

# ITRA NEWSLETTER

**International Toy Research Association**

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<http://www.itratoyresearch.org>



## **ITRA Newsletter Editors**

Suzanne (Suzy) Seriff  
University of Texas at Austin  
Dept of Anthropology  
3705 Laureledge Lane  
Austin, Texas  
78731  
USA  
[seriff@aol.com](mailto:seriff@aol.com)  
[itranwsltr@gmail.com](mailto:itranwsltr@gmail.com)

Mark Allen  
Serious Fun Research Labs  
VCT E2 Fair Oaks  
Chobham  
Woking  
SURREY  
GU24 8HU  
UNITED KINGDOM  
[m.allen-uk@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:m.allen-uk@hotmail.co.uk)  
[itranwsltr@gmail.com](mailto:itranwsltr@gmail.com)

## PROLOGUE

The International Toy Research Association Newsletter is designed to keep members up to date with research in the fields of toys and play. In this issue, readers will find a note from our President, the Call-for-Papers for the 8<sup>th</sup> ITRA Conference, to be held in Paris 2018, a Member's Profile, the Members' Forum, various publications, conference and exhibition previews and reviews. The newsletter has been formatted to allow the document to be read in either printed form or as a soft copy, which can be found on the ITRA website.



The ITRA website (<http://www.itratoyresearch.org>.) covers the following: a description of ITRA, a brief history of the association, how to become a member, and a catalogue of downloadable newsletters.

Those of you who promised material that never arrived... send it again. For those who made contributions, without which there would be many more blank spaces, a massive thank you.

Enjoy the Newsletter.

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## GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT OF ITRA

Dear ITRA colleagues and friends,



The International Toy Research Association (ITRA) started in 1993, initiated by Brian Sutton-Smith, Jeffrey Goldstein and Jorn-Martin Steenhold who invited a small group of toy researchers, from Europe and North America, to an informal meeting at the University of Utrecht. ITRA was created for the purpose of promoting, stimulating and encouraging toy and plaything research all over the world in order to broaden and spread knowledge about toys and promote the development of good toys for children. The 16 founder members of ITRA may have dared to dream that the association would still be going strong almost a quarter of a century later and brought together well over 500 toy researchers – both present and past ITRA members – from six continents.

ITRA supports and cooperates with local, national, and international organizations having the same purpose as the association, through issuing publications and arranging toy research conferences. The 8<sup>th</sup> ITRA World Conference is due to be held 11<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> July 2018 in Paris, France, the main theme being *Toys and Material Culture: Hybridisation, Design and Consumption*. It promises to be another wonderful opportunity to meet old research friends, make new acquaintances, update and share experiences regarding plaything research with passionate, fellow-minded toy researchers.

Gilles Brougère and his team of industrious conference organisers have secured an exciting venue, the newly developed Conference Centre at the MSH (Human Sciences House) in Paris-Nord. They have also been working tirelessly on arranging keynote speakers, updating the financial aspects of registration and accounting (for the first time at an ITRA conference, the facility of credit card payment), and coordinating a stimulating slate of toy-related social activities to accompany the scientific programs. Beyond the conference, delegates will be able to experience Paris, one of the most influential European capital cities - historically, traditionally and culturally.

Do not forget to check our website, [www.itratoyresearch.org](http://www.itratoyresearch.org), for updated information on the conference and make sure to send your proposal in by the appointed deadline of January 8<sup>th</sup>, as the 8<sup>th</sup> ITRA Conference in Paris will be an event that simply cannot be missed!

Hope to see you in Paris next July!

Mark Allen  
Serious Fun Research Labs  
Woking  
SURREY  
GU24 8HU  
UK

Email: [m.allen-uk@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:m.allen-uk@hotmail.co.uk)



# International Toy Research Association 8<sup>th</sup> World Conference

***TOYS AND MATERIAL CULTURE:  
Hybridisation, Design and Consumption***

11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> July 2018  
Paris, France

**CALL FOR PAPERS**



**experice**

Centre de Recherche Interuniversitaire Expérience Ressources Culturelles Education

UNIVERSITÉ PARIS 13

U<sup>S</sup>-PC  
Université Sorbonne  
Paris Cité



# International Toy Research Association 8<sup>th</sup> World Conference

## ***TOYS AND MATERIAL CULTURE: Hybridisation, Design and Consumption***

Paris, France, 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> July 2018

The 8<sup>th</sup> World Conference of the International Toy Research Association will be held in conjunction with *Experice* (Experience, cultural resources and education) and *Labex ICCA* (Cultural Industries and Artistic Creation) of the Paris 13 University – Sorbonne Paris Cité University.

The **International Toy Research Association** (ITRA), founded in 1993, is devoted to the scientific study of toys in all their facets. ITRA brings together toy researchers from all corners of the globe (see [www.itratoyresearch.org](http://www.itratoyresearch.org) for further information). This is our 8<sup>th</sup> World Conference to discuss research, collaborate on international projects and exchange information with other researchers, students and leaders in the toy industry. More than 80 international delegates attended our previous meeting in Braga, Portugal in 2014.

The **Experice** ([//experice.univ-paris13.fr/](http://experice.univ-paris13.fr/)) research centre focuses on education outside school, informal learning, play and childhood material culture. It participates in the Labex ICCA.

The ITRA conference will be held at a newly developed Conference Centre, accessible via metro, known as the MSH (Human Sciences House) in Paris-Nord. The Centre is situated at Avenue George Sand in La Plaine Saint Denis (part of the Grand Paris conurbation) and is 2 minutes from the “Front Populaire” station of line 12 of the Paris Metro. The MSH is situated four to six stations from the famous Parisian area of Montmartre.

### Conference Themes

The predominant theme for the 8<sup>th</sup> ITRA Conference is *Toys and Material Culture: Hybridisation, Design and Consumption*.

