

ITRA NEWSLETTER
International Toy Research Association
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Editor's prologue

ITRA Newsletter Spring 1999 is kind of historical; It is the first of the last year of the 20th century, and the 10th since the first ITRA Newsletter, Fall 1994. Furthermore, it the final issue edited by the present ITRA secretary, who will from July 1st 1999 retire for the 2nd time. The first time was in 1994 on leaving Uppsala University to become an age pensioner according to Swedish labor regulations. Now, after nearly six year it seems apt to leave the assignment as secretary of ITRA, and Newsletter editor to somebody else. From July 1st 1999 your present secretary shall no longer be working at NCFL.

I want to thank all ITRA members who have ever the years contributed to the content of the Newsletters. Without your reports there wouldn't have been but empty pages, This ITRA Newsletter is not so very comprehensive, as past issues may have been. It seems that from the start of a new year and the months before Summer, people are busy. For some of you teaching and examinations of students are very time consuming. for others there are fund applications to write, and projects to terminate before next semester is there. The President of ITRA, Krister Svensson, and his staff, preparations for the 2nd International Toy Research Conference in June, means that the time does not allow them to sit down and write for the Newsletter. Therefore, there is no President's message in the ITRA Newsletter, Spring 1999, nor any NCFL News.

Contents in this ITRA Newsletter are Member Activities, New Members, Conference announcements, Book Publication and Journal Article

MEMBER ACTIVITIES

AUSTRIA

Waltraut Hartmann has been given the highest award for scientific work that given in Austria; "Osterreichisches Ehrenkreuz fur Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1. Klasse" The award was given to her for her scientific research on the field of early childhood education, especially in multimedia programs on children's books, play, toys and television for the use in adult education, for her scientific research on the field of early childhood education, especially in multimedia programs on children's books, play, toys and television for the use in adult education. It was handed over to her , by the President of the Republic of Austria at a ceremony on the 12th Jan 1999.

Another focus of her work that was noted is the development of a play curriculum in elementary school and the scientific evaluation of the longitudinal effect of this program on the development of the children. At present Waltraut is focusing with the scientific work in the Charlotte Buhler-institute, and concerns the implementation quality standards and new educational goals and methods in the kindergarten.

"Buch-Partner des Kindes" ("Book - Companion of the Child") was published in a totally revised edition, partly with new authors by the Osterreichisches Bundesverlag (OBV), Autumn 1998.

Waltraut Hartmann is co-author and writes in this book about the history of children's books, about the effect of books on children's development, about non-fiction for children and about children's problems and in picture books. A book on play and television - experiences of children edited by Hoppe-Graff & Oerter is in preparation. Waltraut Hartmann's contribution is on gender differences in children's play.

On behalf of all ITRA members, the secretariat warmly congratulates Waltraut to the fine award!

Canada

Stephen Kline gives the following relate which, according to himself, "reads more like a travelogue than a research report":

During April and May 98, I had the pleasure of an extended sojourn in Europe which gave me a chance to work with Gilles Brougere in Paris XIII, and to work with his students on the DESS course he runs there. I also managed to visit and give

seminars on various aspects of children's culture and media for Ines de la ville at Poitiers, Hein Ritter at Brunswieg, and Gisela Wegener-Sporhing at Wuzburg and Giovanni Becheloni at Florence. I am still processing all the wonderful experiences of this trip but it was a useful reminder of the breadth and diversity of the work being done on children's toys and entertainment media.

The trip was not only a wonderful opportunity for this isolated Europhile from the wrong side of the Rocky Mountains to avoid the dampness of spring but it helped me realize that one significant spin-off from ITRA's convivial association of international researchers should be a growing number of exchanges and cross-national projects that will—I hope— increasingly flow from our bi-annual meetings. For example, Gilles and I were able to develop a cross-national research collaboration around Fisher-Price's new Rescue Heroes launch (as we bicycled through Paris). While jogging through the sun drenched vineyards above Wurzburg, I was also able to persuade Gisela to visit the dank and dreary Vancouver spring (which she did on the pretext of whale watching).

