May 15 for teachers and therapists working with handicapped children, Sudarshan Khanna and Jean-Pierre Rossie, accompanied by NCFL director Krister Svensson, went to Lapland to study traditional home-made toys in Lapland. The visit was part of preparations for a NCFL proposed book project on "Cross-cultural Toys made by children in India, North Africa and Lapland". Both guest researchers are since 1996 closely related to NCFL, and currently working on developing new knowledge about cultural traditions in home-toy making in the far east and west parts of the world.

Pioneer ITRA member Jean-Pierre Rossie is well known for his studies of Moroccan toy culture, but it may be less known that ITRA member Professor Sudarshan Khanna is a design-educator and toy design research consultant from National Institute of Design, India.

A Finish Ph.D. Exam

Peter K. Smith reports that he has been to Turku, Finland, as Faculty Opponent at a Ph.D. examination, and gives the following account of a Finnish Ph.D. ritual:

"I arrived in Turku at midnight, looking for the midnight sun - but finding deep snow; a shock, even in February, having come from the mild London winter/spring with temperatures in southern England exceeding those in Corfu. Obviously a cultural difference in climate. A cultural difference in Ph.D. examining, too - the reason for my visit.

In England, the Ph.D. examination is a small, private affair. The external examiner, the internal examiner, and the candidate. The supervisor might be allowed in too if the others all agree. And the result is in the balance. The thesis may be passed, or passed with minor revisions, passed subject to major revisions, or even turned into a Master's degree, or failed – all outcomes happen, although 'pass with minor revisions' is probably the most common.

In Finland, the ritual is much more public. It takes place in a large lecture theatre, to which friends, family and the merely curious are invited. We had an audience of over 100 persons. A 'custos' or 'master of ceremonies' introduces the event. Then, the candidate gives a short lecture. After this, the examiner or 'opponent' - me in this case, suitably robed - gives an (even shorter) lecture, about the significance of the topic.

Then, the interrogation (no more than 4 hours, according to the regulations!). Finally, a summing up statement by the examiner. Then, the custos invites questions from the audience (none in this case - had I been so thorough in my examination? - I thought not, as I had only taken 1.5 hours). Applause, then the reward - coffee and cake (and later a dinner, in the Old Town Hall).

Another difference - there was no question of failing the thesis, or even asking for revisions (the thesis had already been recommended by two external referees). Instead, I found I had to grade the thesis on a seven point scale: from 'good' to 'very good' to 'praised', 'highly praised', 'very highly praised', 'exceedingly highly praised' to 'praised above all' (my rough translations of the original Latin!). I soon discovered that 'good' and 'very good' were, pragmatically, 'very shameful' and 'shameful' - these ratings were hardly ever given. Quickly learning the cultural norms, I gave a rating of 'exceedingly highly praised', as it really was a good thesis.

Overall, I liked the Finnish system. The public nature of the examination was more of a ceremonial marker of this 'rite de passage', and it also gave an opportunity for those from other Departments, and outside the University, to get a feel for what research was going on.

Are there other cultural variants on the Ph.D. examination ritual, and other views on which method is preferable?

Peter

CONFERENCES

November 9-14 , 1997, The International Toy Seminar [Colloque International sur le Jouet] was held in Angouleme, France. The Seminar was initiated by ITRA President Gilles Brougere, also Director of 'Grec-UPN', a center at Universite Paris-Nord, focusing in educational and cultural materials. Co-organizers was the pride of the city Angouleme, Ludoland, a play world for children, and - mainly - Le Centre Universitaire de la Charente, administered by l'Universite de Poitiers.

The more than one hundred attendants were given nearly fifty half-hour sessions by participants from 15 countries: Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Holland, Hungary, India, Korea, Slovene, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and USA.

Selected Abstracts from the Angouleme Conference

It is not possible to relate all speeches given at the conference, so I have primarily picked abstracts of papers presented by ITRA members. As will become apparent below, the video game t has occupied the majority of the ITRA members.

Jeffrey Goldstein, University of Utrecht in Holland, presented a paper entitled Effects of video games on elderly players, an

encouraging evidence of the benefit of playing video games when you are old. Twenty-two non-institutionalized persons aged 69 to 90 volunteered to participate in a five-week long, five hours a day, study and were randomly assigned to either a video game-playing experimental group or a non-playing control group.

Using pre- and post tests, the purpose of the study was to find out whether playing video games could be a way to improve elderly persons' reaction time (as measured with Sternberg Test), cognitive/perceptual adaptability (Stroop Colour Word Test), and emotional well-being (self-report questionnaire).

The Sternberg reaction time task indicated a significant improvement in those who had been playing video games for five weeks, and they also reported a relative increase in feeling well. Jeff reports that on the Stroop Colour Word Test both groups improved significantly, and there was no significant difference between the groups.

Stephen Kline, Simon Fraser University, Canada, presented a paper about the same "toy", only his paper entitled Pleasure of the screen: A study of heavy users' experiences of video game play was concerned with young players.

Many a parent has been more or less confused over their offspring's fixation on video games. Kline carried out a series of laboratory and interview studies to explore "the socio-emotional experience of young people's involvement with video games in order to explain why this toy is becoming a commonly preferred leisure experience of young males".

Apparently, females are not that deeply engaged in video games which, in this perspective becomes a masculine occupation rather than one that engages adolescents generally. Kline points at three factors motivating the video game play,

(1) intrinsic to the games design,

(2) to the playing experience, and

(3) to the social context of young people's lives, and discusses "the socioemotional dynamics of 'compulsive in the light of a theory of emotional dynamics addiction to video games.