Beyond toys, the conference will explore the place of tangible objects and novel forms of material culture in play. What are the similarities and the differences, the relationships, between toys and other material devices, such as board games, cards, digital games and media-connected objects? Are there, in play, or in the trans-mediated toys themselves, new forms of materiality?

Three words can summarize this topic:

- Hybridisation: the mix between toys and other playthings or supports; the trans-media franchising and circulation of characters, contents, fictions, and cross-connected toys; the mix between video games and toys; the relationships between toys and technology; and the question of virtual toys.
- Design: the conception of toys and the relationship with other trans-mediated objects addressed to, or of interest to children. Since Experice, the university’s research centre, operates in conjunction with a FabLab specialising in toys and games, known as Ludomaker

([//fr-fr.facebook.com/ludomaker/](https://fr-fr.facebook.com/ludomaker/)), we are particularly interested in encouraging proposals from other FabLabs around the world that also specialise in toys and games.

- Consumption: the marketing, distribution, and use of toys, and their relationship with different kinds of play objects, including the recycling and transformation of everyday objects into playthings.

In addition to the main theme of the conference, other topics relating to toys and material culture are welcome. This includes, but is not limited to, the following topics:

- Toy collecting and toy libraries
- Toys, education, health and environment
- Toys and gender influences
- Toys and intercultural communication
- Toys in history
- Trans-generational toys
- Toys, signs and meanings

We welcome abstracts of completed research, case studies and development projects, as well as incomplete or proposed research or ideas for future research in order to generate discussion and feedback.

## To submit a paper, symposium or poster

If you would like to present a paper, organize a symposium or present a poster please submit the requested abstract or proposal, in English, before **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**. Submissions should be sent to Gilles Brougère ([brougere@univ-paris13.fr](mailto:brougere@univ-paris13.fr)).

**Papers** will be limited to 20 minutes, with an additional 10 minutes for questions and comments. In addition to some basic background information, the abstract must include methodology, research data and results, discussion or conclusion. Authors are also asked to provide which category (from the above list) best fits the description of their paper. The title of the abstract, names, affiliations and email addresses of each contributor should be provided. An abstract should be one A4 page in portrait layout (around 2000 characters). Deadline **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**.

**Symposia** will be limited to 2 hours, with three or four presentations on a common theme. Each proposal should contain the title of the symposium, an overview of the symposium (around 2000 characters), and abstracts of each presentation should be presented in the same format as the papers. Deadline **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**.

**Posters** should be suitable for presentation. Poster sessions usually do not occupy conference time and take place during the coffee breaks. Their duration should be limited to 20 minutes. If you would like to present a poster, please submit a one-page abstract in the same format as the papers. Deadline **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**.

The scientific committee will review your abstract or proposal for its suitability to the conference. You will receive a reply by **15<sup>th</sup> March 2018**.

If you require a response before this date, please apply in writing to Gilles Brougère ([brougere@univ-paris13.fr](mailto:brougere@univ-paris13.fr)) when you submit your paper, symposium or poster.

## Publications

Conference proceedings will be published in the open archive HAL ([//hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/](http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/)). Participants who wish to have their full paper published are required to submit it to Gilles Brougère ([brougere@univ-paris13.fr](mailto:brougere@univ-paris13.fr)) by **15<sup>th</sup> September 2018**.

## 2018 ITRA - BTHA PRIZE FOR OUTSTANDING TOY RESEARCH

The ITRA-BTHA Prize has been established with generous support from the British Toy and Hobby Association ([www.btha.co.uk](http://www.btha.co.uk)). The first ITRA-BTHA Prize was awarded in July 2008 during the 5<sup>th</sup> ITRA conference in Nafplion, Greece. ITRA expects to give two awards at each ITRA World Conference. One award of £500 will be given for the best student research on toys and one award of £1,000 to a senior scholar or practitioner on the uses, design and effects of toys.

The Prize recipients will also receive a travel stipend of £500 each toward the ITRA Conference and will present their research at that conference.

## Purpose

The purpose of the ITRA-BTHA Prize is to recognise outstanding research in the field of toy research. To qualify for the Prize, the work must have been conducted or published since the previous ITRA Conference and be submitted by the researcher or nominated by a member of ITRA.

## Eligibility

Papers, either published or unpublished, in any area of toy research, are eligible. Submissions should be in the English language (original or translation). Research on the uses, design, and effects of toys in child development, education, science, and medicine will be considered for the awards. Theoretical and historical papers will also be considered as long as these are linked to potential research.

Submissions of postgraduate dissertations or books are also welcome. These should be accompanied by a summary of 2500-3000 words. Hard copies of books should be provided to each prize committee member upon request.

## Submissions

ITRA-BTHA Prize papers should be submitted to Gilles Brougère ([brougere@univ-paris13.fr](mailto:brougere@univ-paris13.fr)) before **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**.

The Awards Committee consists of Mark Allen (UK), Gilles Brougère (France), Cleo Gougoulis (Greece), and Greta Pennell (USA).

## Evaluation

The Awards Committee of ITRA will evaluate applications on the basis of originality, the significance of the work, creativity, methodology, clarity of presentation, and importance.

**The 2018 ITRA-BTHA prizes will be awarded during the 8<sup>th</sup> ITRA World Conference in Paris, France, 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> July 2018.**

## Registration and Fees

Registration for the conference will be available online only, opening in early 2018. The conference fee must be paid by credit card. Your registration will not be valid until you have successfully completed the entire process and received a confirmation of registration and payment. If you are unable to register online via credit card, please contact Gilles Brougère ([brougere@univ-paris13.fr](mailto:brougere@univ-paris13.fr)).

There will be two registration periods, early and regular. Student fees are applicable only to full-time university students who can present an official certificate of their student status the first day of the conference.