During 1999 I have been recuperating from the excitement of Europe by teaching, researching and publishing several technical research reports. In March I was pleased to have Gisela speak to my children's media and culture class where she impressed my students with her very thoughtful account of aggression in play and also managed to visit several Canadian multi-cultural schools (and learned the value of "bear bells" for running in the woods). Over the last year, I have also 'gone virtual' setting up a web site where you can see some of the production work done by students of the media analysis lab (children's animation and stories or educational videos), as well as find the executive summaries of some of the research projects we have undertaken this year. If you are interested I invite you to look:

For the media lab videos

1. <http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/education.html>

2. For video game research
<http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/research/vgsummary.html>

<http://www.sfu.ca/~dewaal/>

3. For Rescue Heroes
<http://www.sfu.ca/media-lab/research/rhreport.html>

Stephen Kline, Director, MAL (Media Analysis Lab), School of Communications Simon Fraser University Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, tel 604-291-3855, Fax+ 604-2914024

Denmark

Jorn Martin Steenhold has left LEGO A/S for a job at the instituttet for fremtidsforskning (The Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies). Fax +33 32 77 76 E-mail: martin.steenhold@cifs.dk

Greece

Report from Maria Argyriadis, Curator of the Benaki Museum. Toy and Childhood department. Athens, Greece.

The Childhood years, Toy and Game Collection of the Benaki Museum, will occupy a separate department of the Museum. One purpose of the new museum branch dedicated to childhood, is to study, publicise and present to the broader public all manifestations and facts of the rich subject of Greek children and play. At the same time we will research and recreate children's traditional daily life in Greece during the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, and record their interests and experiences within the cycle from birth to marriage.

I would like to place in front of you, one of the most interesting parts of my research into Greek toys. A systematic effort has been made to gather information from all over Greece by the elderly people who were children at the beginning of the 20th century and today spend time at their local KAPI.

KAPI is the senior citizens' centres that can be found in the most regions of Greece, whose purpose is to provide for older people's health, social and cultural needs.

The first reconstruction and information material was being gathered between 1990 - 1993 within the context of the nation-wide competition. The title was "I reconstruct the toys of my childhood", and organised by the KAPI Volunteers' Association, on the initiative of KAPI's social worker, in Cupertino with the Benakis Museum childhood department and KAPI's all over Greece.

Grandfathers and Grandmothers reconstruct and revive toys which no longer exist, playing with them alongside the children and helping them to understand that, in addition to their industrial toys, there were also handmade constructions, board and sport games whose purpose was not the competition but friendly rivalry and collective living. When the nation-wide competition was over, and following a request by the Benaki Museum to all KAPIs, most of the toys were donated by the makers to the Museum and will be exhibited and will constitute a separate section with educational significance.

Dedicated to the research for, and the recording, study, conservation and preservation of tradition, the Children's Section and Toy Collection of the Benaki Museum, in co-operation with KAPI members, social workers and work therapists, focused their attention on children and play which is one of the central themes of ethnography. The reconstructions of toys are still being enriched and information is still being gathered. I would like to emphasise the significance of this competition and my research, by pointing out that these reconstructions and any personal information about handmade Greek folk toys provided by the people who lived their childhood early in the 20th century can be regarded as significant sources of primary data. Themselves both makers and users, they can relive one part of the history of toys in modern Greece in the most authentic way.

My belief is that older people's knowledge can offer today's children and young people the opportunity to learn through closer contact with our country's rich cultural past. I am also convinced that grandfathers and grandmothers should not be forgotten and especially their relationship with their grandchildren, this rich, loving relationship, so important to the child's mental and emotional well-being.

BOOK PUBLICATIONS

England:

Dan Fleming, *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture*. Manchester University Press 1996.

1. Cultural studies and children's culture
2. Toys today and the playing child
3. The history and narrativization of toys
4. Toys and society
5. Video games and identities

The book has many photographs of toys, taken, by Dan himself in order to illustrate the argument.

India

Sudarshan Khanna (Ed. and co-writer) *Toys and Tales with Everyday Materials*. (part of the series Craft

Without Limits). Tara Publishing. Chennai, India and National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. India

ISBN- E11-8621I -42-X. 143 pp, Price: \$15, incl. handling and air-mail costs.

.Authors:

Toy Concepts, by Sudarshan Khanna,
Text for Adults, by Gita Wolf,
Text for Ages 8-12 and 13-16., by Anushka
Ravishankar

Publisher's note:

Prof Khanna who has been working with Indian folk toys for more than 25 years, gave a set of workshops in 1997. These workshops resulted in Toys and Tales, one of three in a series of publications within the project

Craft without Limits. Other books in the same series are Child Art with Everyday Materials and Puppet, *Unlimited with Everyday Material*, Publisher's E-mail address: Tara@vsnl.com

Each book in the series came about as a result of workshops with children. The art and craft work in all of them have been done by children. The books also contain ideas and suggestions for parents and educators on different aspects of creative education

The books are based on two main ideas:

1. A craft book need not focus on a perfect finished product. The creative process is more important. This allows the child to experiment with her own ideas without fear of failure.
2. Art and craft do not require expensive materials. Everyday materials can give rise to interesting and unusual work.