Gisela Wegener-Spohring, University of Wiirzburg, Germany, discussed her Observation and interpretation of play sequences with video games, explaining that although children's as well as adults' games are "good, at least those that are well-known and harmless because "that is what everyday knowledge tells us", video games in arcades and computers are often refused.

To observe children playing video games might well be different from watching them play for example table games or just observe them playing. One important question is whether play patterns and play elements are visible as we have experienced in earlier play observations.

To find that out the research team "submerged" themselves in the world of arcades, which they observed and "tried to understand". Having gathered records of 24 hours observation, the coming step in the study is to carry out a "precise and discursive interpretation process", a timeconsuming work that can take up to 14 hours for two evaluators for each 60-minute observation record. "Even with video games there can be observed sequences of real play".

A fourth contribution to the subject video games was by **Robyn Holmes** and **Anthony Pellegrini**, Children's social interactions while playing with video games.

One aim of their work is to study and compare children's play behavior when engaged in games with aggressive/war themes vs. similar games with no such theme. Subjects will be a sample of children from six through eight years of age, randomly assigned to one or the two video

conditions in either same or mixed gender dyads, whose social interaction while playing the video games will continuously be recorded and categorized as either positive or negative.

In addition, the children will complete the Media Use and Leisure Survey with the purpose to provide data on children's more general video use preferences and creative ideas of 4th grade pupils on table board games was the title of a paper presented by **Waltraut Hartmann**, University of Vienna. Obviously there seems to be a big step between video games and manually played table games, the fascination in them might have the psychological reasons, like seeking entertainment, contesting, and problem solving.

Hartmann pointed at the fact that "board games are one of the oldest cultural evidence of humanity", and asked rhetorically if there is a risk that we lose this cultural heritage in the age of electronics and computer games. However, she concluded that there are good signals that electronic games will not cause the disappearance of traditional type table board games.

Hartmann could lessen the perhaps widespread fear among professionals, teachers and parents, by reporting that board games, holding 10% of the Austrian market, are still more sold than computer games. The results of her study of 674 4th grade pupils aged 9-11, clearly show that board games are as popular as are computer games and consequently far from being replaced by computer games.

Hartmann's conclusion is that "children's enthusiasm for board games should be an encouragement for teachers and educators to integrate this form of playing in their work in order to maintain the children's playfulness and their joy of learning".

Overall, it seems that 'informal learning' is a phenomenon of great interest among scholars. One example is Psychologist Lars-Peder Alingfeldt, NCFL, University of

Halmstad, who has recently carried out a study of the use of a constructional toy as an alternative teaching aid in compulsory lower classes.

Dongju Shin from Duksung Women's University, Korea, talked about Natural things on playgrounds as play materials. She reported a study exploring the qualitative aspects of children's use of natural things on a playground, what kinds of natural things on a playground are used by preschool age children for their play, and how do they use natural things as play materials.

There are different type playgrounds, and the one where eight preschoolers, four boys and four girls, were observed during their outdoor free play was a 'creative' playground, attached to a University in Seoul. The children were observed by means of a "wireless transmission system", a constant comparative process. The data analysis is based on descriptive and explanatory categories, integrating categories and their properties, and constructing theory.

An issue not far from the one about natural materials in playgrounds was taken up by **Sudarshan Khanna**, National Institute of Design, Ahmadabad, India, in a paper entitled Educational and cultural context of dynamic folk toys. Khanna regrets that in most societies today the tradition of toy making by children or local artisans has declined. No doubt the toy industry comes up with a range of new toys every year, toys that may give a lot of fun.

However, industrially made toys should not replace the homemade toys, but rather compliment them. The author discussed the importance of the coexistence of traditional and modern toys, and related interviews with 10-15-year olds he had met in workshops, and who mostly remembered playing with their "simple innovative toys which they had made themselves, or those that they had bought from local toy makers".

Khanna demonstrated a number of popular toys made by children or artisans in India, and explained that similar toys have been played with or still are being used by children in almost all parts of the world. He also raised the question of the educational-cultural value of such "timeless toys" as those that are invented and made by hand and with very simple material, simple in the sense that it is not expensive, but rather can be taken right from the natural environment.

Finally Khanna suggested more systematic study of "the value and worth of the popular classical toys of various societies through small cross-cultural teams", composed by researchers, designers, and educators.

Ziegfried Zoels, Fordern durch Spielmittel, Germany, is also a spokesman for innovative toys, only he and his team of designers focus on special toys for children who have one or more handicaps. His approach to toy design for disabled children is that "thinking and behavior are being changed due to new technological possibilities", which in turn is an endeavour of various scientific disciplines.

The several technological changes in the field of education over the past 150 years are a challenge to improve the teaching of intellectual skills and abilities. Zoels claimed that "the human senses are underestimated", and illustrated in his presentation that this situation plays quite a considerable role in other disciplines "such as design, or even advertising".

He emphasized the importance of more sense oriented educational programs, of which he considers many are very strongly connected with playthings and toys, and finally he illustrated such interdisciplinary understanding, by giving practical examples of the work of the institute Fordern durch Spielmittel fur Behinderte Kinder [Toys for children's rehabilitation].

