

ITRA NEWSLETTER

International Toy Research Association

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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, a couple of items under Member Profiles, the Members' Forum, various publications, conference and exhibition previews and reviews. Please note that many conference and exhibition organisers have been required to put their plans into abeyance due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.



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, a list of publications, 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,



First and foremost, I trust this finds all International Toy Research Association members, both past and present, and Friends of ITRA, safe and well during the current Covid-19 global pandemic. On behalf of the ITRA Board and Editorial Team, I would like to pass on our condolences to those who have lost family members, work colleagues and friends. Similarly, I would like to extend our appreciation to all the front line workers, all around the world, who have given blood, sweat and tears, and in many cases, their lives, in the fight against this deadly virus which is ravaging our globe – we salute you. We are cognizant too that there is much collateral damage – physically, psychologically, socially, emotionally, economically – and our thoughts go out to those who have lost, or are under threat of losing, livelihoods, jobs, homes and suffering from stress, lockdown fatigue and uncertain futures related to the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic – this is true individually, communally and internationally. With the promise of new treatments, multiple vaccine developments and vaccination programs we start to see light at the end of the tunnel – we have hope.

At the end of 2019, it was my great pleasure to announce that the 9th ITRA World Conference would be held July 2021 in Amsterdam. However, in light of the ongoing Covid-19 situation, the ITRA Board held a series of emergency meetings this autumn and agreed to postpone the conference until meeting in-person was safe and viable. No firm date or plans for re-scheduling our next in-person conference have yet been confirmed. The Board's decision was based on a thorough exploration of international and institutional restrictions in place at the time, and projections on restricted travel and meeting protocols in the coming months. Once travel restrictions have been lifted and it appears to be more financially viable for both attendees and the host institution, we will begin negotiations again for our next conference.

On a related issue, the Board determined that membership fees would be provisionally extended for an additional year, until our next conference meeting, hopefully in summer of 2022.

During these months of Covid-19 enforced social isolation, I took on the task of reaching out by individual email to each registered ITRA member, firstly, to simply make contact and find out how everyone was, and secondly, to personally update every ITRA member and *Friend of ITRA* on the findings of our recent Board discussions and decisions. I appreciate all of those who were able to grab a moment to reply to my emails with a personal message, and even offer an official update to share with the ITRA membership – many included in this newsletter's 'Member Forum' section. This personal connection was especially meaningful during this unprecedented time when the pandemic makes even the normal stresses of the academic end-of-year and the toy industry's run up to Christmas, an exceptionally hectic time. I was humbly reminded how Covid-19 is affecting real people, in real situations, in real time. Responses ranged from those who felt overwhelmed with the burden of the pandemic, to members expressing happiness and gratitude merely to survive, to those who shared that the pandemic had afforded some unexpected toy research opportunities. However, the overwhelming sense I had from contacting fellow toy- and play-researchers, was that it has been and continues to be a time to take stock of the things that really matter. The irony is that in these times of local lockdown and isolation, necessity may have afforded greater – and more frequent – remote or long-distance digital interconnectivity, potentially bringing some families and colleagues closer together due to the shared Covid-19 experience – though little consolation within the bigger picture.

Regarding ongoing ITRA activities, we have some news on the financial management front. For some years now, the intention was to move the Association's bank account from Greece to another European country and mid-year we thought we were close to completing the transfer, only to be thwarted at the last moment. As it happens, the Covid-19 situation has not helped, as the necessary in-person meetings were not permitted, complicating the whole process. I would like to thank Gilles Brougère for all his time and efforts and Cleo Gougoulis, who in the meantime, will continue as ITRA Treasurer. On a positive financial note, we have been able to maintain a good working relationship with the British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA), and earlier in the year, when the 2021 ITRA conference seemed to be going ahead, Roland Earl, Director General of the BTHA, kindly agreed to financially support the Senior and Student *ITRA Prizes for Outstanding Toy Research* to be awarded during the expected 2021 ITRA Conference. The BTHA have been particularly understanding of our predicament regarding deferring the 9th ITRA Conference, for which we are most grateful.

We received good news from a number of students who are current ITRA members. Anna Borzenkova, awarded the *Student ITRA Prize for Outstanding Toy Research* at the 8th ITRA Conference held in Paris, 2018, successfully defended her thesis and is expecting to be granted her PhD sometime in the new year. Krystallia Markaki was awarded her PhD during December 2020 and Thomas Bonnacarrere is due to submit his thesis this

coming January. Further updates on these students and more information on research of a number of our ITRA colleagues, may be found in this issue's 'Member Forum' section.

To end on another positive note, while 2020 has undoubtedly been a difficult and challenging year, once the international community has been able to successfully manage the Covid-19 pandemic, the ITRA Board will be actively pursuing a 9th ITRA Conference, and it will be another opportunity to meet old research friends, make new acquaintances, update and share experiences regarding plaything research with passionate, fellow-minded toy researchers.

Do not forget to check out our website, www.itratoyresearch.org, and [Facebook](#) page for updated information on the conference and all other ITRA matters. I trust all ITRA members remain safe and well, as we globally and individually navigate through these continued uncertain times.

In the meantime, I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a relaxing festive period, New Year and a positively memorable 2021!

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MEMBER PROFILE – Vicki Thomas



Vicki Thomas is currently Senior Lecturer in Design at the University of Northampton, where she has taught Product and Interior Design courses, since 1992. As of October 2020, Vicki has also been involved in establishing the Green Materials and Technology Research Centre within the University's Faculty of Art, Science and Technology where she has been engaged in a number of *Knowledge Transfer Partnerships*. Vicki graduated with a BSc (Sociology) from London School of Economics (LSE) in 1979, started an MA at Middlesex University before transferring to the Royal College of Arts/Victoria & Albert Museum (RCA/V&A) where she was awarded an MA, in 1984, with a dissertation entitled, "Gifts:

The Designer's Role in the Commercialisation of Gift Exchange."

After graduating from LSE, Vicki worked in the insurance industry, and at the end of 1984 established Vicki Thomas Associates (VTA), at which she currently holds a consultancy position. Her role involves project generation, market research, licensing, intellectual property rights, design management and leading an interdisciplinary team. Vicki has curated a number of toy-related exhibitions including *All Work and No Play make you a Dull Designer* (2013) and *Batteries Not Included* (2014). She has been a regular conference presenter and authored publications including *The Toy Box - The Changing Semiotics of Toy Packaging*, in Zantides, E. (2017); *Playing in Northampton* in Patte, M.M., & Sutterby, J. (2016); and, *Designing Toys, Gifts and Games: Learning through Knowledge Transfer Partnerships*, edited by Arlino Silva and Ricardo Simoes (2010).

Vicki's parents were in the diplomatic service, which meant that, as a child, she regularly found the family relocating to new and unfamiliar places – Vicki recalls her father joking about them always being on the move. It was during these times of change that she found solace in toys as they made any new apartment seem familiar – like 'home.' These early childhood experiences shaped her curiosity in why human experience was somehow similar and yet so visually different in each country she had lived. Her interest in the links between social structures and patterns in material culture spurred her on to study Sociology at the London School of Economics. Her first foray into academic research was an undergraduate dissertation – *A Sociology of Fashion and Design*.

However, on graduating Vicki went to work for an insurance firm, *Lloyd's Brokers*, in the City of London, meanwhile continuing to study Art & Design classes at the City of London Polytechnic. On deciding to continue her earlier research, Vicki discovered the relatively new fields of Design History and Cultural Studies, both of which explored many of the issues she had tackled on her own in her undergraduate studies. She pursued this graduate level work, first at Middlesex University and later at the Royal College of Art (RCA) – the latter program was linked to the Victoria & Albert Museum. One day, while standing in the museum, she realised that most of their collection consisted of ritual or everyday objects that had been designed to be gifted within a social context, or to convey or accrue status to the giver or recipient – concepts that she had read about in the seminal works of Marcel Mauss and Thorstein Veblen. This discovery ultimately led Vicki to embark on a wide-ranging dissertation exploring Mauss' concepts of the *Gift Exchange* process, but specifically within the realm of toys. Vicki's research bore a noted similarity to that of famed toy and play scholar, Brian Sutton-Smith, both of whose theoretical frameworks had roots in the social sciences rather than the field of education. Vicki's dissertation work was ultimately exhibited at the RCA Degree Show – alongside exhibits developed from other practical design courses – leading to a number of work offers with top designers, retailers and manufacturers.