For children between 8 and 12 years: gives step-by-step instructions on how to make each toy. Games, stories, jokes and tricks open up imaginative ways of playing with these toys. For children between 13 and 16 years: brings alive science through toy making, by examining the physical laws behind the working of these toys. It also suggests connections to other phenomena, variations and further experiments with materials. For adults: Addresses a number of complex issues related to toys and play.

NEW MEMBERS

Martin Barker, School of Cultural Studies,
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Dan Fleming, University of Ulster, Ireland, is an educationalist and cultural studies researcher at the

University of Ulster, so the book on toys takes a cultural, rather than psychological, perspective. It deals with today's toys as media products, focusing on Ninja Turtles, G1 Joe, Transformers, video games, etc. I'll be developing some further ideas on video games for my Halmstad conference paper - particularly the phenomenon of cyberpets and 'artificial life' toys and videogames.

I can also be contacted via my online 'office' at <http://www.netopia.geocities.com/dfleminguk/>

See further under BOOK PUBLICATIONS

Helena Kling, Educational Centre for Games, 10 Y Israel Bek Street,, Tel Aviv, Israel.

Helena is by profession a psychologist specializing on Children's Play in Hospita, and has for many years been working on projects about play. At present running the *Educational Centre for Games in Israel*, a non-profit association which she describes as follows:

"We have a small building full of stuff, a veritable "heritage centre" of play; there is "hands on play" available; a work room where people can make games and toys; an exhibition room with miniature rooms and two model railways; a library this has become a centre of information on play; a large collection of Israeli hoard games and collection of collections and dolls and so much more that if I go on writing about it I am afraid of disbelief! Soon we shall have our own web site and so will join the world community of Play.
E-mail: kling@post.tau.ac.il

CONFERENCES

Centre for the Social Study of Childhood, with the theme "Sites of Learning", An interdisciplinary conference on childhood, will take place 14th – 16th September 1999. University of Hull, England.

This conference addresses the theme of children's learning in and across a diverse range of social settings - the home, the school and playground: the street; the media and the Internet. Through exploring these different sites of childhood. Our aim is tiring together a range of disciplinary perspectives on the different ways in which children learn, the different places in which this learning takes place, and the different experiences of learning which children have - with their peers, their parents arid the professionals they encounter.

Conference themes include:

- * The transfer and exchange of knowledge and ideas between children themselves, in the street, at home, in the playground...
- * Ways and modes of children's learning - generational, spatial, visual, oral...
- * Children's resources for learning - their social, economic, political and material capital or lack of it...
- * Children's appropriate and inappropriate knowledges...

The Annual Lecture of the Centre will be given during the conference by Dr. Martin Wood head, Centre for Human Learning and Development, Open University. Plenary Speakers: Prof. Andrew Pollard, University of Bristol, Sos Bayer & Jan Kampman, Roskilde University, Denmark, Alan Prout, Hull University

Since deadline for abstracts was already April 30, booking will be too late when this ITRA Newsletter is due, but for more information about the conference and perhaps a report, you may contact Allison James, Centre for the Social Study of Childhood, CASS, University of Hull. E-mail: A.James@cas.hull.ac.uk

Finland:

9th European Conference on Quality in Early Childhood Education EECERA Conference, Helsinki, Finland 1-4 September 1999

Conference Theme: How does early education lead to life-long learning?
The conference is organized by European Early Childhood Education Research (EECERA), and UNIVERSITY OF Helsinki. Kindergarten Teacher Education, and Centre for Continuing Education. Queries concerning the Conference registration of programme may be directed to Helja Sjoblom, Fax +358 9 19121692, e-mail: Helja.sjoblom@helsinki.fi
Internet information:
<http://frodo.helsinki.fi/EECERA>

USA

International Conference on Sports & Society July 8-10, 1999

Linda Hughes, TASP and Coordinator of Alternative Routes to Certification Willard Hall, University of Delaware Newark, DE 19716, forwards the following information from Northern Michigan University:

Featuring panels of peer-reviewed papers and some invited presentations by sports professionals. Papers will be selected from a wide variety of disciplines, including anthropology, broadcasting, exercise science, folklore, film studies, literature, marketing, philanthropy, philosophy, popular culture, public relations, psychology, recreation, rhetoric, sociology. The focus may vary from participation to spectator involvement in individual or team sports. Interdisciplinary approaches are especially welcomed.