Gilles Brougere, Universite Paris-Nord, and **Birgitta** Almqvist, University of Halmstad, reported results from their parallel studies of

the toy culture in French and Swedish child care respectively, and introduced a similar study to be carried out in Sao Paulo, Brazil, by Tizuko Kishimoto, University of Sao Paulo.

Apart from this triple session entitled Presentation of an international inquiry on the play material in the preschool system, **Tizuko Kishimoto** gave a vivid picture of Japanese preschool toy culture in her paper Toys in Japan: Their uses and meanings, and **Birgitta Almqvist** discussed factors on micro (family and toys) as well as on macro (society, toy market) level in a paper entitled The role of toys in children's gender socialization.

January 24-25, 1998: *The Culture of Toys Conference*, Emory University. Directly from the program: The Smithsonian will expand its Festival of American Folklife on the Mall in the summer of 2000 and will feature children from all over the world making and playing with toys unique to their countries and cultures. Quoted from Hillary Clinton, August 15 1997:

The aim of the Emory Conference is to address questions that may arise about the proposed Smithsonian Folklife Festival. All the speakers - in terms of their own scholarly background - are invited to express their thoughts on such questions as:

- How do children play with toys?
- What is the contemporary state of toys?
- What do we know about toy making in American history?
- What is the current state of international research on toys?
- What are the varieties of cross-cultural toy making?
- What do we know about age and gender issues in relation to toys?
- Should traditional toy making be sustained? How?

- Are there differences in play creativity between children in the United States and other countries?
- Are today's children handicapped by too much control of their play?

Brian Sutton-Smith gives the following summary of the conference:

The preface to this conference was the collecting by Sharon Mnich of some remarkable toys made by third world children. She was joined by Dr. Neil Shulman in forming World Play, a non profit corporation which, in concert with the Smithsonian, proposed to bring 200 such child toy makers to the Folk Festival on the DC Mall in June-July, 2000.

Hillary Clinton gave the proposal her blessing. The aim was to contribute to world peace and perhaps to show that these children who were still making their own toys were learning to be more creative than American children who received only consumer toys. I was approached to develop a preliminary conference to examine the merits of the proposal. Emory University of Atlanta, the home of Mnich and Shulman, agreed to subsidize the event. All who were asked to speak consented to come and some of their remarks are listed below.

Brian Sutton-Smith pointed out that if toys are simple, their interpretation is not, and illustrated the point by their multiple types of play and the multiple types of play theory that involve toys. In addition, he said, there are also variable kinds of cultural and social contexts within which children must exercise their play. (1) First there are societies ancient and modern which neglect or prevent children from playing. (2) Second, most societies intervene to socialize children into the adult culture, whether promoting miniature weapons and tools or, as currently, using organized sport and play way methods in education.

(3) It is peculiarly modern, however, to instigate individualized imagination. Theorists like Bakhtin, Erikson, Piaget and Berlyne all make this assumption. (4) The most recent social context, however, is the one that idealizes play as a human experience and suggests that adults and children should play together in relative equality or at least in intrinsically motivated play. But the question arises (The Pocahontas Question), what happens to the third world toy makers that come from social contexts 1&2, into contexts 3&4 within which the apprehension of their work becomes totally changed. And the question is also relevant whether a modern child computer master creating games and books is not more creative than a child making toys from industrial junk.

Andrew McClary (Prof. Emeritus Natural Science, Mich. State University) reminded us that the last century most American children also made their own toys, and he illustrated some of the classics such as Hoops Whips, Kites etc. More importantly, he demonstrated that there are still such places in the USA, for example. Day Care Centers, Schools, Museums, City Recreation Departments and Scouts Troops where adults give help in teaching or encouraging children how to make some kinds of toys, including the older kind that used to be made by American children in the last century.

Gary Cross (Prof. of History, Penn. State University) showed in his analysis that prior to about 1970 all toys everywhere were rites of passage. They were illustrating or metaphorizing the competencies that children should receive as a part of their regular socialization. Since that time, however, toys have increasingly become offshoots of fantasy narratives presented in television time, all suggesting that children now increasingly participate in toy play for these sui generis fantasy satisfactions regardless of socialization. That is, toys have become more like entertainment movies and less like workaday tools. They follow the cycles of entertainment rather than

continuities with the earlier generations of toys that their parents experienced.

Jeffery Goldstein pointed out that 80% of all toys are now manufactured toys. It does not, however, make much sense to bring children to DC and expect them to play on demand. That is not how children generally play most creatively. Wouldn't this event be a kind of exploitation of overseas children for the entertainment or education of US adults?

What are the children supposed to get out of this that is generic to their play itself? Again, there is no evidence that toy play is determined primarily by the nature of the toys. Rather, play reflects inner needs and cultural influences. Is a child who plays with Lego or a computer game any less imaginative and creative than a child who makes his own non technological toy?

Aren't modern toys forming a global child culture and don't these overseas children's own toys emphasize only that they are outsiders to this international movement? Perhaps traditional toys are essentially conservative, conserving not just cultural traditions but limiting the introduction of new ways of social thought.

Suzanne Seriff (Ph.D. & Folklore Consultant) illustrated at considerable length the life and contribution of children growing up in toy making families in Mexico. These children typically participated in the making of toys appropriate to special festival occasions, though at other times they themselves also played with modern plastic toys. The family toys were "Souvenirs from a time of delightful irrelevance". She says this nostalgia is widespread in folk art even if seen as a disappearing phenomenon. But the makers were also very realistic about the toys. They were made to be eaten, worn or danced with or thrown away or exploded on the appropriate occasions. In India the government supports craft shops for such

creations. In Japan they are treated as living national treasures.