At the end of 1984, Vicki established *Vicki Thomas Associates* (VTA), through which she used her research to generate collaborative design projects in the gifts industry. Designers were often trained using industrial models based on materials – paper, clay, fabric – or on technologies – printing, industrial processes and assembly – but generally not on how the consumers use their designs. Vicki observes that most graduating product designers, if their major design project is toy-based, seem invariably to classify it as an 'educational toy' focussing primarily on child psychology and developmental theory – more suited to the classroom than the home.

For further toy design studies, the course which best suited Vicki's criteria was a City and Guild course, run at the London College of Furniture at a time when firms like Galt were bringing well-designed toys to the consumer and through toy libraries. Although the course closed, when the College became a university, the alumni continue to meet and share projects and experience. Vicki applied her new design skills, working alongside illustrators and pattern designers at VTA, on toy projects for commercial clients and institutions like the Design Council (Soft Toys of Little Folk), UNICEF (wooden toys and jigsaws), and BBC/RSPCA (Character development for Animal Hospital licensed collections).

In 1992, Vicki started teaching Contextual Studies, part-time, at Northampton University to students studying Product Design and Fashion – based on her many years of experience as a practising designer and researcher. As an academic on the Product Design Course team she became involved in a number of UK government funded enterprises known as *Knowledge Transfer Partnerships* (KTP) which produced toys and playthings. The toys



had to appeal to all ages and encourage inter-generational play such as wooden toys, doll houses, guitars and table football games. One KTP project was particularly successful for *Sue Ryder*, a non-profit organisation dedicated to helping the elderly live safe, secure and productive lives. The project provided a series of popular and distinctive toys for their elder care homes, while raising substantial sums in support of the charity's work.

Vicki proposed that Northampton University showcase the creative value of play, through an exhibition she curated based on her team's ongoing research. *All Work and No Play make you a Dull Designer*, the resulting exhibition, in turn spun off a collaborative research project that highlighted the town of Northampton's centuries-long association with toys. In around 1899, a resident of the town named Wenham Bassett-Lowke formed a company specialising in model railways, boats, ships, and construction sets, and nearly a half century later, another local company, Mettoy Playcraft Ltd, produced a range of die-cast toy vehicles trademarked as Corgi Toys. Vicki was commissioned, by the local Northampton museum, to jointly curate an exhibition called *Batteries not included*, which uncovered the leading role of these and other Northamptonshire companies, including the innovative work of local resident John Orme, who developed machine tools for plastic toy production, and Wicksteed, a company that designed playground equipment during the post-war decades.

It was during her work on the Sue Ryder KTP that Vicki became aware of ITRA, as she was looking for a platform to present her research findings. She was involved in a joint paper with Northampton University colleagues at the ITRA Conference in Bursa, Turkey, in 2011, entitled, *Playing with design – preparing designers for the global market*. Vicki describes how great it was to find like-minded people, with a wide range of backgrounds including researchers who seemed – like her – to have been influenced by the work of Brian Sutton-Smith. Vicki opines that many play and toy researchers are more influenced by their academic training in the fields of early childhood education and psychology; she thus found it refreshing to be able to share a wider, more anthropological perspective and to be able to call on 'an international cohort of fellow toy researchers.'

Vicki hopes ITRA may be able to meet more often, perhaps bi-annually, when the current pandemic is over. While ITRA has forged a strong link with the British Toy and Hobby Association, she hopes that more of the research presented at ITRA conferences can be shared with a wider audience both within the industry and among educators and academic researchers. She also suggests that ITRA might consider hosting sessions or forums at other local, national and international events and venues, such as the *Licensing Festival*, a digital gathering on a global scale that invites the entire brand licensing industry together to connect, learn and strike deals. While Vicki regularly recommends ITRA to other researchers, she believes the Association's profile should be more prominent, offering as an example the development of an online journal or a dedicated ITRA website for publishing and circulating conference papers presented at ITRA's in-person conferences.

One of the most exciting things that Vicki has been centrally involved in recent years is Northampton University's current development of a new environmental crisis-focused research centre investigating the application and impact of *Green Materials and Technologies* (GMT). The Centre would involve academics across the university, including the fields of fashion, product design, waste management, leather technology, environmental science, education and business strategy. Vicki is engaged on a project which continues building on two earlier pieces of work examining the "Greening of the Toy Industry." While completing her MA, Vicki worked one summer for Dunlop using her knowledge of insurance documents to study the profiles of the people who invested in innovative materials such as gutta-percha and rubber in the 19th century – these included playthings such as golf balls, baby bouncers, and inflatables. The aforementioned Northampton Toy Town study paralleled this with research showing how the plastic technology developed in the local region revolutionised the global toy industry in the 1950's. Her current Northampton University study on toys includes consideration of the development and use of novel natural materials to replace oil-based plastics, efforts to recycle existing toys, and projects examining the design playthings more suited to a circular economy.

Vicki observes that graduates from her university classes have benefited greatly from their work on toy projects – broadening the scope and understanding of the ways in which toys can function to generate creativity, build networks and relations of exchange within a community, rather than merely focusing on the "educational" value of toys to build literacy skills or other competencies in an early child's education. Her students have found that they are themselves more creative and produce more exciting results when given a chance to "play" as part of their course of study. She continues to be inspired by the writings of Sutton-Smith, Huizinga and Nachmanovitch, to name just a few, predicting that the Covid-19 lockdowns across the globe, will have refocused the value of play in the family, and the roles toys may play in keeping us healthy – physically and psychologically – and in transferring life skills and knowledge down through the generations.

The International Toy Research Association 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 (and adults) – much like Vicki's childhood experience, we are glad she has found a 'home' with us.

MEMBER PROFILE – Dorota Michułka



Dorota Michułka is an Associate Professor at the University of Wrocław, Poland, in the Institute of Polish Studies, and Head of the Department of Methodology of Teaching Language and Literature. In 1986, she studied for an MA in Polish Studies, in 1989, an MA in History and in 1996, was awarded a PhD. Her thesis was entitled, “*From fatherhood to homeland: about the reception of Romanticism in Polish schools in Galicia during the autonomous period (1867-1914).*” In 2015 Dorota was awarded a postdoctoral degree in Literary Studies.

Over the past twenty years, Dorota’s research has covered a number of related topics in the fields of literary and cultural education. She has researched and published widely on such topics as Polish school reception of Romantic literature and the literature of the 2nd half of the 19th century, children’s literature in the contexts of history, culture and education, the place of books and school literary canon in contemporary interdisciplinary communication, cognitive reading of children’s and young adult’s literature in the context of experiences and emotions, and the theory and practice of reception (based on research in developing new forms of discourse analysis of literary education concerning literature, mainly the language of engagement in literary reading, functionalized to satisfy the emotional, social, and cultural needs of young readers).

Dorota has participated in and organized numerous international conferences, published over 180 articles and written a number of books. She is currently the Editor-in-Chief of the international journal *Filoteknos* whose subjects include children’s literature, cultural mediation, and the anthropology of childhood.

Wrocław University’s Polish Studies Department has a long tradition connected with children’s literature and folklore, having been the first Polish university to establish a department focussing on children’s culture. In the early days, Prof. Jerzy Cieřlikowski published a book “*Great Play*” which was based on research of children’s folklore. It was during Dorota’s research and teaching, at the university’s Department of Education, that she came across many charming images of toys in the children’s literature. In 2016, Wrocław University hosted a conference, ‘*The Child and the Book – Child and Play*’ and a number of papers presented featured toy research.

This experience inspired Dorota to submit a paper, to Gilles Brougère, to be presented during the International Toy Research Association conference held in Paris, 2018. Dorota’s impression of her first ITRA Conference was that it featured many fascinating papers, covering a wide range of themes, and she met many wonderful people. It is the breadth of the interdisciplinary studies represented, she believes, which makes the Association invaluable to researchers of toys and children’s culture.

Her university’s Polish Studies Department promotes children’s studies in the context of education, the anthropology of childhood, and cultural mediation. Based on her experiences in this department, Dorota would recommend broadening the next ITRA conference’s themes to include the anthropological approach to children’s studies, the culture of participation and performance, and intergenerational dialogue. She believes there are many young scholars who would be interested in research based on images of play as a cultural phenomenon, images of play and toys in literature, and toys in a culture of participation.

Dorota’s current research is predominantly concerned with the cultural canon of children’s worlds including analyses of contemporary books for children, especially picture books, and the socio-cultural context of children’s culture, including gender and minority studies. She notes that such research into the multicultural and gendered frameworks of children’s culture and play is especially important today due to current increased levels of migration in Poland – a topic that Dorota describes as being culturally taboo, a ‘zone of silence’, for many years in Poland.

Regarding future studies, Dorota would be interested in a change of direction, from literary studies and education towards a greater focus on children’s cultural studies and the anthropology of childhood and practice on reception – cognitive reading and emotion. Dorota argues that children’s education is one of the most important issues in social development both for the individual and communally.