In 2000, Northern Michigan U Press may publish selected proceedings from the conference in a special volume. To submit a paper or panel of papers send a 250-400 word abstract for each proposed paper BY APRIL 1 to: Dr. Donald Rybacki, Dept of Communications and Performance Studies, Northern Michigan University, 1401 Presque Isle Ave Marquette, MI 49855. For additional info, contact Dr. Rybacki at drybacki@nmu.edu

Linda Hughes forwards the following contact information from Olga Jarrett, the Association for the Child's Right to Play (IPA) The annual fee for individual membership is \$40. General contacts should be to the president Dr. Rhonda Clements Graduate Physical Education 240 Hofstra University Hempstead, NY 11549. Phone: +1 (516) 463-5176

Membership queries should be directed to Dr. Torn Reed, Membership Processor, University of SC School of Education, 800 University Way, Spartanburg, SC 29303 Phone +1 (864) 503-5579

Willard Hall. For more information, especially on recess, and Email addresses for the leadership, see web site www.ipusa.org.

BOOK REVIEW

Dolls and Toys. A Collection of Texts by Plutarch, Kleist, Rilke, Eco, Baudelaire, Chesterton, Benjamin. Athens: Agra, 1996. 121 pp.

Summary, of a Review by Cleo Gougoulis (For the review in full, contact Cleo, E-mail: cleogou@hotmail.com)

Chesterton gives an example of the toy- bow and arrow and the dangers assumed in his era (1874-1936) to be associated with their use by children, in order to condemn censorship in general. His thoughts are triggered by a Christmas visit to a toy shop and particularly by a toy retailer's remark concerning a tendency, those days, towards less manufacturing of bows and arrows, because they were considered dangerous for kids.

The author strongly protests against this protectionist attitude: According to his opinion, abolition is the worst way to stop a problem, as you 'cannot stop a boy from throwing stones by preventing him to see any stones ever'.

If it is the parents' job to teach children not to throw stones, it is also their duty to teach them, when to cast an arrow and when not to. Children should be spared their weapons for one more reason. If the meaning of real weapons, as artifacts, is ambiguously situated between poetry and realistic - and therefore repulsive - prose, toy weapons, according to the author, only refer to poetry. In that sense the child's symbolic sword is "an abstraction flowing out of the heroic without its atrocities, it is the soul of the sword never to be stained by blood". Warfare in this view is the union of opposites, (nobility vs brutality) with play referring to the noble side of the polarity.

Eco's "Lettera a mio figlio", is a celebration of the cathartic function of war toys. The author's arguments are grounded on his own play life and subsequent political affiliation. Eco's play memories abound with rough street play, initiation rites and ludic warfare episodes in which he participated either as controller of toy armies or as combatant in stone wars.

Eco warns his son, "who construct little cranes, for in the cold and distorted minds of these young mathematicians concentrate all terrible complexes, which will disturb their later maturity. If children love those horrific (sic) toys now, they will push the button of the nuclear war later. The letter ends with Eco's decision to buy his son some toy guns for Christmas and the declaration of his intention to teach the child through these toys who the real bad guys in this world are.

While one should keep in mind that the text is a letter, rather than a treatise or toys and child development, it is still interesting, because it resonates the romanticism of the Sixties. The striking inconsistencies in the author's treatment of different categories of toys (war toys are subject to manipulation of meaning during play, whereas construction toys are not) may be partly attributed to the formalist attitude of semiotic theorists to objects (cf. Barthes' similar approach to wooden vs plastic toys) and partly to the author's own emotional involvement in the text.

Two following essays written by Walter Benjamin, indicate that Benjamin has obtained some knowledge on the history of toys in the context of his interest in art in the age of culture industry. His first text, a critical presentation of the 1928 toy exhibition in the Berlin Markisches Museum,

comprises historical data on the German toy industry, critical remarks on exhibition techniques and some thoughts on the reason the toy exhibits appeal both to adults and children.

Children, in Benjamin's account, create and control miniature worlds to compensate for their lack of control in real world. Adults, on the other hand, reduce the terror of real life in its miniature portrayal through toys. In that sense, adult impetus for play should not be interpreted as reverting to childhood. Play has for the author a liberating effect. After all Benjamin represented the optimistic side of Critical Theory.

News From Toy Land

All Toy Land News below is taken from the Swedish Toy Review (Svensk Leksaksrevy), edited by Per Sparre, Managing Director of the Swedish Association of retailers.

TOYS "R" US AND WAR TOYS

War toys are still subject to debates this time because the Swedish toy trade is trying to keep up the agreement from 1979 between the toy manufacturers and dealers on the one side and the not to sell toys representing weapons used in the 20th century wars. While Swedish toy stores are eliminating them from the toy stores, Toys "R" Us obviously does not bother about the Swedish agreement. Another 'bad boy' in the international toy trade without being properly invited evidently is the Danish giant "BR".