In all countries, however, scrap material is a source of much of the construction. Considerable skill and ingenuity is needed in construction them no matter how traditional they are. If we bring these children from all over the world to America we must empower them to play with each other and not just bring them here for our sake.

Jean-Pierre Rossie (Ph.D Anthropological Consultant) His story was about the toys that children make themselves in the Sahara. Toys are made from local waste material even though these are occasionally combined with commercial toys in play. The processes of tradition and creativity are inextricably mixed together and hardly separable. Within traditional patterns there is always, however, considerable individual variation. Girls' dolls represent not babies but adults as idealized models (in marriage, as spouses etc.), in contrast to the typical baby dolls of traditional Western doll play.

The continuity of these toys with the past is often emphasized by their similarity to ancient Egyptian or Greek toys (marbles, jacks, tops, toy animals, swings). But boys in particular also look outward in the toys they make, creating vehicles (cars etc.) which they have seen but which are not possessed in their village. More noticeably toys are a child made world; they are not given to them as gifts by the parents who take little notice of their childish activities. Gifts are more often of sweets and food. When the parental groups cease being nomads as is happening everywhere, and become sedentary, so too do the toys of the children undergo considerable change.

Dolls for example become less schematic and more realistic. They are influenced by the presence of the new plastic dolls and by the tourists wish to buy their older home made dolls. Emigrants also bring home

exemplary toys from Europe. In urban areas the children are becoming more like modern children with their consumer toys.

Patricia Marks Greenfield (Prof. Psychol. UCLA) showed how children's play weaving on a toy loom in Mayan Mexico both mimics but simplifies the adult practices in ways adapted to the simpler cognition of the child. The reality here is combined work/play domain not generally recognized as such in most European play studies where exclusive distinctions are usually sought between say exploration or learning and play. The toy in this case is a highly conventionalized cultural artifact through which in social interactions with elders the child learns the adult real loom conventions. Errors have lower social cost in play and are therefore more easily permitted. It is better to think of toys thus as culturally constituted than as instruments for novel behaviors, The latter idea implies the breaking down of immigrant values.

Carolyn Pope Edwards (Prof. Psychol. U. Nebraska) reviewed the earlier Six Culture and subsequent studies of John and Beatrice Whiting and others, for the evidence on relationships between play, toys and other cultural variables. Three Studies in Africa, Mexico, and the Philippines, where the children participate more in the maintenance of the subsistence economies (chores, fetching fuel, cooking, baby minding), appear to show less play than the three studies in Okinawa, India and the USA, where the children do not so participate and there is more time and provision for forms of play.

The studies were done at a time before modern civilization began to affect these children by leaving scrap industrial materials and car and plane images for them to construct toys about, so there are no such examples.

David Lancy (Prof Anthropology, Utah State University), suggested that by and

large, throughout pre Western human history, adults have either neglected or suppressed the play of children, this being more true of girls who have nearly always had a greater role with family chores. Parents emphatically did not shape children's play, and toy making by adults was rare and when it occurred was usually of tools to help children learn their roles (toy bows, knives, hoes, canoes and stoves etc.)

But adults do intrude in play if children are being hurt, are too noisy, or haven't done their chores, and they do expect children to learn their adult roles by watching and pretending, not through being taught. At the same time the imagination of most pre-modern children within nomadic or subsistence levels of living is minimal by some modern standards. Its focus by and large is more cooperative than our own.

Toys are largely a modern phenomenon and toy-making a fringe activity on the periphery of civilization. Bringing toy makers is bringing those in between the immediate industrially influenced past and the present, not those from the real past.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (Prof. Folklore, NYU) spoke of using the above resources for the purposes of putting on a Smithsonian show at the DC Mall. First of all, she asked, what is the message in bringing toys from somewhere else?

What do you mean by toys? What is their spatial character? Are they self-contained or are they the bits of an environment? What is their temporal character

Are they ephemeral (edible, disposable etc.), temporary, (imaginary objects), cyclic (gifts), obsolescent (antiques, or periodic (festivals)?

Which of these characteristics are you trying to express? Then there are the paradoxes. Is the exhibit meant to represent the children's way of playing or is it a relic of that play? How can their play be also a display? Is this a paradox of "staged" spontaneity?

Real play isn't necessarily fun to watch. And what are the politics of these poetics. How are the children managed both on and off stage? What is really the exhibition value of these displays? Is it their creativity, their humanism, their history, their being outsiders? Making and playing must happen for exhibition value. Are the toy, tools, props, instruments or themselves a show?

Conclusion

While no one had specifically discussed the prefatory idea of bringing 200 child to makers to the Mall it was certainly on no one's agenda at the finish of the colloquium. What prevailed was a general skepticism about that specific proposal. In the discussion chaired by Richard Kurin the next morning, however, alternative proposals emerged.