A strength often cited by International Toy Research Association conference attendees is the breadth and depth of the research presented. From an ITRA perspective, we are pleased that Dorota joined us in Paris, added to the diversity, both in the areas of research and the nationalities represented within our Association. We hope Dorota will be an active member for many years to come.

MEMBERS' FORUM

Please remember when you do submit items for inclusion in the ITRA newsletter to send them in a downloadable form. The views expressed by International Toy Research Association members do not necessarily represent those of the Association.

ARGENTINA

Daniela Pelegrinelli, Director, Museo del Juguete de San Isidro, wrote:

Here, in Argentina, we have experienced many hardships. In my case, over the last three years, I have been living in a little town where I developed cultural projects related to play and toys. I founded two toy libraries established in relevant locations, with itinerant activities in rural schools and public spaces. Last January, I returned to Buenos Aires with plans of going to Jujuy, in northern Argentina, to work with a superb doll collection; however, this did not happen. Instead, I developed courses and continue teaching. Hopefully, pandemic permitting, I will finally get an opportunity to move to Jujuy and write about the doll collection – located in the middle of a mixed culture in the Andes. I hope so.

These days, I am finishing research and writing about an Argentinean doll and the relationship between this doll, girl education, fashion, and feminine work. Researching was too difficult because most of the libraries were closed, but I could establish and maintain e-mail contact and make some progress.

Best wishes to all the members of ITRA.

Daniela

AUSTRIA

Christoph Kühberger, Professor at University of Salzburg, sent the following conference report, written by Antonia Grage and Tomke Jordan and translated by Marco Freitag:

"*Playing with History. On the Material Culture of Toys and Games as Representations of the Past*" in Salzburg from 13th – 15th November 2019.

Toys as omnipresent historical-cultural products and games as everyday practice shape the lives of children and families. Games and playing in their various forms are therefore of particular relevance as possible mediators for historical images and narratives. The resulting question concerning the influence of toys and games on the perception(s) of the past was addressed by the international and interdisciplinary conference in preparation for a toy exhibition planned for 2021 in the Salzburg Museum (for older children and adults) and in the Spielzeug Museum (for infants). Both the conference and the exhibition aim to provide possible answers as to how the past is represented in games and toys since the post-war period and what references can be made to historical sources and narratives. In his opening address, conference leader Christoph Kühberger (Salzburg) presented the concept of the exhibition planned in cooperation between the Salzburg Museum and the University of Salzburg with the working title "Playing with History." The exhibition is intended to capture the historical dimensions of board and parlour games, play figures, role-playing and computer games based on three generations of toys and put them into a play context. For each generation of games, a theme is brought into focus, which, however, cannot be assigned exclusively to the respective generation. Therefore, flowing transitions are to be clarified by retrospectives and outlooks. The selected three toy generations are divided into the 1950s/60s (Indian-themed world), the 1970s/80s/90s (knights and pirates) and the generation from 2000 onwards, where princesses, as well as computer games, are to be in the foreground.

For the full conference report by Antonia Grage and Tomke Jordan (both Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel, regionalesgeschichte@email.uni-kiel.de) / translated by Marco Freitag (University of Salzburg/ Department of History) may be found (in German) from h-soz-kult:

<https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/tagungsberichte-8581>

BELGIUM

Jean-Emmanuel Barbier, from the University of Brussels-Brabant, wrote:

Unfortunately, I do not have much toy news – sadly. Similar pressures exist in Belgium, regarding teaching, as in much of Europe, although our structure is smaller. I'm not teaching at a university but a specialised institution dedicated to the science and technical aspects of games, with a particular emphasis on the professionalization of our students. Sadly, Covid-19 did not fall at a good time for us as we had just changed the content of our modules, tightening up the different lessons, and including more practical and experimentation rather than theory – obviously online lessons are not ideal in these conditions.

As for research-based pursuits, Covid-19 put a halt on many of these – some projects have been delayed, financing put on hold for others, as is cooperation in general, and finally, many conferences have had to go online; for example, the XXIIIrd Board Game Studies Colloquium organized with University Sorbonne Paris Nord (see <https://bgsparis2020.com/>).

I hope that ITRA members will have a warm (but certainly not ordinary) Christmas and New Year. Keep safe and well.
Sincerely
Jean-Emmanuel

BRAZIL

Danielle Almeida, Associate Professor at Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB), wrote:

On a personal and professional note, despite everything, 2020 has been a rather productive year for me and my research group on Toy Studies here in Brazil. We have developed several activities – included in the image montage – ranging from online presentations in conferences to the scientific and non-scientific community, collective engagement in social actions, publications, periodic virtual meetings, and participation in international research communities.

If it would be of interest to the ITRA newsletter audience, I shall ask my colleague, Jhonathas

Nascimento, to write a few paragraphs in order to share the accomplishments of our team in terms of toy research in 2020.

Warmly,
Danielle



Jhonathas do Nascimento wrote:

2020 will always be remembered as a challenging historical year.

The health crisis of Covid-19 has affected not only Brazil but also other nations around the globe, leaving millions of children unable to attend their schools, due to the imminence of contagion in their educational institutions. All at once, parents found themselves unprepared and faced with the challenge of creating both playful and educational activities to occupy their children's free time during the quarantine period.

The Brazilian Research Group on Visual Semiotics and Multimodality (GPSM), coordinated by Dr. Danielle Almeida, linked to the National Council for Scientific and Technological Development in Brazil and the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), has, for the past 5 years, been focusing its projects on childhood in its various configurations. Each of its researchers have been invited to align their investigation to the scope of the various multimodal representations that characterize the children's universe, by conceiving them as multimodal codes produced by or for children, for their learning and/or entertainment.

For this reason, the avant-garde character of the GPSM linguistic projects originated from the field of Humanities focusing on childhood have contributed to the formation of (new) researchers who, in 2020 have helped, in a challenging historical moment like the one we are still experiencing, to unveil the layers of the multimodal language of childhood.

On a more practical basis, in 2020 the GPSM has socially contributed to social actions by developing online ludic activities to help parents and children in their play activities during the quarantine. GPSM member Jhonathas do Nascimento and Heitor Teixeira, both undergraduate students from UFPB, shared in our media games and activities to entertain children during their lockdown period. Among the suggested activities were storytelling, origami, art expositions and Pictionary. Also, the GPSM team tried to publish videos on a weekly basis to Brazilian public school students whereby GPSM member and PhD student Keila Leal commented on questions related to ENEM (the Brazilian national exam held which gives access to university) in preparation for the 2020 edition of the exam.



We have also kept our online meetings with the whole group to discuss its members' ongoing projects, developed on a Masters, PhD and post-doctoral level. Projects include that of PhD student Keila Leal, who is currently working on the multimodality of children's picture books; PhD student José Maria de Aguiar, developing research on handmade toys for children with disabilities; PhD researcher Cláudia Ponciano, who has been researching the spatial semiotic configurations of Brazilian children's birthday party scenarios; and Jhonathas do Nascimento, who has been assisting Dr. Danielle Almeida in her investigation on European toy museums.

In 2020, the GPSM has also had the honour of working with invited guests on childhood, toys and game studies from all over the world such as Dr. Elizara Marin, a well-known researcher on Brazilian toy museums; Ângela Madeira, a Brazilian consultant on games and toys development; Belgium-based Brazilian toy designer Letícia

Stanchi, founder of Afro Racine toys; and Switzerland-based Game Designer Caroline Costa, founder of Goosebump.

Dr. Danielle Almeida herself has been invited to participate in a number of online conferences where she presented some of the findings related to her projects on Multimodality and Childhood. In 2020 Dr. Danielle Almeida was also invited to collaborate as the Brazilian representative in the international research group PanMeMic – the Pandemic Meaning Making of Interaction and Communication – an International Research Group on Semiotics about the effects of new forms of communication generated by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

At the post-graduate program where she teaches, PROLING (Post-Graduate Course on Linguistics at UFPB), she has offered the online course ‘Semiotics of Playing,’ together with Dr. Pierre Normando Gomes da Silva, founder of the Playing Museum (Museu Brincante) to post-graduate students of UFPB.

All in all, 2020 came out as a very productive year for the whole GPSM team. Not only were we able to strengthen our affective bonds among our members but we also were able to carry on with our projects online in a way which could be of help to both the Brazilian and the international community.

We feel ready for 2021.