- |   |            |
|---|------------|
| • Early registration until 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2018         | 300.00 EUR |
| • Late registration after 2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2018          | 340.00 EUR |
| • Student early registration until 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2018 | 200.00 EUR |
| • Student late registration after 2 <sup>nd</sup> May 2018  | 230.00 EUR |

Payment by credit card (MasterCard and Visa only) can be made at <http://monintranet.univ-paris13.fr/paiement/itra/>.

Registration fee includes all conference sessions, conference materials, scheduled meals, refreshments at breaks. It also includes a trip to the *French Museum of Playing Cards* ([www.museecarteajouer.com/](http://www.museecarteajouer.com/)) on the evening of the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018. Museum entry fee, demonstration and meal inclusive of registration fee.

The fee does not cover accommodation and travel expenses.

## Financial Support

Limited financial support will be available to participants for whom registration fees and/or travel costs present a hardship. Please submit your request for financial consideration before **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018** to the ITRA Treasurer, Cleo Gougoulis ([cleogougoulis@yahoo.gr](mailto:cleogougoulis@yahoo.gr)).

## Conference deadlines

Abstracts of papers - **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**  
Proposals for symposia - **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**  
Abstracts of posters - **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**  
ITRA-BTHA prize submissions - **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**  
Request for financial assistance - **8<sup>th</sup> January 2018**  
Response from review committee by - **15<sup>th</sup> March 2018**  
Early registration until - **1<sup>st</sup> May 2018**

## Venue Details

The conference will be held at MSH (Human Sciences House) Paris-Nord, a new and interesting building dedicated to research in human sciences close to a new university campus for human sciences under construction.

The conference centre is situated at 20 Avenue George Sand in La Plaine Saint-Denis (part of the Grand Paris conurbation) and is a two minute walk from the "Front Populaire" Paris Metro station (Line 12). It is situated 4 to 6 stations from the famous Parisian area of Montmartre.



## Travel Information

Paris is easily accessible from anywhere around the world and is served by two international airports (Orly and Charles de Gaulle). It is worth noting that some low cost flights (for example Ryanair) arrive in Beauvais Airport, which is 85 km from Paris (approximately a 75 minute bus journey).

High Speed trains (Eurostar, Thalys, Lyria, and TGV) connect Paris to various other major continental cities and an efficient road system makes travel to Paris, by car or coach, a viable option from other European countries.

The Paris Metro has a well developed rail network which means the conference centre is around 15 to 30 min from downtown Paris.

## Accommodation

The conference centre at MSH Paris Nord is situated on a university campus which is currently under construction which limits the availability of cheap student or hotel accommodation. Conference attendees are advised to book hotels in areas in close proximity to the Paris Metro Line 12. This includes the Montmartre, Pigalle, Grands Boulevards and Grands magasins, Opera, Tuileries, the fashion district and Sèvres-Babylone areas, all of which are within 15 to 30 minute Metro journey to the MSH conference centre (see [www.plandeparis.info/paris-metro/metro-map.html](http://www.plandeparis.info/paris-metro/metro-map.html)).

Accommodation should be booked directly with the hotel. Useful websites include:

- <http://www.lastminute.com/hotels/paris.html>
- <https://www.booking.com/>
- <http://www.hoteldirect.co.uk/paris/>
- <https://www.hostelbookers.com/hotels/france/paris/>
- <https://uk.hotels.com/de504261-qu0/cheap-hotels-paris-france/>
- <https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/HotelsList-Paris-Cheap-Hotels-zfp20355.html>

## Committees

### Scientific Committee

Mark Allen, Serious Fun Research Labs, Woking, UK  
Vincent Berry, Université Paris 13 – Sorbonne Paris Cité, France  
Gilles Brougère, Université Paris 13 – Sorbonne Paris Cité, France  
Jeffrey H. Goldstein, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands  
Cleo Gougoulis, University of Patras, Greece  
Luisa Magalhães, Catholic University of Portugal, Braga, Portugal  
Greta Pennell, University of Indianapolis, USA  
Suzy Seriff, University of Texas at Austin, USA  
Lieselotte Van Leeuwen, University of Gothenburg, Sweden  
Inès de la Ville, University of Poitiers, France

### Organizing Committee

Mark Allen, Serious Fun Research Labs, Woking, UK  
Vincent Berry, Université Paris 13 – Sorbonne Paris Cité, France  
Gilles Brougère, Université Paris 13 – Sorbonne Paris Cité, France  
Nicolas Pineros, Université Paris 13 – Sorbonne Paris Cité, France  
Nathalie Roucous, Université Paris 13 – Sorbonne Paris Cité, France

## MEMBER PROFILE – Suzanne (Suzy) Seriff



Suzanne (Suzy) Seriff is an award winning innovator in the museum and community arts world with over 30 years experience working with traditional artists, performers, toymakers and storytellers. After a pre-doctoral fellowship year, she returned to her home state of Texas to complete her Masters and PhD in Folklore at the University of Texas at Austin on the socio-political meaning and significance of handmade toys in the lives of under-served communities in Southern Mexico and South Texas.

Today, Seriff combines teaching on civic engagement through the traditional arts at the University of Texas at Austin, with museum curation and consultation around issues related to the power of traditional folk and expressive arts and culture, worldwide. She has curated and directed several travelling museum projects on traditional arts and social justice—all of which feature the arts and lives of traditional toymakers, in some way, including an exhibition on ephemeral festival toymakers from Guanajuato, as well as an award winning, national exhibition on folk arts and toys made from recycled industrial materials. From 2010-2017 Seriff served as guest curator and founding director of the Gallery of Conscience at the Museum of International Folk Art, a participatory exhibition space that draws on the power of folk art to spark meaningful community engagement and conversation around social justice and human rights issues of our time, including women’s empowerment, natural disaster, forced internment during war, and HIV/AIDS.