The Editor of Leksaksrevy declares that the point here is not war toys per se but the agreement signed by the Swedish toy trade representatives, an agreement held high by the professional toy stores. The National Toy Retailers Association in Sweden has seen to it that toy stores have carried out a purge of war toys through the 89s and 90s.

It is a matter of gentlemen's agreement. "A promise is a promise and should be held no matter what". Even the authorities have stated that the toy trade in Sweden has lived up to its commitment. No surprise then, that Per Sparre in his role as managing director for the Swedish Association of Toy Retailers is disappointed not to say disturbed. He now claims that: Either we must withdraw the allegiance or the authorities must see to it that Toys "R" Us falls in with the rest of us. Competition on equal grounds is necessary." Leksaksrevy 2/99

Prohibition

Boasting without a realistic base is always bound to hit back. TOYS "R" US is subject to another article in Leksaksrevy, this time in NO. 3/9. In February

The Swedish line of the company was given a prohibition prescription by Konsumentombudsmannen (Consumer ombudsman) to pay a penalty of 100 000 SEK if not stop advertisement saying they "guarantee to have the lowest prices in Sweden".

In April the company claims on its Swedish sit to be "biggest in the world", with one million articles in stock. According to Per Sparre - with his long experience in the toy trade, the truth is first that 'Wal-Mart' is bigger with an increasing sale, and that Toys "R" US assessment that it can offer one million articles actually means one million articles in stock which is quite another thing.

"Bravo Toys "R" Us"

In a Stop Press note, Toys "R" Us" is given credit for having cleaned up its home page from previous overstatements and untrue facts. "It took some two months before the company reacted on the two months later

Greece- new member of TIE

Toys Industries of Europe (TIE), with its headquarters in Brussels, represents the European toy manufacturers in a number of questions, particularly negotiations with EG about security issues, televised commercials, parallel import, copying. treaty of commerce etc. The heavier an organization is the more its memorandum weighs. It is, therefore, a great pleasure for the international toy trade to note that also Greece with its 140 toy manufacturers is now an adequate member of TIE. (Leksaksrevy 3/99)

CHILDREN'S CORNER

Beside requesting toys, children often use letters to Santa to express their feelings, and ask for miracles as if Santa had the powers of God. Children's Letters to God provided by Travis R. Grant from the *Sixth Sense - The Sense of humor* list, are of almost the same character as those to Santa. They all begin "Dear GOD", like the Santa letters begin 'Dear Santa'

In school they told us what You do. Who does it when You are on vacation?

Jane

Did you mean for the giraffe to look like that or was it an accident?

Norma

Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy.

Joyce

Please send me a pony, I never asked for anything before. You can look it up.

Bruce

If You give me a genie lamp like Aladdin, I will give you anything you want except my money or my chess set.

Raphael

Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother.

Larry

I want to be just like my Daddy when I get big but not with so much hair all over.

Sam

I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions.

Ruth M.

I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it.

Nan

If You watch me in church Sunday, I'll show You my new shoes.

Mickey D,

I would like to live 900 years like the guy in the Bible. Love,

Chris

We read Thomas Edison made light, But in school they said You did it. So I bet he stoled (sic!) your idea. Sincerely,

Donna

Editor's Closing Words

The ITRA Secretariat and its one-person staff wishes to thank you for your cooperation through the nearly six years I have been holding the secretarial post including the Newsletter editing. I recommend the job because it is very stimulating and gives you a lot of nice contacts all over the earth.

I came to NCFL in Halmstad bringing with me my 11 years of toy research knowledge, some of which was included in my Ph.D. thesis, and with quite a number of play- and toy research colleagues. My donation to the University of Halmstad is the ITRA network which I hope will grow and prosper, and given me a lot of friends all over the world. I came to Halmstad bringing

It is said that "variety is the spice of life" so what ITHA needs is a change of secretary, and what the secretary needs is something else to put her energy on. Writing a new book perhaps, giving a lecture to people who are interested in children's play and use of toys, translating more children's books from English to Swedish, a joyful profession I practiced from 1978 to 1985 when toy research had come into my life. There will also be more time to spend with two young boys, my grandsons, before they become too old. One does learn a lot from the young generation,

Some of you will participate in the 2nd International Toy Research Conference, June 14-19, but to those of you who are not coming I take the opportunity here to wish you a fine Summer Recess and a stimulating other half of the last year of the 20th century.