Best regards,

Jhonathas

You can find the GPSM online at:

<https://gpsmultimodalidade.weebly.com/>

<http://toysonfocus.weebly.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/gpsmufpb/>

CANADA

Marc Steinberg, Associate Professor at Concordia University, author and keynote speaker at the 8th ITRA Conference held in Paris, 2018, wrote:

I do not have updates to pass along since I have not been focused on toy research, but I do have a short piece on “pandemic platforms” that should be of interest to ITRA members:

<https://pandemicmedia.meson.press/chapters/space-scale/153-2/>

Best wishes,

Marc

FINLAND

Katriina Heljakka, from Tactic Games and the Pori Laboratory of Play at the University Consortium of Pori, wrote:

This fall has been busy for me. Besides current research focused on various character toys, such as dolls, robot toys and hobby horses, I have worked to develop methods and tools for playful learning in the academic context and elaborated on the physical elements of playful environments, such as contemporary museums. These work-in-progress projects will continue in 2021, as will a tripartite study on inter-generational pandemic toy play initiated with a publication in May 2020, titled:

Heljakka, K. (2020) Pandemic toy play against social distancing: Teddy bears, window-screens and playing for the common good in times of self-isolation. *Wider Screen*, 11.5.2020. Available at

<http://widerscreen.fi/numerot/ajankohtaista/pandemic-toy-play-against-social-distancing-teddy-bears-window-screens-and-playing-for-the-common-good-in-times-of-self-isolation/>

This fall, I participated in a number of interesting conferences as well: At the EUROSIS Game’On conference organized as a hybrid conference in Aveiro, Portugal, I presented toy research with colleague, television scholar Pauliina Tuomi, with a paper on gamified doll-dramas, with the title: “Gamified Doll-Dramas: Provocations, Playbor and Participatory Play Practices in the Age of iTV”.

This paper demonstrated how adults create and produce serial soap opera or (melo)drama-like narratives familiar from popular TV with fashion dolls (for example, Barbie), share them on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram) and gamify them with persuasive strategies inviting participation and involvement in creation of plots – even by making appearances with the toys owned by the members of the audience (the spectating players). The study profiles the toy-playing adults as content creators and as ‘playborers’, who, through the making of doll-dramas, create play content for others to enjoy and consume.

In an article previously published in the *American Journal of Play*, researchers Heljakka & Harviainen defined these creations of adult toy play as “the outcomes of spatially multidimensional, plotted, and photo-played toy play of adults employing dolls, action figures, and figurines.” This article – Heljakka, K., & Harviainen, J. T. (2019). From Displays and Dioramas to Doll Dramas: Adult World Building and World Playing with Toys – can be accessed through the following link: <https://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/11-3-Article%203.pdf>

As a first-timer of the CHIPlay conference organized in virtual format in November 2020, I presented an interdisciplinary study on playful learning with the robot dog Golden Pup and a real dog with my colleagues Piriita Ihamäki and Anu Lamminen. In this conference paper we report on a study that focuses on preschooler's development of social emotional skills with the two dogs – the robotic dog and the live dog. The exploratory study was conducted with Finnish preschoolers aged 5 - 7 years, and combined the areas of early education pedagogics, smart toys and interactive technologies. The findings of the study indicate how guided playing with the robot dog supported socio-emotional learning through conversation about human relationships, while interaction with the real dog facilitated empathic responses through spontaneous reactions to the animal's behaviour. The study contributes to an understanding of the role of robotic toys in simulating human interactions with children and adults. In particular, we found that the robotic dog may assist in simulating human interaction more than the actual living dog. This finding may indicate that robotic toys may be excellently suited to support playful learning of social-emotional competencies. More information on this conference paper below: Heljakka, K. I., Ihamäki, P. J., & Lamminen, A. I. (2020, November). Playing with the Opposite of Uncanny: Empathic Responses to Learning with a Companion-Technology Robot Dog vs. Real Dog. In *Extended Abstracts of the 2020 Annual Symposium on Computer-Human Interaction in Play* (pp. 262-266). Available at <https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3383668.3419900>

On a different note, I would like to share a story on a toy design case with fellow ITRA members: From the beginning of the global Covid-19 pandemic, many toy companies have reacted quickly by bringing to the market many kinds of character toys acknowledging and celebrating the work of health care professionals, who are the real superheroes of current times. In this way, the toy industry has noted and acted upon the ongoing global situation by noticing emerging business opportunities, but also recognized how companies can capitalize on 'toy activism' through creative design of new toys.



In fall 2020, my family's company launched the Lumo Stars Get Better plush line with the first four characters: Lili the Bear (with a thermometer), Luca the Panda (with a plastered leg), Ducky (with a broken wing), and Teddy (with a vaccination). The conceptual design for this line had already begun in 2018, long before the beginning of the pandemic. I noticed how there was a growing interest in empathy, well-being and a wish from players of all ages to nurture "toys in need of special attention." I proposed and sketched the initial designs for the toys at Tactic Games, and am happy to report that today they are available as finished products. With this line, I would like to share my ideas



about how toys can be a meaningful and impactful medium that communicates the important message of faith in getting better despite challenging times and how everyone should give special attention, cuddle and care to not just the nearest and dearest, but to those who are the most vulnerable in the world.

With these words and end-of-the-year greetings from Finland.

Stay safe & playful!

Kati

FRANCE

Julian Alvarez, from the Immersive Factory and Associate Professor at University of Lille, wrote:

Fortunately, concerning my family and colleagues everything is fine and I hope the situation will improve quickly for all of us.

Regarding news related to toys, we are finalizing a paper on the use of LEGO to introduce young children of 5 years to computer thinking entitled "Motif Motif" or in English "Pattern Pattern" and the second about the HUB Immersive Factory project.

The "Motif Motif" (Pattern Pattern) project presents a pedagogical setting to introduce non-reading pupils aged 5-6 to the concept of repetition without mobilizing spatial abilities. The NOCE Team of Yann Secq, Marielle Léonard, Yvan Peter and Luigi Lancieri (head of our laboratory CRISAL – NOCE / University of Lille) drive various research projects in order to verify if it is possible to introduce basic concepts in algorithms by relying on the identification of visual patterns, without involving the programming of a robot's movements. Their scenario articulates unplugged activities based on LEGO toys in order to propose Serious play sequences to invite children to problem solving and creative activities. These activities also can be adapted to online learning environments. The team analyzes these sequences through observations in an ecological environment and the collection of digital traces of online activities. Finally, the team completed this study with insights from the appropriation of the pedagogical activities by kindergarten teachers who have followed a continuing education module on initiation into computational thinking. Elements of this work should be delivered in 2021.

The second project involves the Immersive Factory's Immersive and Collaborative HUB which is dedicated to organizing and animating environment, health and safety events. This immersive learning device dedicated for

multi-users' training could be seen as a sand box, a kind of video toy. The R&D Departments of Immersive Factory try to divert this device in order to create Serious Escape Games sessions dedicated to Ludopedagogy and EHS sessions. Several questions are associated with this project, for example: Will the learning linked to such immersive environments involving sand boxes be effective? How will learners behave in such environments with regard to real environments or other types of videoconference-type applications? Such questions are important to explore in the context of an unprecedented health crisis such as Covid-19. A doctoral position has been opened to work on this subject.

[Immersive Factory](#) is an International Company dedicated to creating EHS simulations and Serious Games. The Immersive Factory Team involved in the "Serious Escape Game HUB" project is composed by Beatrice Devin, Olivier Chabiron, Bertrand Pierre, Julian Alvarez and Olivier Pierre (CEO of Immersive Factory).

Best wishes,
Julian

Thomas Bonnacarrere, PhD student at Université de Poitiers, wrote:

For my part, I am fine, as well as my family and my closest ones. I am on schedule to present my PhD in Poitiers next January and I am still heavily involved in the continuation of my research-action work on the strategic and creative apprehension of ecological collapse via the capacitation of local communities working synergistically to build and sustain a 'glocal' collective intelligence network. I should finish the theoretical and practical dimensions before next September and then I will make a card game, in order to help people understand and familiarise themselves with the fundamental concepts. So yes, I still have much work to do, and I am really excited to present the work at future ITRA events.

Finally, I am also training people how to use some tools I designed (one of them, named SOLARIS which aims to facilitate the elaboration, hybridization and promotion of personal knowledge for popular education and open scientific purposes – which is the core of my PhD). The results are really encouraging – all the people involved gave me enthusiastic and constructive feedback to help me sharpen my design work in making it as public-friendly as possible – but it requires a lot of effort on my part since I am involved on both the theoretical/design work, as a researcher, and on the practical side, as a practitioner. I am currently working seven days a week and am starting to feel a little bit tired (to say the least), but passion keeps driving me forward!

Take care and I can't wait for the 2020 Winter newsletter.