It was suggested that the best approach might be to think of a diversity of ways in which children and their toys could be exhibited on the Mall. As Kurin said, we are used to having kids on the mall, showing, doing, being collectors and showing videos. There is no set text-book for this. What you might have are lots of diverse types of toy demonstration. For example:

1. You may have a family of toy makers demonstrating (as in Seriff's illustrations)
2. You may have displays of toy collections to be inspected (as in Mních's display of toys at the conference)
3. You may have an instructional participatory mode for teaching how to make home made toys (as in McClary's presentation)
4. There could be people participating in ancient forms of toy play as in Kite flying
5. You could have other different world children telling their stories on video deriving from such work as that of Jean-Paul Rossie.
6. You could have historical photo collections for inspection
7. You could be the demonstration of Toy library construction in various communities of the world, particularly South America.
8. There could be sophisticated modern toy participation (as already provided by Lego & Computer companies)
9. There could be participatory age graded toy play. Toys for infants and preschoolers separately in which the children are inside with adult having access, and the rest of us watching over the walls.
10. Remedial toy examples for inspection
11. Varied materials to be provided for open ended participatory constructions. The emphasis being on creative discoveries rather than toys.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

A brand new book by **Brian Sutton-Smith** is *The Ambiguity of Play*, published by Harvard University Press, March 1998.

From the publisher's presentation: "Every child knows what it means to play, but the rest of us can merely speculate. Is it a kind of adaptation, teaching us skills, inducting us into certain communities? Is it power, pursued in games of chance? Day dreaming enacted in art? Or is it frivolity? Sutton-Smith, focuses on play theories rooted in seven distinct 'rhetorics' – the ancient discourses of fate, power, communal identity, and frivolity and the modern discourses of progress, the imaginary, and the self."

Contents
 Play and Ambiguity
 Rhetorics of Animal Progress
 Rhetorics of Fate
 Rhetorics of Power
 Rhetorics of Identity
 Child power and Identity
 Rhetorics of the Imaginary Child

Phantasmagoria Rhetorics of Self
Rhetorics of Frivolity, and Conclusion.

From a review by **Greta Fein**:

"It is a stunning book and a superbly scholarly undertaking which will make it impossible to discuss play in the simplistic terms we are accustomed to."

Another reviewer is **Anthony Pellegrini**, saying:

"A wonderful and important book. Its strength is its depth and its breadth. Play is discussed in incredibly close detail, and from diverse perspectives: from anthropology to zoology, to literary criticism and biology. This work represents the one most thorough discussion of play that we have."

Cleo Gougoulis of Athens, Greece, sent the following information of a book which is accessible to those of you who read Italian or Greek:

"Frederica Lamberti-Zianardi & Brunella Schisa, *Caro Babbo non fare come l'anno scorso* [Dear Santa, don't behave like last year, i.e. please be a sport this year] The book is published by Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, S.p.A. Milano, 1996, and translated into Greek by Gnosi Publishers, Athens, Greece, in 1997. 108 pp. ISBN 960-235-613-8 for the Greek edition. Cleo declares that the book contains a selection of Letters to Santa, written in 1990, five years after that the Roman headquarters of the National Italian Post established an annual national contest for writing letters to Santa and inaugurated a Santa Claus Service which sends answers (a short standard reply) and a couple of small gifts to each child-correspondent. Gifts include erasers, crayons, note-pads, key-holders (for boys) and combs etc (not mentioned by the authors) for girls.

Letters come from many parts of Italy where local traditions are still alive, so they are not only addressed to Santa Claus but also to Befana (the Epiphany Good Witch), little Christ and Santa Lucia. The sample was deliberately chosen on basis of their

spontaneity. Out of a total of 50,000 letters received by the Italian Mail in 1990, the authors, one of them a psychologist and the other a journalist working the Repubblica Newspaper, selected 100 letters representing "children's real thoughts, dreams, and wishes".

Letters reflecting or possibly written by adult initiative (i.e. those asking for global peace and less famine) were excluded, leaving for examination only "those letters which seemed to be sent furtively to Santa: the crumbled letters often sent with no envelope, in poor handwriting", asking for "truly personal or secret presents or depict a troubled world of jobless, single, lost of absent parents.

Out of these "genuine childish expressions" the "cutest and funniest" letters, which, according to the authors "can yet be "melancholic, hopeless, paradoxical, insolent and pleading" at the same time. Names of children were changed to protect their anonymity, and each letter is published in its original lay-out, preceded by a title based on the authors' reading of the main theme, and signed by the sender's pseudonym followed by the place of origin.

It was a pleasure to read this book, Cleo says, "although some obvious sentimental overtones, it nevertheless attests to the fact that children are far more competent interpreters and commentators of the world than adults are willing to accept. By no means are these letters meant to be representative, for it is not the authors' goal to be scientific, but to achieve a better understanding of children by bringing their concealed worlds into daylight".

Cultural Differences in Child Approaching to Santa Claus

The characteristics of the Italian children's Christmas requests will be compared with those from children in my collection of some

3,000 Santa letters from Sweden, Japan, France, England, Wales, Russia and even a few more afar countries. I am also hoping to be able to include the character of American children's requests.

My intention is to study cultural differences in children's apprehension of and approach to Santa in as many cultural contexts I can find, because Santa or whatever he (?) is called in different countries apparently is a global phenomenon. In my experience, children's letters to Santa Claus are not merely a list of requested toys and other items, but offers an insight in the way children reason, and - not least - their inner feelings which quite often are openly and frankly revealed in the letters.

Another book recommended by Cleo is: **Roopnarine, J. L., Johnson E.J., & Hooper, F.** (1994). *Children's Play in Diverse Cultures*. Suny Press.

NEW MEMBERS

On behalf of all ITRA members the secretariat wishes to announce and welcome the following new members to our group: **Dan Fleming**, School of Media and Performing Arts, University of Ulster, Coleraine Northern Ireland, author of *Powerplay; Toys as Popular Culture*, Manchester University Press, 1996. We hope to be able to present Dan Fleming's book in ITRA Newsletter, Fall 98. **Martin Barker**, School of Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of the West of England, Bristol BS16 2JP, England, who studies children's use of media, including toys. David Hawtin, Director General, British Toy and Hobby Association in London, recommend him to Jeff.