Suzy has been a member and served on the boards of several professional societies, most recently the American Folklore Society and the International Toy Research Association, as well as national think tanks such as the Folklore and Museum Policy Working Group.

Toy-related publications include “Recycled, Re-Seen: Folk Art from the Global Scrap Heap: The Place of Irony in the Politics of Poverty,” in her edited volume by the same name, from Harry Abrams Press, 1996, as well as “Holocaust War Games: Playing with Genocide,” in *Toys and Communication*, Luisa Magalhães and Jeffrey Goldstein, eds, from Palgrave Macmillan Press, 2017.

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Suzy’s earliest memories were of family holidays in Mexico and her fascination with the handmade toy section of the pueblo marketplaces. Her parents were folk art collectors from Texas, and would invariably stop at the Spanish colonial era Catholic Churches and markets. Suzy vividly describes running ahead to investigate the hand blown miniature glassware, stalls filled with magenta and green painted wooden jumping jacks, wooden puzzles, elaborately decorated miniature wooden furniture sets, colourful kitchen utensils, and *Days of the Dead* celebration papier-mâché skulls and skeletons. Suzy was intrigued, even as a child, by the stories about the lives and cultures of the people who made, sold and played with the toys - stories that seemed enviably rich in culture, tradition, folklore and meaning. Suzy noted with a smile, “An anthropologist in the making even then!”

Later at college, Suzy took the opportunity to study “abroad” by creating her own senior thesis project resulting in her living and working, for six months, with a traditional toy making family in Oaxaca, Mexico. The study culminated in a senior thesis in anthropology on the social, cultural and political significance of the Days of the Dead toys in the lives of contemporary Oaxacans who drew on centuries of tradition and humour around the holiday to symbolically and ritually invert power structures, gender definitions, and all other binary categories including living and dead, male and female, rich and poor, heaven and hell, etc. Suzy then applied for the post-graduate Thomas Watson Fellowship, affording her the opportunity to expand on her Oaxaca study and carry out fieldwork with traditional festival toymakers in Mexico, India, the Philippines, and Japan. Suzy’s interest in festival toys centred around their designed intent to be specifically ephemeral - to be eaten, blown up, played with, interacted with and consumed in the space of the festival event – thereby seeming to heighten both the children’s and adults’ engagement, enjoyment, and meaning making in the festival itself.

Suzy returned to the United States and enrolled in the folklore graduate department of the University of Texas at Austin to continue her study of folk cultures, material arts, and toys from around the world. She was drawn to that department due its emphasis on the social context in which folk tales, songs, stories and arts were performed, as opposed to scholarly studies of the texts or objects alone. Upon completion of her PhD in folklore, Suzy embarked on what she affectionately described as “a wild and crazy career,” in which she divided her time between University lecturing, consulting, and writing, and her hands on work with traditional artists in museums, folklore festivals, and public programs throughout the United States and the world.

Suzy’s initial contact with ITRA was through Brian Sutton-Smith. She remembers, at her first ITRA conference in Sweden, making the acquaintance of a number of ITRA luminaries - including Jean-Pierre Rossie and Sudarshan Khanna, among others - who also worked with handmade toymakers, and thus began a comradeship of creating panels together at subsequent conferences on the meaning and significance of the making, distribution, and playing with handmade toys - specially within the changes and challenges of the industrial age of machine-made toys. When she learned that her randomly assigned roommate at that conference was to be Cleo Gougoulis - another museum consultant and cultural toy scholar - she knew she had found her “people!”

Over the course of Suzy's association with ITRA, she has appreciated and enjoyed the diversity of its membership - geographically and intellectually - and the opportunity it affords to learn from scholars and professionals from different vantage points from within the field of toy research. Suzy feels, like folklore, toy scholarship tends to be a discipline that practitioners are passionate about, even if some have happened across the field of toy research by chance. Once 'in,' she notes, they seem to have an immediate connection. The time interval between the ITRA conferences, Suzy described as sufficiently long to begin to really miss fellow researchers and revel in hearing about their latest work when together, but short enough to remain connected and committed to the field, the Association, and its members in the in-between years. At each of the ITRA conferences Suzy attended, she described how she would "literally find myself running into the arms of my beloved colleagues during our first meet and greet, and leaving, three or four short days later, with a new set of intense friends and colleagues along with a renewed commitment to the oldies and goodies."

The relatively small size of ITRA, Suzy argues, is definitely one of its greatest strengths, while also providing some real challenges in terms of both the logistics and economics of maintaining the health and welfare of the Association from year to year. The fact that ITRA is so Europe-centred gives Suzy an opportunity to connect with colleagues who she would not normally have the chance to meet, and visit wonderful places around the world she would not normally have a chance to otherwise explore.

During the ITRA conference in Nafplion, Suzy was first elected onto the ITRA Board and since that time diligently served as recording secretary and dependable newsletter co-editor. She found the chance to work with a small subset of esteemed international colleagues on the Board has been extremely rewarding, while at the same time rife with a number of unique challenges based primarily on the geographic distance from each other which makes face to face meetings between conferences next to impossible.

Another issue raised by Suzy regarding ITRA, as a small association, with a dedicated and knowledgeable group of founding members, is soliciting and retaining a younger group of toy scholars who are able and willing to take up leadership positions and continue to move the Association forward with strength into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some issues that Suzy felt the "new blood" might be in a good position to address include boosting ITRA's social media presence and interactivity; amplifying the effort to expand the membership, stepping up and expanding the development arm, strengthening the collaborations with industry practitioners and patrons, while continuously honing in on and boosting the academic rigor and excellence of the Association's conference presentations, publications, exhibitions, and other extra-conference activities.