Best Regards,
Thomas

Thibaut Clément, Associate Professor in American Studies at Paris-Sorbonne University and keynote speaker at the 8th ITRA Conference held in Paris, 2018, wrote:

We in France are in the final stretch to the University's end-of-term, and we have moved all our exams online on the university's e-learning platform which, you may not be surprised to learn, cannot cope with the traffic. We've tried maintaining in person teaching for the first four weeks of the term, but when it was apparent that the second wave was upon us, the dean asked us to experiment with hybrid teaching before moving all classes online two or three weeks later. Needless to say, everyone – students, teachers, lecturers and staff – are all exhausted at this stage. I take comfort in the fact that both the students and my colleagues have all been extremely helpful and spared no effort to make the transition as seamless as possible. I had planned a 3-month stay in Los Angeles to do some preliminary archive- and field-work in the spring last year but sadly the pandemic completely disrupted my plans.

It turns out I have some news to share! I was lucky enough to be granted a Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique fellowship (délégation CNRS) at the LARCA research unit (Laboratoire de Recherche sur les Cultures Anglophones), Université de Paris last year (that's the 2019 – 2020 academic year). The fellowship was for a new research project entitled "*ShoppingTown, SoCal: shopping centers, urban development, and commerce in Southern California*," which focuses on malls as tools for the planning of the commercial, social, and urban-regional environments in the greater Los Angeles region. This work builds on some themes explored in my research on Disney theme parks – and especially the media's influence on the built environment, the modes of consumption of popular culture, and how manmade landscapes materialize values, support cultural norms, and shape user practices.

In 2018, I joined an Essen- and Potsdam-based research group, the Key Issues in Theme Park Studies group, which is now close to finalizing a book, entitled "Key Issues in Theme Park Studies," and soon to be published with Springer. The group includes 15 researchers from across Europe and the United States and representing a variety of fields (i.e. geography, anthropology, American studies, history).

Allow me to wish everyone in ITRA a very good Christmas and New Year.

Keep safe and well,
Sincerely,
Thibaut

Quentin Gervasoni, from Université Paris 13 (EXPERICE) and LabEx ICCA, wrote:

As for the situation in France, it is not unlike that of the UK from what I can read. Although my PhD research is not directly related to toy research, I planned to conduct interviews at people's homes in order to get a grasp of how Pokémon (my research object) is invested in their domestic space, and these plans were obviously cancelled. Instead, I have resorted to vocal interviews and asking for some "video visits" or some pictures of their Pokémon stuff in their rooms and homes. On a broader note, the pandemic has affected me, albeit not as much as many others, in that it prevents me from working in libraries which are my preferred working context (I have a hard time concentrating at home). It also made me abandon fan convention observations and at-home interviews, which weakens the physical, material aspects of my research which are what still bonds me to toy research in a sense.

The pandemic has also affected my research in that I was planning to go on a research trip at Concordia with Marc Steinberg, and the trip was postponed to autumn 2021. I will resume the administrative processes for the research trip in January, and hope this time it will do.

As for my future research, I would love to get a chance to study the children's side of Pokémon play (I'm focused on the online side, which is mostly late adolescent/adults) which would take me back into toy research, but this is more of a postdoc plan, and the next two years will be dedicated to finishing my PhD so it is likely that I will not be able to be very invested in toy research.

Sincerely,
Quentin

Antoine Taly, CNRS researcher working in the Theoretical Biochemistry Lab in Paris, wrote:

I fear I have nothing significant to share with the ITRA community at the moment. The only paper that might be interesting to a fraction of the ITRA audience is our recently shared model for game-based learning that should be relevant for the use of toys in serious applications:

Taly, A., Djaouti, D., & Alvarez, J. (2020, December). *The Colectyng Model for the Evaluation of Game-Based Learning Activities*. In International Conference on Games and Learning Alliance (pp. 401-407). Springer, Cham.

Other than that I have finished my semester duties except for a fraction of assessment and will try now to take some rest!

All the best,
Antoine

GERMANY

Volker Mehringer, from Augsburg University, wrote:

Here in Germany we are back in a strict lock down, as of Wednesday - 16th December 2020. Fortunately, it does not affect me that much as, from the beginning of the pandemic, we have been working from home. First thing I did was I occupied my 8 year old daughter's desk – she never used it anyway! Since then I have been sitting here – it feels more like years than months – and this small desk quickly became my classroom and my research centre. Coincidentally, because I am in the middle of a child's room with toys all around, it can be quite inspiring for a play-and toy-researcher, though it can take some effort to keep maintaining the research.

In April we published a book called "Spielzeug, *Spiele und Spielen. Aktuelle Studien und Konzepte*." This edited volume included interesting articles written by various researchers and practitioners. At the moment we are planning a second volume with an international focus. So, if any ITRA members are interested, please make contact with me at spielzeug@phil.uni-augsburg.de.

There was a bit of press work to do because during the first lockdown in Germany, play and toys quickly became a hot topic in the media. As it so happens, the combination of lockdown and Christmas, it is all starting again.

At the moment I am conducting a research project with masters students on play situations in kindergarten – we are attempting new ways to conduct video-based observation and hopefully this will commence in early January. But most importantly, we are trying to get through this pandemic as well and as healthily as we can. I am looking forward to meeting everyone during the next ITRA conference.

Best wishes to everyone in the meantime!

Volker

Artemis Yagou, Research Associate at the Deutsches Museum, wrote:

An updated list of my (recent and forthcoming) play-related publications:

- Play, Design, Politics: Technical Toys, Design Policies and British-German Exchanges in the First Half of the Twentieth Century. In: Wasensteiner, L. (ed), Sites of Interchange. London: Peter Lang (forthcoming, 2021).
- Building a Mini-Parthenon: Experiences of Users. In: Kühberger, C. (ed): Mit Geschichte spielen. Bielefeld: Transcript (forthcoming, 2021).
- The Other Side of Play: Fear and Frustration in the Design, Consumption, and Use of Construction Sets. In: Journal of Design History, Vol. 33, Issue 3 (2020): 193-208. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epaa029>

- More than a Toy Box: Dandanah and the Sea of Stories. In: Bauer, S.; Schlünder, M.; Rentetzi, M. (eds): Boxes: A Field Guide. Manchester: Mattering Press, 2020, 202-212. Open Access:

<https://www.matteringpress.org/books/boxes>

For more information, see: www.yagou.gr

Looking forward to physically reconnecting with the ITRA community in 2022. Until then...

Stay safe and all the best.

Artemis

GREECE

Cleo Gougoulis, Assistant Professor at University of Patras, ITRA founding member and current ITRA Treasurer, wrote:

The Greek Journal *Archaeology and Arts* (*Αρχαιολογία και Τέχνες*) has devoted three special sections of issues (132, 133 and 134) to the topic of play in Greece during three selected historical periods (Antiquity, the Byzantine era and the Contemporary era) edited by Cleo Gougoulis. The issues were launched in April, July and December 2020 in Greek.

More information can be found in the Publications section of the Newsletter.

Domna Kakana, Professor in the Department of Early Childhood Education, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, wrote:

Fortunately, we are all still fine and healthy but the situation is very critical. Greek universities decided, from the beginning of the academic year, to run this semester online, considering the severity of the situation, a fact that increased the workload and fatigue to a great extent. I really hope that soon this period will pass and remain in our memory only as a difficult and demanding academic year.

Best regards

Domna

Krystallia Markaki, profiled in the Spring 2020 edition of the ITRA Newsletter, defended her dissertation in July and was awarded her PhD in Modern and Contemporary during December 2020. Her thesis abstract follows:

The vision of the League for Women's Rights (LWR) (Σύνδεσμος για τα Δικαιώματα της Γυναίκας), materialized in the Papastrateios School of Toys and Decoration (PSTD) (Παπαστράτειος Σχολή Παιχνιδιών και Διακοσμητικής) as an exemplary and experimental school of applied arts. This School comprises a series of radical ideas that emerged during the interwar era and range from the labour school of thought which assigns toy building to its rightful users – children – to modernist ideas that interweave Greekness and childhood through aesthetics. In this vision, liberation is achieved through the materialization in the tangible toy of popular art as mediated by aesthetic education.

Both the general education provided by the “demoticist” teachers, and the artistic education provided by painters and sculptors of the Art Group (Ομάδα Τέχνη) that teach students how to build toys, aim at the development of a new Modern Greek civilization in the footsteps of contemporary art currents (such as the artistic education movement, Bauhaus etc.) and in accordance with rules dictated by Greekness. This resulted in a hybrid object-toy that, on the one hand brought together European models, popular patterns and high art, and on the other brought about a social relation: practical solidarity. LWR, the feminist voice of Educational Association (Εκπαιδευτικού Ομίλου) and the Art Group seeks to establish toy-building both as a profession and as a potential industry served the need of children, be they rich or poor, for toys that would be “both entertaining and nice.”