Maria Argyriadi, Department of Sculpture in the School of Fine Art at the Technical University, Athens, Greece. Maria is, among things, doll collector, and collects children's toys from Greek and European manufacture

as well as folklore material concerning the girl. She has been involved with the conservation of dolls, is a member of the United Federation of Doll Clubs and collaborates with the Bethnal Green Museum of Childhood and the children's section of the Museums of Paris and Rome.

She has donated her collection, which includes over 3000 items, to the Benaki Museum. It was Cleo Gougoulis and Gilles Brougere who recommended her. Maria's postal address is: 3 Nyofytou Vamva St. 106 74 Athens, Greece.

Dr. Nermin Celen, is a developmental psychologist at the faculty of Uludag University, Bursa Turkey, and also a member of Child Culture Association in Ankara University. Her Ph.D. dissertation was on play and its effect on cognitive development. At the International Toy Seminar in Angouleme in 1997, Together with her colleague **Dr. Bekir Onur**, Ankara University, she gave a presentation of a study on Children's needs of toys from the mothers' point of view in two cities of Turkey. Dr Onur is also a member of ITRA.

Raquel Zumbano Altmann, Sao Paulo, Brazil, has for many years been working with projects on toy libraries. Next year she will start a new program sponsored by the Brazilian Foundation, Vitae, which is branch of Lampadia Foundation from Liechtenstein, the same Foundation that helped to publish the book *The Right to Play - the Toy Libraries [(O Direito de Brincar - a Brinquedoteca]*

Raquel has over a period of eight years been classifying 35,000 toys. She is now preparing a speech about the Classification History, from Alfonso X, king of Castilla and his *Book of Games (1253)*, Rabelais in *Pantagruel* and *Gargatua*, passing through Roger Caillois, Roger Pinon, Piaget, over Chateau's points of view about play and games, to Denise Garon's (E.S.A.R.) and the I.C.C.P. classification systems and their use

in toy libraries. A project with the Brazilian Association of Toy Industries to select the best Brazilian toys and games of 1998/1999, is to be published in a magazine for consumers and toy libraries, due to come out first week of October.

Tizuko Kishimoto, University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. Tizuko has been studying Japanese preschool toy culture, and is now engaged in a study of toys in Brazil, similar to Gilles Brougere's study of toy culture in French Ecole Maternelle, and Birgitta Almqvist's study of toy culture in Swedish childcare centers.

TASP NEWSLETTER

TASP Newsletter Editor **David Lancy** at the Anthropology Department, Utah State University, announces no less than three books about cultural differences in childhood. The following presentations are taken from TASP Newsletter Winter 1998.

David Lancy, *Playing on the Mother Ground*. Cultural Routines for Children's Development. Guilford Press: New York. 1996, 240 pp. Index, photos and references included.

Laurence Goldman, Ph.D anthropologist at the University of Queensland, explains that this kind of publication is rare. "Such is the relative dearth of full-length etched ethnographies of play from a cross-cultural perspective that - almost irrespective of their theoretic leanings or substantive findings - every contribution has to be applauded and welcomed by scholars of the ludic". Goldman states that "it is especially to Lancy's credit that throughout his book on Kpelle (Liberia West Africa) work and play, his theoretic credentials are worn on his sleeve".

The final words by the reviewer, is that although having revealed some of his own

prejudices - he admits that "Lancy has produced a book that will continue to engage debate among play analysts".

From TASP are also taken the following *Book Notes on Play in Antiquity*, well worth spreading among toy researchers. David, who has reviewed the three books claims that while not recent, they "are in print and form a very nice set on childhood in antiquity. If you want to read the reviews in full you might try and send a mail to the TASP Editor and ask for a copy of the TASP Newsletter Winter '98.

David's E-mail address is:
dlancy@usu.edu

The first book is *Growing-up in Egypt*, written by **Rosalind M. & Jac J. Janssen**. and published by Rubicon: London, 1990. (available from Barnes & Noble mail-order for \$15).

The second book note concerns **Mark Golden's** *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, published by John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1990, and the third book is *Adults and Children in the Roman Empire* by **Thomas Wiedemann**, published by Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989.

From TASP Secretary **Mary Rivkin** came

TASP 1999 CALL FOR PAPERS

The Association for the Study on Play (TASP) will meet at the LaFonda Hotel on the Square, Santa Fe, NM, February 3-7, 1999, in conjunction with the Society for Cross-Cultural Research (SCCR).

Proposals for papers, panels, symposia, and media presentations must be postmarked by October 1, 1998. For more information, **contact Dorothy J. Sluss**, 70548 Human Development & Learning, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN 37614. You reach Dorothy by Fax (+1) 423-439-4439, or E-mail :sluss@access.ETSU-Tn

NCFL NEWS

TOY SEMIOTICS

Two M.A. thesis in pedagogic, recently presented at the University of Halmstad, are theoretically based on social semiotics. Both authors work at NCFL parallel with doctoral studies at the University of Malmo.

One thesis, entitled *Leksaker som speglingar av vuxenvarlden* [Toys as reflections of the adult world] is written by Anders Nelson, from the perspective of visual representation aims at showing how each single toy represents an object, person or phenomenon found in the adult world.