In addition to Suzy's Board responsibilities, she has also been privileged to serve, for the past few conferences on the Conference Scientific Committee, as reader for conference papers and panels. This position afforded Suzy "a front row seat - and accompanying insight - on some of the real opportunities and challenges of our diverse membership." On the plus side, Suzy observed that proposals tend to vary widely in subject matter, keeping the Association up to date on the latest research in a wide range of toy related areas. Some of the challenges, she noted, come with the territory of a global membership: fluctuating submissions in terms of academic rigor, original research, and, English-language proficiency.

Away from ITRA, in addition to teaching courses at the University of Texas on anthropology, museum studies, cultural heritage, dialogue, immigration, and arts and activism, Suzy has curated a number of international travelling museum exhibitions, as well as directing, from 2010-2017, an experimental exhibition lab within the Museum of International Folk Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, known as the Gallery of Conscience. The gallery is dedicated to catalyzing conversations about contemporary social justice and human rights issues through the lens of folk artists from around the world. Suzy is currently consulting on a number of local, national and international folk arts and social justice projects.

In the last few years, Suzy has begun to take the time to publish - something that her rigorous schedule of exhibitions, teaching, and public sector work never afforded - which is another aspect of her career she is enjoying immensely. One of the professional items on Suzy's bucket list is to curate an international exhibition on traditional handmade festival toys from around the world, with a lens focused on the economic, political, cultural and social justice aspects of society they animate. ITRA has been one of the rewarding ways in which she has been able to keep abreast of current scholarship around these issues, and network internationally with other folklorists, anthropologists, and toy scholars with whom such a global project might be collaboratively created. Suzy hopes that next year in Paris will be the year to get the ball rolling and set the project in motion.

Suzy's initial childhood passion and fascination for hand-made toys, her dedication and hard work have served her well, in her professional roles as a toy and anthropology researcher, lecturer and museum curator. It has been to ITRA's benefit that Suzy has similarly applied herself as an active, passionate and dedicated member of the Association, the Board and Editorial Team - and we trust, long may it continue.

## MEMBERS' FORUM

Please remember when you do send items for inclusion in the Newsletter to send them in a downloadable form.

### Brazil

**Danielle Almeida** wrote to us about her recent research experience:

In October 2017 I had the great opportunity to work as a research fellow at *The Strong Museum of Play* in Rochester, New York, after being selected by its team of scholars and curators. My main purpose in applying for this fellowship was to collect data for my *Toys on Focus* project, a three-year linguistic investigation granted by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), aimed at revisiting and expanding the findings of my previous toy studies.

The *Toys on Focus* project was developed with a view to contributing to the area of toy research, as the webpage (<http://toysonfocus.weebly.com/>) of the project contains links to publications as well as to upcoming conferences such as the 8<sup>th</sup> International Toy Research Association Conference, to be held in Paris in 2018.

The project is inserted in the scope of the research group in Visual Semiotics and Multimodality (GPSM), conducted by me at the Brazilian University of Paraíba (UFPB), where a team of professors and researchers, both at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, carry on linguistic investigation about the verbal and visual language of childhood representations, in order to see how their choices reflect social practices related to gender roles, diversity, representation and inclusion. In the research team, there are people involved in the analysis of toy packages, Disney characters and movies, playing activities, ludic learning, handmade toys, children's movie posters and toy trends and collections, among others.

I have to confess that, despite being a toy researcher myself for almost fifteen years, and having extensively researched the world of toys in their multiple configurations, both through my PhD thesis entitled *Icons of Contemporary Childhood: A Visual and Lexicogrammatical Investigation of Toy Advertisements* and several publications derived from it, my linguistic analyses have traditionally tended towards the investigation of toys from the two-dimensional perspective of their advertisements. This is why being at *The Strong Museum* as a researcher last October gave me the invaluable chance to finally look at toys as three-dimensional objects and because of that, I was able to refine my observation of toys' material configurations, by checking on their texture, smell, kinetic possibilities and the degree of realism in their representations.

The resources made available at *The Strong National Museum of Play* were essential to the development of both my current project and to forthcoming ones in that, having access to artefacts like the doll collections from *The Strong*, helped me get closer to a universe I had only theoretically approached in my years of academic work. Every day at the *Strong Museum* I was offered a tray of dolls of a different category for my analysis. These dolls ranged from old bebés *Jumeau*, walking and talking baby dolls to rare, collectible *Barbies*. In ten days, I had over seventy dolls coming in my direction, so that I could explore every single detail of their multimodal resources, by photographing their packages, analyzing their verbal and visual texts, testing their (in) flexible material properties. Such clues, I believe, were fundamental to help me find new ways of improving the quality of my toy analyses as well as to create an inventory capable of mapping out toys' - especially dolls' - multimodal properties. For example, by observing toys' kinetic design at the tactile level, I was able to relate my findings to toys' attached gendered meanings. In my last days as a researcher at the museum, I could explore the dolls at display and interactively have fun at the toy exhibitions. Looking back at the ten days spent as a research fellow at *The Strong Museum of Play*, I feel my heart blessed with gratitude for this incursion into the childhood universe. Not only did it turn out to be an extremely enriching academic opportunity but also a rather emotional experience that allowed me to revisit my own childhood memories.



### Greece

**Cleo Gougoulis** sent us the following notice:

The famous British folklorist Iona Opie passed on 23<sup>rd</sup> October. Iona and her husband Peter Opie were pioneers in researching British children's culture (games, songs, language and lore) by adopting a child's point of view. Their work has been recognized by many contemporary childhood specialists as a forerunner to the new

Sociology of Childhood. The International Journal of Play has devoted a special issue (vol 3.3, 2014) to their work and overall contribution to the study of children's folk culture.

See obituary <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/25/iona-opie-obituary>

## USA

**Greta Pennell** sent us the following film review:

*Toyland: Fun in the Making*

Director: Ken Sons

68 minutes

Documentary Produced by Ken Sons Film Production, 2010.