Keywords: toys school, artistic education, modern Greek civilization, material civilization, solidarity, Greekness, toys, demoticism, Art Group, League for Women's rights, Maria Svolou, Avra Theodoropoulou, Zacharias Papantoniou, Spyros Vasileiou, Papastrateios School of Toys and Decoration

Vassiliki Riga, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, University of Patras, wrote:

Fortunately, we are well and things in Greece are improving. This past semester, in all universities in Greece, most teaching was conducted online. The online teaching afforded me an opportunity to develop my research field and to “train” both my students’ skills and my own! Since the first quarantine in March 2020, I managed to turn experiential lessons (like movement play and theatrical game) into online lessons, which by definition ‘cannot’ be done. The new situation encouraged my students to organise motor games which children could play at home alone, or with their parents, and we wrote a manual; for example, the children created puppet shows from materials they had at home and I uploaded them online (<https://childrenfestival.gr/en/kouklotheatro/>). For over ten years, I have been responsible at the Department of Educational Sciences and Early Childhood Education, University of Patras, for organising a Children's Festival. Since this year these events were not allowed, we set up online activities which were accessible to everybody (teachers, parents, and children) <https://childrenfestival.gr/en/ergastiria/>. From now on we will all continue together (my students and my colleagues) to enrich the website of the Children's Festival with such activities.

Finally, I had the opportunity to participate in many workshops and events in Greece and abroad, which I could never have gone to if they were not online...

I believe that every difficulty I encounter "wakes me up" from my routine and "trains" my mind!

I hope ITRA members are staying safe and healthy through these unusual times and I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a better New Year!!!

Sincerely
Vassiliki

HONG KONG

Rémi Leclerc, Founder of the PolyPlay Lab and current ITRA Board member, wrote regarding an exhibition he is co-curating:

Curated and Designed by Rémi Leclerc (PolyPlay Lab) and Lee Chi Wing (Milk Design) and organised by Design Spectrum, the public face for Hong Kong Design Centre, *Play Lives* will be held from 22nd February to 30th April 2021 at 7 Mallory Street in Wan Chai, Hong Kong.

For a more detailed description, see the Exhibitions section of the Newsletter.

INDIA

Surabhi Khanna, designer, educator and consultant based in New Delhi, wrote:

The nationwide lockdown in India happened in March 2020. Within a few hours of the announcement, everything moved online! Apart from design courses at the Institute, a challenge for me was in how to conduct workshops, which involve hands-on toymaking and demonstrations.

An opportunity came at the National Institute of Design Haryana (NIDH), the Institute at which I am a Faculty member. A colleague and I were in the organizing role of a two-day Design Windows workshop on various aspects of design; one was entitled "Design Process through Toy and Game Design" which I conducted online. Participants were from the Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee (IIT-R), and consisted mainly of professors and PhD scholars of management, engineering, architecture, and the humanities. After a brief introduction on toys, games and design process, we made playthings from our childhood to recreate play memories. And then we made an exploration of a toy and tale. The material used was paper and simple stationery. The participants were delighted to know about each others' journey through their stories about their childhood playthings. This was followed by a discussion of design process through play.

I was selected as one of the speakers at the RSD9 *Relating Systems Thinking and Design* conference by Systemic Design Association, after a double peer blind review. This conference is an initiative of the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, Norway and this time was organised by the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad. My presentation was entitled *Toying for Joyful Learning – Exploring Systemic Process* on 16th October 2020.

I was also a presenter at the *National Awareness Workshop on Accessibility*, 3rd – 4th December 2020, for National Disability Day, India. My presentation was entitled, "*Accessibly, Playfully: Design with accessible and inclusive elements.*" Participants (architects, designers, educators) from around the country attended the program.

I was invited as a jury member (Online mode) for *National Level Toy Making Competition* for and by Kendriya Vidyalaya schools on 14th December 2020. Out of 25 entries of boys and 25 entries of girls (total of 50), 1 male and 1 female winner were chosen to present at the national level on the basis of experience, utility (development value of product), originality & contextual creativity, finishing, Technique/ skill, overall impact and presentation/ narration. The students sent a Youtube link to show the process as well as photos and a write-up.

Another noteworthy event this year is that the Indian government has started focusing on a *Vocal for Local* campaign with which I am involved; one part involves the area of Toy and Game Heritage and Design in India.

This initiative has brought a nationwide outlook about the importance of working with toys to increase one's capacity for new learning. Vocal for Local has an important mantra. In conjunction with this, I was interviewed

for a national newspaper along with Prof. Sudarshan Khanna, Shri Arvind Gupta and many others to understand the toy design and research scenario and impact in India. The title of the article was "A peek into the world of India's toy start-ups." A link is provided here.

<https://indianexpress.com/article/express-sunday-eye/a-peek-into-the-world-of-india-toy-start-ups-atmanirbhar-bharat-7101315/>

Our teaching activities ended the week before Christmas. This past semester I was primarily teaching Systems Thinking –

which is all conducted online, however, all faculty members go to campus every day. The nationwide lockdown happened on 25th March in India. I was in NIDH in Kurukshetra at that time in my rented apartment. With online planning of classes and other work, it was a busy time but still a sense of panic due to the uncertainty.

Stocking up food and other necessities became a priority. The news everyday was adding to the tension of being



away from my loved ones. It was a lonely time not knowing what was ahead. After almost two weeks, I managed to reach Delhi and be with my family. So we were together during a world-wide tough time. Human connection is so important. Since July we have been back at our workplace (in Kurukshetra), maintaining physical distance and working together.

Warm regards and happy festivities,
Surabhi

NIGERIA

Uwemedimo Iwaketok, former Head, Department of English, University of Jos, wrote:

Below are some pictures of Nigeria children making and playing with toys made from natural and discarded materials – a stick, something like a nail, plastic bottle tops and a compact disk.



I found the toys very fascinating. I wish I had taken some time to study the mechanism.

A very lovely New Year and 2021 to the ITRA family.

God bless everyone.

Uwemedimo

THE NETHERLANDS

Mathieu Gielen, Assistant Professor of Design for Children's Play at the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering, TU Delft, wrote:

It has indeed been hectic here; I'm in the last week of education and since yesterday (14th December 2020) we have entered a national lockdown, so I have had to redevelop my education programme for this coming week and January. Unfortunately that does not leave me much time for many other things, including writing a meaningful update for the ITRA winter newsletter.

Most education is possible online, just a bit more dull. I am however still wondering how we can do product tests of toy concepts with children online... I think I'll just stick my head in the sand and hope the lock-down is over when that exercise is due :)

I wish the ITRA membership the best, have a good Christmas and stay healthy!

Kind regards,

Mathieu

Joyce Goggin, Senior Associate Professor at University of Amsterdam, wrote:

I have a couple of published things that might be of interest:

- "Play and Games in Fiction and Theory." *Angels: New Perspectives on the Anglophone World*, Vol. 11, 2020.

<https://journals.openedition.org/angles/2561>

- "Why Do Cute Things Make Me Mad?" *Gizmodo*, 20.04.2020. <https://gizmodo.com/why-do-cute-things-make-me-mad-1842593407>

- "Skyfall and Global Casino Culture." *The Cultural Life of James Bond: Spectres of 007*. Ed. Jaap Verheul. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020: 289-309,

- "Toyetics and Novelizations: Bringing The LEGO Movie to the Page." *More Than Just Bricks: Critical Perspectives on LEGO in Popular Culture*. Eds. Rebecca Haines and Sharon Mazzarella. Palgrave, 2019: 175-197.

As far as weathering the pandemic goes, our teaching has all been moved online and I really love *Zoom*. I find the ludic element – the Brady Bunch, Hollywood Squares, game show vibe of the interface – really makes teaching fun and it seems to focus students' attention. I have also much enjoyed the time to read literature for its own sake, rather than teaching it only. I have had much more time for myself to sink into beautiful, delightfully long, 18th and 19th century novels. That leisure time comes, of course, at the expense of much travel and

conferencing with great people – i.e. at the annual meeting of the ITRA – but such is the state of the pandemic for now. The time to myself has also meant – for better or worse – time to find and buy the odd vintage doll, such as my 1950s Sun Rubber Co. Gerber Baby doll.

On a more serious note, I have also been thinking of writing something about dolls. And, I am also just about to submit my first blog piece on poker to Critical Gambling Studies

<https://www.criticalgamblingstudies.com/index.php/cgs>

I hope this finds everyone well! Happy Holidays!!