The second work, *Att läsa leksaker i ljuset av semiotisk teori* [Reading Toys in the light of semiotic theory] by Mattias Nilsson, aims at understanding toys as symbols and signs making it possible for the child to 'read' toys as texts representing adult values and in the social environment. These assumptions are in accord with the fact that toys are adult products in the sense that they are usually designed, made, produced and often bought by adults.

However, since both Jean-Pierre Rossie and Sudarshan Khanna are regular guest researchers at NCFL, we might be able to foresee works focusing on toys as child products with built-in messages to the adult world.

For a bibliography by Jean-Pierre Rossie, see NCFL web site
<http://www.hh.se/dep/ncflweb/index.html>

Breakthrough for Toy Research

The director of the Swedish Toy Retailers Union and editor of the Swedish Toy Review, Per Sparre, follows the NCFL proceedings with great interest.

In *Leksaksrevy* No. 1/1998 he publishes an article from the NCFL Newsletter *Gyroskopet*. The following is a summary in English of the article:

The Nordic Center for Research on Toys and Educational Media (NCFL), University of Halmstad, has received a grant of SEK 2,600,000 from The Bank of SWEDEN Terdentenary Foundation to start up a project entitled *Toys as Communication*.

The financial support grants the establishing of a new field within the toy research area, at the same time as the research activities at the University of Halmstad is broadened.

Toys as Communication is a cross-national multi-disciplinary project with participants from Sweden, Denmark and England, representing semiotics, pedagogic, and social psychology:

The point of departure is that toys are central phenomena and that they have come to play an important role in the socialization of children. Toys transfer role patterns and identities, and the dividing line between formal and informal learning becomes decreasingly invisible. Another point of significance for the project is that toys are connected with mass media such as cartoons and movies for children.

An underlying argument is that toys are in themselves a kind of sign system, a code from which the child can construct his own understanding and create his own text. (Ed's translation from Swedish)

Project leader **Staffan Selander**, Professor in Education and Curriculum Studies at the University of Stockholm, Department of Education summarizes the aims of the project as follows:

The project *Toys as Communication* encompasses the following three areas:

- 1) Toys' social meaning,
- 2) Toys' role in play, and
- 3) The social distribution of toys.

Collaborator in England is **Theo van Leeuwen**, Professor of Communication Theory at the School of Media of the

London College of Printing, with a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Sydney, Australia, and in Denmark **Torben Hangaard Rasmussen**, preschool teacher and member of the staff of NCFL.

For more information, contact Krister Svensson, E-mail:
krister.svensson@ncfl.hh.se

A National Resource Center

In December 1997, the Swedish Handicap Institute appointed NCFL to be a National Resource Center for play material within the handicap area. A contribution which well runs together with an EC project with NCFL as partner and deals with development of toys for children and youth with disabilities.

The commission from the Handicap Institute implies a long-term contribution on research and competence development within the play material area. Within 1998 the activities will be planned, organized and started up. Product development of toys will be a priority area as well as putting together and making competence and research accessible.

As a starting point, a workshop will be held at NCFL in April 1998 with the aim to make a survey of actual research, needs and competencies.

Experts and participants from the field such as researchers and parents, pedagogues, occupational therapists, psychologists, manufacturers, designers and engineers will contribute.

ToyCenter

The purpose of the project is to offer a milieu for the development of new products in the toy industry, and to make a fruitful cooperation possible between education, the research unite at NCFL, and toy companies in order to motivate the development of

current knowledge of toys with regard to design, function and material.

The ambition is to build up a unique competence at ToyCenter to suggest high quality toys originating from the needs of the child in its cultural context. The project is granted by 'Sparbanksstiftelsen Kronan' a national saving bank, and the County Administrative Board of Halland. Project leader is technical engineer **Tomas Berg**.

Additional, but usually periodic, staff are industrial design students from other countries as well as from Sweden. This year, for example, industrial design student **Henrik Johansson** and Finish goldsmith **Anuliisa Anttilainen** have been working at ToyCenter where Henrik was working half time and half time at BRIO Toy. Anuliisa, also studying industrial design in Germany, divided her time between ToyCenter and a company specializing on toys for handicapped children. Eight students on University level are at the moment engaged in innovational work at ToyCenter. The Center also welcomes students in Bachelor of Science in Innovation Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering programs.

For further information about ToyCenter™, contact tomas.berg@ncfl.hh.se

The World of Play and Toys

A production of eight short videotaped films illustrating children's play, play materials and play environment are being carried out. The aim of the film project is to form the basis for further education of child care personnel by showing children's choice of play in natural contexts, and their preferences in play materials.

The ambition is to link theory and practice. Therefore, current research on, and theories about, children's play and toys will be discussed in the light of educational practice as experienced by a reference group of preschool personnel from child care centers in the town of Halmstad.

Project leader is media specialist **Bjorn Sterner**, and scientific leader is **Birgitta Almqvist**, both at NCFL.

The eight video-films are already been asked for by people on the child care market.

If you and your child care center/teacher training department is interested in these films, please contact Bjorn on E-mail: bjorn.sterner@isb.hh.se

The 2nd International Toy Research Conference

The 2nd International Toy Research Conference Toys as Communication takes place June 14-19 1999 at the University of Halmstad. Sweden. The conference is organized by the Nordic Center for Research on Toys and Educational Media (NCFL) in cooperation with the International Toy Research Association (ITRA).