See the official trailer at: <https://kensonsfilms.com/toyland/>

Featuring interviews with sixteen toy inventors, several industry leaders from companies like Hasbro and Big Monster Toys as well as faculty and aspiring student toy designers from the Otis College of Art and Design Department this documentary follows the idea for a new toy from concept to release. It is the development of this new toy, its modifications, initial pitch to Hasbro, revisioning and testing that drives the overall story line and provides points of entrée for some historical analysis. For example, over the course of the film, the toy's name and focus changes several times from Upside Down Chin Characters to Ridiculous Aliens in Disguise (RAID) to Crazy Chins. The extent to which name changes are part and parcel of the invention process is then illustrated with such examples as the initial moniker the Whamo Whoopie Hoop changing to the Hula Hoop. The documentary further highlights the challenges and champions of toy design/invention by threading stories and vintage footage of classic toys and their advertisements like the Radio Flyer wagon, Slinky, Battling Tops, and Operation.

The historical elements of the documentary are its strength. They provide insights into the relationship between cultural norms and toy designs.

Especially interesting is how close many classic toys came to NOT making it. For example, buyers for Sears had deemed Twister too risqué for inclusion in their catalogue. Milton Bradley was set to cancel production – that is until Eva Gabor and Johnny Carson gave the game a spin on his late night show in 1966 and showed that breaking the rules, including cultural norms about body space, can be a ticket to success.

Other compelling stories featured in the film are those from Betty James, owner of Slinky. The first machines to produce Slinky were developed in 1945 and are still being used today in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania USA which Ms. James hopes will always be the manufacturing home for the iconic toy developed by her late husband. The story of his departure from his family and the toy business is a poignant reminder that even with tremendous success life in toyland is not always fun and games. Similarly, the stories included in the film about the legendary Marvin Glass of IDEAL toys paints him as anything but IDEAL. While he is considered by some to be the “reigning king of toy designers”—with toys like Lite Brite, Rock ‘Em Sock ‘Em Robots, and Mousetrap—interviews with several peers and colleagues describe instances of broken promises, unpaid bills, secrecy and erratic behaviors. However, attempts to examine his side of these stories are not evident and that is a short coming for a film billed to be a documentary.

The film has a lot of useful information both in terms of history and advice for toy designers. Its short running time of just over an hour makes it ideal for classroom use. However, a statement made by Tim Walsh, the inventor of the

Crazy Chins toy featured in film left a nagging feeling that the film could use a bit more fact checking. In particular, at the outset Tim Walsh describes his inspiration for Crazy Chins as something he did himself around the age of six, but as something that had never been seen in the toy business. Yet, I clearly remembered as a child, watching a television show that featured upside down chin characters. In less than an hour, my recollections were confirmed as I found the famous ventriloquist, Paul Winchell's Ozwald (see Figure 1). Certainly what Walsh is developing goes beyond this toy from the 1960's but it certainly isn't new. Perhaps Walsh had never seen Ozwald, but it is a rather glaring omission for a documentary that traces back as far as 1914 for examples of successes and failures in toy design.



**Greta Pennell** also sent us the following regarding “Toy Trains & the Holidays Events in the US”:

Toy trains hold a special place in my heart, in part because my father worked on the Chicago Northwestern Railroad, but also because the toy train he gave me as a child remains one of my favorite toys. It wasn't a Lionel, but the more affordable Marx HO train set. I still have it, it runs great, and on occasion have been able to add to it and combine it with newer layouts. It is also the impetus for a new turn in my gender and toy research. With the holidays upon us, toy trains come out of their boxes to go under the tree or in elaborate layouts at various museums and other public spaces. Below are images, videos, and descriptions of recent events in the United States featuring toy trains that are designed to bring out the kid in all of us:



*Indiana Railroad Model Trains at Conservatory Crossing exhibit at Garfield Park Conservatory in Indianapolis, Indiana USA*

- 1) National Toy Train Museum in Strasburg, Pennsylvania hosted its annual holiday event on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November, 2017. The exhibit runs until Dec 31. For more info about the museum see their website at <http://nttmuseum.org> with a special slide show of the holiday event at; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=17&v=\\_Ukcr9dKKqs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=17&v=_Ukcr9dKKqs)
- 2) The Eiteljorg Museum in Indianapolis, Indiana (<https://www.eiteljorg.org/home>) hosts “Jingle Rails: The Great Western Adventure” from Nov. 17, 2017 through January 15, 2018. This locomotive wonderland features 9 trains, 400 m of track featuring detailed landscapes from Indianapolis to the national parks of the American West, passing legendary sites (e.g., Mt. Rushmore, Las Vegas Strip, Hoover Dam), grand railway lodges, Northwest Coast Native villages, and natural wonders like Mt. Rushmore, Grand Canyon, Yosemite Falls, Old Faithful, and much more. <https://www.eiteljorg.org/explore/exhibitions/jingle-rails-the-great-western-adventure>
- 3) Chicago Botanical Garden, Chicago, Illinois (<https://www.chicagobotanic.org>) Wonderland Express runs through January 7, 2018 featuring indoor snow. The Garden’s promotional video captures the wonder and joy of children as they watch the trains speed through the detailed miniature Chicago landscapes amid the glittering indoor snow: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzgnJ0y\\_BN0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rzgnJ0y_BN0)
- 4) New York Transit Museum (<http://www.nytransitmuseum.org>) 16<sup>th</sup> annual Holiday November 16, 2017 through February 4, 2018 featuring Lionel Metro-North, Polar Express, and vintage subway train sets against a cityscape.
- 5) New York Botanical Gardens (<https://www.nybg.org>) Holiday Train Show from November 22, 2017-January 15, 2018. With almost 800 m of track and more than a dozen large scale trains that run both high overhead and at waist level through more than 150 iconic NYC buildings and sites, this is one of the largest holiday train exhibits in the country. A Gallery of images available at: <https://www.nybg.org/event/holiday-train-show/holiday-train-show/>
- 6) Looking for something more life sized? Descriptions of 15 top rated holiday rides on real trains from the folks at Red Tricycle may be the ticket: <http://redtri.com/the-most-awesome-holiday-train-rides-in-the-country/slide/1>

## CONFERENCES & EXHIBITIONS

This section covers current, up-coming and past conferences and exhibitions. Hopefully mentioning past events will not induce depression as to what you may have missed, while we trust previews of future events will whet your appetite to attend. Previews and reviews of conferences are sought for the next edition of the ITRA Newsletter.