Joyce

THE PHILIPPINES

Jean-Pierre Rossie, Children's Folklorist, wrote:

Fortunately for me, my family and other people I know well are currently in good health and safe of the Coronavirus infection. In December 2019, I returned to Dagupan, a coastal town in the north of the Philippines, and bought tickets to fly between the Philippines and Belgium in May and September 2020; however, both flights were cancelled due to national travel restrictions in light of the pandemic. Currently I have planned trips to Belgium in May or September 2021 and hopefully the quarantine rules will be lifted and travel back to the Philippines permitted even if it requires tourists to produce proof of being vaccinated.

But enough of all these travel problems making it difficult for me, as quite a nomad, to travel to these two countries as well as to visit friends, family and collaborators in France and Portugal and southern Morocco..

Therefore I hope that in the second half of 2021, and certainly in 2022, these problems will have gone.

In the meantime, publication updates for the newsletter:

- The online publication in January 2021 of the English and French version of Rossie, Jean-Pierre, Jariaa, Khalija, Daoumani, Boubaker & Fassoulas, Argyris (2021). *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures. Make-believe play among children of the Moroccan Anti-Atlas*. Foreword by Luisa Magalhães, Braga (Portugal): Centre for Philosophical and Humanistic Studies, 2 volumes, about 700 p., 638 ill.

- The new updated online edition in English and French of my commented bibliography also to be available in January 2021. Rossie, Jean-Pierre (2021). *Saharan and North African Toy and Play Cultures. Commented bibliography on play, games and toys*, Braga (Portugal): Centre for Philosophical and Humanistic Studies, 80 p.

Both publications will be available on:

Academia.edu : <https://ucp.academia.edu/JeanPierreRossie>

Scribd : <https://www.scribd.com/user/63524386/Jean-Pierre-Rossie>

- At the end of 2019, the following article was published in English and Spanish in the international journal of The Center for World Indigenous Studies (USA). Rossie, J-P. (2019). Amazigh Children's Toys and Play Cultures. In *Fourth World Journal*, vol. 18, 1, p. 4-19, 9 ill., <https://www.academia.edu/39837635>

- Rossie, J-P. (2019). Los Juguetes y las Culturas del Juego de los Niños Amazigh. In *Fourth World Journal*, ill., Vol. 18, 1, p. 20-36, 9 ill. – <https://www.academia.edu/39837548>

I wish ITRA colleagues good health and all the best,

Jean-Pierre

SWITZERLAND

Veronique Dasen, Archaeologist and Professor in Classical Archaeology and Art History at the University of Fribourg, wrote:

My ongoing work includes supervising Masters and PhD students, writing books/journals and a weekly webinar: Masters work: one was completed under my direction in Fribourg this autumn. '*Darani Ludovica, La tomba di Iulia Graphis: tra miniature e mors immatura*' – on the lead miniature vessels and furniture found in the tomb of the girl, it is a very good study with new ideas and she will publish her results.

PhD Dissertations: four ongoing research projects on toys and games: Ammar Hanna, *Enfance en jeu dans le monde grec classique* (co-direction G. Pironti Paris, EPHE); Daniaux Thomas, *La culture ludique de Gaule romaine* (co-direction Prof. D. Frère, Université de Bretagne); Katsarelia Kyriaki, *La culture ludique de Grèce centrale* (Projet FNS Poupées articulées 2020 – 2024); and, Losyte Vilma, *Jouer avec les dieux* (co-direction, Prof. C. Bonnet, Toulouse).

My publications may be found at: <https://locusludi.ch/the-project/> which includes the first 5-6 journal issues and books, in particular the catalogue of the exhibition I edited last year – open access, in June 2021.

The weekly webinar (Wednesdays 4-5:30pm, Swiss time) "Toys as Cultural Artefacts in Ancient Greek and Roman Cultures," is organised by the research team of the European Research Council (ERC) Project Locus ludi. The cultural fabric of play and games in classical antiquity (Horizon 2020 – contract no. 741520), at the University of Fribourg.

The pandemic has deeply changed our academic lives. The need to exchange and collaborate is more present than ever and this online seminar intends to provide a virtual space for ongoing research on ludic culture. This semester will be dedicated to toys as cultural artefacts in ancient Greek and Roman cultures, fostering

anthropological and material approaches in order to define the specificities of ancient playthings. We will address the following questions: What is a “toy”? What do we mean by toy in a post-industrial contemporary society? and How was it defined in the past?; The toy stage in the biography of objects; Cheap or costly toys? Self-made by children or caretakers, or products of specialists?; Playful rites or ritual play?; The agency of toys: for the ancients, did toys generate a fictional universe, and did they possess a subjectivity?

A list of my talks (<https://locusludi.ch/lectures-of-invited-researchers/>)

23rd Sep 2020. Véronique Dasen, Chiara Bianchi (Fribourg): “Presentation of the research project on articulated Greek and Roman dolls”

30th Sep 2020. Ada Nifosi (Kent): “Looking for gender and age specific ‘dolls’ in Dynastic Egypt”

7th Oct 2020. Sonia Klinger (Haifa): “Toys or models of toys: objects in terracotta from the Demeter and Kore sanctuary at ancient Corinth”

14th Oct 2020. Astrid Fendt (Munich): “Rite de passage or special ability? The bronze statuette of a boy holding a spinning top in the Munich Collection of Antiquities” / Edwige Lovergne (Rome): “A new terracotta doll in an Etruscan sanctuary”

21st Oct 2020. Ioanna Patera (Krakow): “Paignia, jeux d’enfants et jeux d’adultes” / Marco Vespa (Fribourg): “Animals as athurma”. Discussant: Cleo Gougouli (Patras)

28th Oct 2020. Adrienne Lezzi-Hafter (Zurich): “Choés du peintre d’Erétrie” / Hanna Ammar (Fribourg): “Des jouets pour les enfants ?”

4th Nov 2020. Emilie Thibaut (Compiègnes): “Miniature offerings for the Etruscan gods: toys to grow ?”. Discussant Edwige Lovergne (Rome).

11th Nov 2020. Maya Muratov (New York): “With strings attached: terracotta figurines with articulated limbs”

25th Nov 2020. Zahra Newby (Warwick): “Dolls in the funerary context: the Grottarossa doll and her mistress”. Discussant: Chiara Bianchi

2nd Dec 2020. Vicky Sabetai (Athens): “Playthings from Boeotia: a combined look at their varying occurrences in cult-places and tombs”

9th Dec 2020. Kamil Kopania (Warsaw): “Animation in the Middle Ages – key historical and artistic issues”, Laure de Chavagnac (Lyon), A Roman interactive figurine discovered in Lyon (France)

16th Dec 2020. Angela Bellia (Rome): “Musical instruments and sound toys in the sacred and funerary sphere”
The webinar will prepare the way for the conference, with the same title, due to take place, hopefully, in 22nd – 24th June 2021.

[Editors – for more information see the Conference section in the Newsletter].

Kind regards,
Véronique

Marco Vespa, University of Fribourg, wrote:

There are two publications that I would like to point out, including a special issue of a French journal, *Pallas*, and a volume that will be published on 14th January 2021. Most of the contributions are in French, but I hope this will not be a problem:

- This is the link to *Pallas* on play and education in Antiquity: <https://pum.univ-tlse2.fr/~no-114-Bons-ou-mauvais-jeux~.html>

- As part of the Locus Ludi project. The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity, funded by the European Research Council (ERC), a collective reflection was required on the famous fragment of Heraclitus: “Time is a child who plays by moving pawns: the royalty of the child. ” The fourteen contributions in this volume each offer different approaches and readings of this enigmatic sentence. A whole book on a single sentence; it asks so many questions and allows so many answers. Every word deserves its own investigation and debate over its many meanings. How to understand the aon, for example? Or the full implications of the words “time,” “life,” “time of life,” “vital force,” “existence,” “eternity.” Who is the child; how old is he? What game does he mainly play? The work offers an assessment of the different interpretations – philosophical, political, and oracular – of the conditions of the transmission of the fragment, of its place in the work of Heraclitus, of the context of production, of the relationships with other poets and philosophers to the history of pawn and dice games, while questioning the philosophical dimension of the game. Innovative avenues are open. To say that a child is playing is to state the obvious, unless the child is anything other than just a child. Are children not, in and through play, an image of Heraclitus himself? A poet and player, Heraclitus, poet because player. The gaze on childhood must also be questioned. Far from using the child to denounce the incompetence of adults, Heraclitus portrays a child incarnating the Aion as a vital force and source of eternal renewal. The movement of his pawns symbolizes his learning of the order and disorder of the world. The game brings a temporary balance to the cosmos, and the child’s kingship becomes synonymous with their ability to manage a world threatened by chaos. And the game, with words and dice, never ends here. More information regarding the volume can be found here: <https://www.lcdpu.fr/livre/?GCOI=27000100926440>

I also wish all a wonderful Christmas and a year 2021 by far better than the previous one.