Call for papers will be sent out in September together with more detailed Information. If you are interested in participating, you are welcome to send us a note with name and address, Fax and/or Email, and what your subject would be.

Send your entry to conf99@ncfl.hh.se
For further information about the conference, contact NCFL Secretariat on E-mail: anders.nelson@ncfl.hh.se
Information about the 2nd International Toy Research will also be found on NCFL home page
<http://www.hh.se/dep/ncflweb/index.html>

NEWS FROM TOYLAND

The Swedish Toy Review- Svensk Leksaksrevy, member of International Toy Magazine Association (ITMA) informs that the Niirnberg fair this year has been increased with a new wing so that the total

space will be 144,000m². Some 3,000 producers from 54 countries were expected to exhibit their new collections. Hong-Kong and China are topping the list with no less than 245 market places. New this year are permanent exhibition cases booked by a number of leading brand producers to be able to receive customers all year round.

Computer Game Violence

Lars Rade, journalist, specialist on games and regular columnist in the Swedish Toy Review, reports a type of TV-games that are characterized by extreme violence and floods of blood. One of these distasteful games is Pistol, which has caused controversies in Great Britain; after some discussion the British authorities decided to allow the marketing of the game.

However, so many people protested against the game that it is now sold in a 'milder' version' in which the player "can no longer shoot his own head off", and some sounds have been altered, such as "screams from dying pedestrians". In Sweden, however, the original uncensored game is being sold.

Another game, Grand Theft, has caused a parliamentary debate in Great Britain. The player is supposed to impersonate a small thief arriving by car to a big city where he is supposed to work his way up by conducting a series of violent actions, such as stealing cars (extra points for police-cars and school-buses) and killing people. The 'sense 'morale' in the game apparently is to be that the more people the player (in the role of the small-thief) kills, the higher he is met by respect from the organized criminality in the society. Some 'sense morale'.

Everything in the game is very realistic with screams, swearing, and rock music. According to Swedish PC Gamer, Grand Theft Auto is "one of the most violent game I have played, filled as it is with unnecessary violence, criminality and killing".

Unfortunately, the article does not reveal the names of the producers, or else one might have been able to decorate them with a Bad Boy Tag.

Children's Corner

Deliberately saying something that will be misunderstood, and playing with words are two very much appreciated jokes among children. How about this one:

-I am dreaming about becoming a millionaire just like my dad.

- Is he a millionaire?

- No, but he is dreaming about it.

Word playing is also fun:

-Why did the man with only one hand cross the road?

-To get to the second-hand shop.

Riddles like this one are popular to tell peers and adults:

-What is it that is red and just starts climbing a tree?

-A squirrel in red pajamas.

If you try to be smart and ask why he is wearing a pajamas, you might well be met with even more smartness, such as:

-Because he isn 't quite up yet.

Sometimes children misunderstand a joke they have heard and alter it according to their very private logic. This is the original story about the tomatoes: Two tomatoes were walking along the road when a van came and ran over one of them. The one who was not run-over then said to the smashed tomato:

-Come on ketchup, let's go.

I heard a little girl of five telling this story to a peer. When she came to the part where not-run-over said to the smashed tomato she looked puzzled for a while, and then exclaimed:

- Come on Linnea, let's go!

One reason for such misunderstandings might be that, when telling a joke to a child, we take it for granted that the child understands the point of it. More often than seldom the child does not. The child merely tries to repeat what he thinks having heard because others have been laughing at it.

Children's Reasoning About Play

I am in possession of 20 eight-year-old school children's understanding of play and of toys, not big enough to boast about, but hopefully enough to be of interest to those who appreciate children's own "verdicts" play and toys.

The material is the product of a homework that a female teacher gave her 8-year-old pupils; they were either to write a story, primarily on play but also on their view of toys, or simply answer some question on play and toys.

It is a both charming and informative material from which one can learn a lot of how 8-year-olds regard play, and toys

If you are interested, please contact me on
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Editor's Epilogue

A new section which is introduced in the present Newsletter is "Message from the President", a column in which the President will be highlighting a certain issue of interest to us all.

"Letter to the Editor", is another new section where you are welcome to bring forth your opinions about various matters, primarily those that are connected with toy research and our Association, for example to suggest improvements in the ITRA Newsletter, spread project ideas for future crossnational collaboration, or just tell a good "toy story". The Secretariat would also welcome children's jokes for the section "Children's Corner".

If you would review a new book, please send ITRA Secretariat a paragraph containing author's name, title of book, name of publisher and year of publication, ISBN, number of pages, prize, and from where it can be ordered.

Next ITRA Newsletter is planned to be distributed end of November-beginning of December. If you have written material to be included in the Newsletter, please send it to the Secretariat by E-mail:
birgitta.almqvist@friiba.se

Do you know of somebody you would like to recommend as a member of ITRA? If so, please send the secretariat information about the person, his/her name and post, Fax number and/or E-mail address.

HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER OF ITRA

The ITRA membership is open to scientific researchers, practitioners and other persons and organizations wishing to follow what is currently going on in the field of toy research.. Why, how, where and when ITRA was formed you can read elsewhere in this Newsletter.

For you who are not yet a member but would like to join the group, we welcome your application. You will find a framework sheet for ITRA membership application on the last page of this Newsletter.

As soon as you are registered as a member you will be included on the mailing list for the ITRA Newsletter and other relevant information. ITRA Newsletters are also currently published on Internet, see NCFL web site:

<http://www.hh.se/dep/ncflweb/index.html>