### FUTURE CONFERENCES

#### January 2018

**Kids@Play** will be held at Venetian, Las Vegas, USA, 10<sup>th</sup> January 2018. Adults focus on the digital world while kids see less distinction. Ninety percent of parents report introducing their kids to technology before school ever starts. Since the mid-00's, tech and smart toys have dominated the industry's growth. Smartphones, wearables, tablets, robots, connected toys, and the Internet of Things are taking centre stage in a world where kids see screens and tech as just one of life's digital extensions.

For more information visit:

<http://miniaturescene.com/Fair-Dates>



#### February/March 2018

**The Association for the Study of Play International Conference** will be held at the Crowne Plaza Melbourne, Florida, USA, 28<sup>th</sup> February – 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018.

The theme is *Fulfilling the Promise of Play*, and proposals are encouraged from all academic disciplines related to play and from play practitioners and advocates. Formats include individual papers, workshops, roundtables, and posters. Presentations will be organized according to three tracks: play from the past, play in the present, and play as part of the future. Submissions from undergraduate researchers and graduate students are encouraged.

More details available at:

<http://www.tasplay.org/about-us/conference/>



### PAST CONFERENCES and EXHIBITIONS

#### November 2017

**Children's Play in the Urban Environment** was held in London, UK, 6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

The seminar looked at the latest research on children's play and young people's culture and its relationship to health and wellbeing trends. The *Child in the City* International Seminars are a rolling programme of focused events, bringing together practitioners, children's professionals, play workers, city planners, landscape architects, geographers and policymakers, along with researchers, academics and advocates from different relevant fields around a specific theme of the child-friendly city agenda.

For more information visit:

<https://www.childinthecity.org/2017-london/>

**Children's Research Network Annual Conference** was held in Dublin, Ireland, 29<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

The theme of the conference was '*Children and young people's participation.*'

For more information visit

<https://childrensresearchnetwork.org/activity/events/conference-2017>

### CURRENT EXHIBITIONS

#### Until January 2018

**Play!**, The Autry Museum in Griffith Park, Los Angeles, USA, until 7 January 2018.

Experience the next level of toys and games at this new Autry exhibition. Through more than 200 historic objects from the Autry's diverse collections, *Play!* explores the role of toys and games across cultures and over time. Featuring dolls, board games, video games, outdoor activities, and more, the exhibition looks at the many ways children have played in the American West, the social values toys reveal, and how the West has inspired

imagination. Beyond the displays, visitors are invited to get hands-on with games of the past and present—no assembly required.

For more information visit:

<https://theautry.org/exhibitions/play>

### **Until February 2018**

**Play: Toys Reimagined as Art**, Taubman Museum of Art, Roanoke, Virginia, USA, until 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

The exhibition highlights artists who use toy-like materials to create magically transformative installations, videos and sculptures for “the kid in all of us.” The exhibition features site-specific works by six artists working in diverse media from crayons to building blocks and inflatables. With its highly interactive and engaging artworks, *Play* focuses on the similarities between how children and adults experience various playful habits of invention, such as curiosity, imagination, and problem solving.

For more information visit:

<http://www.taubmanmuseum.org/calendar/9554/play-toys-reimagined-as-art>

### **Until April 2018**

**Winnie-the-Pooh: Exploring a Classic**, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK, from 9<sup>th</sup> December 2017 through till 8<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

This exhibition will reveal the story behind the creative partnership of A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard and the factors contributing to the phenomenal success and enduring popularity of Winnie-the-Pooh. Designed for both children and adults, visitors will be led on a multi-sensory journey to rediscover these classic books such as discovering language as a child, and inspiring creativity with drawing.

For more information visit:

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/exhibitions/winnie-the-pooh-exploring-a-classic>

## **FUTURE EXHIBITIONS**

### **September 2018**

**Kaiju vs Heroes: Mark Nagata's Journey through the World of Japanese Toys**, Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, USA.

Take a journey through the world of Japanese soft vinyl *kaiju* (monster) and hero toys, courtesy of toy designer Mark Nagata’s unrivalled collection of vintage figurines. Born out of the cultural ashes of World War II, these distinctive toys became both a means for Japanese Americans to reconnect with their culture and an apt metaphor for post-war relations between the United States and Japan.

For more information visit:

<http://www.janm.org/exhibits/kaiju-vs-heroes/>



## PUBLICATIONS & BOOKS

Book reviews, or book recommendations, are sought for the next edition of the ITRA Newsletter. Please submit these to the Editorial Team at [itraneWSltr@gmail.com](mailto:itraneWSltr@gmail.com). This edition also includes calls for papers on upcoming publications.

### **The International Journal of Play**

The journal welcomes: reports on research projects; papers concerned with theory-practice links; policy critiques and expositions; reviews and analysis of contemporary and historical publications; essays, memoirs, and other forms of reflective writing; writing that builds on the experience and voices of children and young people; and, theoretical position papers.

The International Journal of Play will appear three times a year and the contents of the first issue can be found at: <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rijp20/current>



## MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

- 1) Study proves parents are right - kids play better with fewer toys  
<https://www.simplemost.com/study-proves-parents-right-kids-play-better-fewer-toys/>
- 2) 6-year-old earns \$11 million reviewing toys  
<https://patch.com/us/across-america/6-year-old-earns-11-million-reviewing-toys>
- 3) Child's play: Here's how to buy Christmas presents for the kids that will be fun and useful  
<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-11/giving-toys-that-are-fun-and-useful-this-christmas/9246694>
- 4) Toucan play that game: Talking toy bird hacked  
[https://www.theregister.co.uk/2017/12/07/robot\\_bird\\_teksa\\_toucan\\_hack/](https://www.theregister.co.uk/2017/12/07/robot_bird_teksa_toucan_hack/)
- 5) Goodbye, pink and blue: How to shop for gender-inclusive toys  
<https://www.dailydot.com/irl/gender-inclusive-toys/>
- 6) Razors, syringes and batteries: The toys that Rohingya children play with  
<http://abcnews.go.com/International/photographer-captures-life-inside-refugee-camp-rohingya-children/story?id=51587804>
- 7) Disney has released first pictures of Toy Story Land and it's magical  
<http://www.heart.co.uk/showbiz/tv-movies/disney-toy-story-land-new-rides-pictures/>
- 8) Outdoor nursery where kids make their own toys run by ex-Leicester teacher is Britain's best  
<http://www.leicestermercury.co.uk/news/leicester-news/outdoor-nursery-kids-make-toys-650541>
- 9) Parents, read this before you buy another toy for your kids  
<https://www.rd.com/advice/parenting/too-many-toys-creativity/>
- 10) How children are biologically programmed to prefer playing with toys aimed at their own gender  
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5106139/Biology-means-children-prefer-toys-aimed-gender.html>
- 11) Future Proof: The life and death of toys to life  
<http://www.toynews-online.biz/business-analysis/read/future-proof-the-life-and-death-of-toys-to-life/049584>
- 12) ECSU researchers name animal figurines top toy for preschoolers  
<http://www.norwichbulletin.com/news/20171206/ecs-u-researchers-name-animal-figurines-top-toy-for-preschoolers>
- 13) Gender stereotyping in toy catalogues is having 'long-lasting' negative effects on both boys and girls  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gender-stereotyping-in-toy-catalogues-is-having-long-lasting-negative-effects-on-both-boys-and-girls\\_uk\\_5a27f8b6e4b0c21176273630](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/gender-stereotyping-in-toy-catalogues-is-having-long-lasting-negative-effects-on-both-boys-and-girls_uk_5a27f8b6e4b0c21176273630)
- 14) Don't play with toy safety: CPSC tips for safe gifts  
<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/dont-play-with-toy-safety-cpsc-tips-for-safe-gifts-300558715.html>
- 15) Adapted toys help disabled children play  
[https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western\\_colorado/adapted-toys-help-disabled-children-play/article\\_82514c92-d98a-11e7-9b84-10604b9f6eda.html](https://www.gjsentinel.com/news/western_colorado/adapted-toys-help-disabled-children-play/article_82514c92-d98a-11e7-9b84-10604b9f6eda.html)
- 16) Think twice before buying a connected toy  
<https://www.theverge.com/circuitbreaker/2017/12/9/16748188/think-twice-before-buying-a-connected-toy>
- 17) Inside Barbie's fight to stay relevant  
<https://www.fastcompany.com/40503573/inside-barbies-fight-to-stay-relevant>
- 18) Toy Story  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/life/dear\\_prudence/2017/12/dear\\_prudence\\_i\\_went\\_to\\_college\\_and\\_mom\\_threw\\_away\\_all\\_of\\_my\\_stuff.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/dear_prudence/2017/12/dear_prudence_i_went_to_college_and_mom_threw_away_all_of_my_stuff.html)



## ITRA 2017 Fees Notice

*Please note that, according to the ITRA Board's decision in Alicante, 8<sup>th</sup> August 2005, conference fees cover ITRA membership fees until the following conference. This means that conference participants who paid full registration fees for the 7<sup>th</sup> ITRA conference in Braga, Portugal 2014 have been exempted from paying ITRA dues for the years 2015 through 2017.*

*If you were not able to attend the conference in Braga, you must submit your annual membership fee for 2017 to remain an ITRA member in good standing.*

**Annual membership: €50**  
**Retiree// Student membership: €25**

Payments may be made

a) through bank transfer to the following account number

International Toy Research Association,  
National Bank of Greece, Pal. Phaliro branch 175  
Account number: 175/480074.53  
IBAN Number: GR16 0110 1750 0000 1754 8007 453  
SWIFT: ETHNGRAA

b) by sending an International Money Order, payable to ITRA, to the Treasurer at the following address:

Cleo Gougoulis  
73 Terpsihoris St.  
P.Phaleron  
17562 Athens  
Greece

Please notify the ITRA Treasurer, Cleo Gougoulis, by sending an e-mail to: [cleogougoulis@yahoo.gr](mailto:cleogougoulis@yahoo.gr), when you send your fees to the bank. It is important to mention what amount and in which currency you paid.

## EPILOGUE

If you attended a conference this year - toy related, preferably - have anything to say, whether about yourself, publications you have read or would like to recommend to the ITRA membership, events, research or just anything, or would like to propose an ITRA member we could profile, do not hesitate to contact either Suzy or Mark, via [itranwsltr@gmail.com](mailto:itranwsltr@gmail.com). We intend to publish a spring edition in May 2018. This edition will contain latest updates for the upcoming ITRA conference in Paris, and all pertinent logistic material related to the conference. In the meantime, the editors of the newsletter would like to thank everyone who contributed to this issue of the ITRA newsletter.

We would encourage you to feel free to send the editors articles, which we can share with the rest of the ITRA members. If English is not your first language, please do not let this be a hindrance to contacting the Editorial Team; we are more than happy to assist in editing items from contributors.

The Editorial Team would like to wish all ITRA members a festive holiday season and a peaceful new year.

Regards  
Suzy & Mark

*We do not stop playing because we grow old, we grow old because we stop playing.*  
Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790)