All the best, stay safe,
Marco



TURKEY

Handan Asude Başal, from Uludag University, wrote:

My family and I, my friends and research colleagues are currently well and safe. I hope ITRA colleagues are keeping well and safe, since Covid-19 has been impacting the whole world. We are working and teaching online lectures from home offices instead of university offices. In Turkey, despite the health-safety measures taken, the disease increased. Hopefully, the infection rates will decrease with the vaccine. I hope that all countries of the world overcome this difficult process as soon as possible, and wish you all a healthy and peaceful day.

Sincerely

Handan Asude Başal

UNITED KINGDOM

Anna Borzenkova, from Wolverhampton University, awarded the *ITRA Student Prize for Outstanding Toy Research* at the 8th ITRA Conference held in Paris 2018, wrote:

I already had my Viva and now I am finishing some minor corrections, so I hope to be awarded the PhD soon. During my PhD I designed a thematic play environment known as “Undersea friends” where each toy, in the play space, is a creature – friend and a facilitator of children’s interactions. We have built two lovely prototypes of the toys and evaluated them with children. Children with different manifestations of cerebral palsy were active players and demonstrated significant change in their communication with peers.

Currently I am working on the proposal and planning to apply for the White Rose DTP Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme before Christmas. Many grants/fellowship schemes are closed or postponed because of the pandemic, as well as academic vacancies at the universities.

During the summer I was working at Heriot Watt University on the project "Bridging traditional beliefs and Covid-19 transmission prevention strategies in Choco, Colombia" which is directly linked to the pandemic. This project was more about

using gamification to bridge the official medical recommendations with the traditional beliefs of indigenous communities. To disseminate the results, we have published a book chapter and two papers:

- Book chapter: Borzenkova, G., Golovatina, P., Zapata-Ramirez, P.A., Hernandez-Sarmiento, J.M. (2020) Gamification Design for Behaviour Change of Indigenous Communities in Choco, Colombia during Covid-19 Pandemic in Spanellis, A., Harviainen, T. (eds.) Gamification for social change (in press).

- Spanellis, A., Borzenkova, G., Golovatina, P., Zapata-Ramirez, P.A., (2020) Using gamification to develop shared understanding of the pandemic: Covid-19 in indigenous communities of Choco, Colombia, GamiFin conference proceedings (in press).

- Golovatina, P., Zapata-Ramirez, P.A., Spanellis, A., Borzenkova, G., Hernandez-Sarmiento, J.M. (2020) Engaging with indigenous communities during Covid-19 pandemic: the case of Tribugá- Choco region in Colombia, Proceedings of ESCMID Conference on Coronavirus Disease 2020

I am also currently involved in another project at Heriot Watt university “Multi-hazard prediction and disaster response management in Indonesia” and have contributed to the development of a game for training about the procedures in the event of an evacuation.

Take care and have a lovely Christmas.

Kind regards,

Anna



Amanda Gummer, Founder and CEO of the Good Play Guide, wrote:

We, at the Good Play Guide, have just launched the first e-commerce platform that requires toys to have undergone play-testing with children before being able to be listed and working with the Open University on a digital play during the pandemic project and I'd be glad to share the findings (early next year).

We have also developed our research processes to enable us to observe play remotely using video links and worked hard to ensure the ecological validity is preserved (as much as possible). This has enabled us to continue carrying out our research with children during the lockdowns and has thrown up some interesting issues around cost-benefit of in-situ research.

For more information see: www.goodtoyguide.com

Best,

Amanda

Lydia Plowman, Professor and Co-Director of Research at the University of Edinburgh, wrote:

Developed by Professor Lydia Plowman at the University of Edinburgh, Digital Play is a response to the many people who tell us that they would like to know more about the role of digital media in the lives of the children they look after. It focuses on young children aged up to five or six and is intended to be useful for educators, students, childminders and others working with parents and caregivers at home or in early childhood education and care settings. Building on many years of research in this area, we look at findings afresh and provide an overview of some of the information that's available. The 62pp resource is structured around 8 topics such as 'screen time', 'play and learning', 'digital toys', and 'staying safe', with each section including recommendations for further reading as well as an overview of what the research says. The resource is free to download here <https://www.de.ed.ac.uk/project/digital-play>.

I have also written a short piece

- Plowman L. (2020) Digital toys. In *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Children and Childhood Studies* (4 volumes), ed. Daniel Cook, pp.1569-1572. New York: Sage.

This can be downloaded for free from my academia-edu site at <https://edinburgh.academia.edu/LydiaPlowman>

All the best

Lydia

USA

Kathleen Alfano, child development and play specialist, co-founding member of ITRA and profiled in the 2019 Winter edition of the ITRA Newsletter, wrote:

I haven't conducted play research recently, but to keep up to date, I've been following trends of toys and play as reported in trade publications and associations. Mostly, I've been immersing myself in online seminars on such topics as healthy cooking, mediation, exercise and yoga classes, and everything worldwide about all aspects of Covid-19.

An interesting experience for me this holiday season was to plan and execute a virtual party. A tradition in my extended family has been to have an ornament exchange party, hosted by me, for which each person buys or makes one ornament, and at the party each ornament is given a number, then each person picks a number from a box, and a match is made. At the party we always play games and give prizes. But, this year, because it was held virtually, party bags were prepared and delivered or mailed to participants. The party bags contained goodies to munch on during the party, and parts of games to play. For example, each participant was given two bingo cards, three holiday trivia cards, a kazoo for holiday songs, along with several other activities. Prizes this year were "bragging rights" rather than actual prizes. During the party, participants took turns with their part in playing the games. Lots of laughing took place and immense fun was had by all. Ages of participants ranged from 9 years to 75 years. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the experience. This is a wonderful example of how technology can enhance bonding and playful opportunities in a creative way.

I look forward to reading the next ITRA newsletter. It always contains interesting topics. And, I also look forward to the next conference in 2022.

Wishing all ITRA members a wonderful new year.

Sincerely,

Kathleen

Christopher Bensch, Vice President for Collections, at The Strong, Rochester, USA, wrote:

The Strong National Museum of Play was closed to the public between mid-March and late June 2020, in compliance with regulations issued by New York State. Its staff demonstrated admirable agility in transitioning to work from home so that the museum's activities in collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting play could continue during the hiatus. Since then, careful planning, creative modifications to exhibitions, and scrupulous adherence to safety protocols have once again made the museum an engaging destination for people of all ages, though attendance is still 75% below the comparable period in 2019 with a commensurate impact on the museum's finances. Meanwhile, The Strong's curators, historians, librarians, and educators take great pride in continuing to serve the museum's various publics both in person and from a distance. In fact, research inquiries are on track to hit a new record as librarians and archivists respond to requests for access to information and images. And this year's inductees to the National Toy Hall of Fame – Baby Nancy, Jenga, and sidewalk chalk – were in perfect sync with a year that confronted both racial inequities and the effect of the pandemic on play patterns. As The Strong museum moves into 2021, it will leverage its expertise and capacities to document the play and playthings that typify this period.

Wishing all ITRA members, healthy holidays and increasing reasons for all of us to feel hopeful as 2021 progresses.

Best,

Chris

Doris Bergen, author and Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Miami University, wrote:

The major news that I have is the publication of a new book *The Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys*, which I edited and has 20 different chapter authors, some of whom are members of ITRA. If you would like more information about this book (planned to be published in Jan or Feb 2021) I would be glad to give you a blurb about it.

[Editors – Doris’ ‘blurb’ may be found in the Publications section of the newsletter]

Miriam Forman-Brunell, author and Emeritus Professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, wrote:

I am now Emerita Professor of History, after retiring from the University of Missouri-Kansas City in the fall of 2019. Since then, I published an essay in an issue of *Organization of American Historian’s* magazine devoted to American Girls’ History. I guest edited an issue of the *Journal on the History of Childhood* on the girling of work. Perhaps of greater interest to ITRA members is a collection I just completed, *Deconstructing Dolls: Girlhoods and the Meanings of Play*, due out this coming March with Berghahn. Currently, I am immersed in writing a synthetic narrative history, *Girls in America: A History of Girlhoods*. I’m also happily continuing to make Anidolls, needle felted creatures of my own invention.

Many thanks

Miriam

Leon Wang, from Firebird Design Lab, wrote:

These are certainly challenging times. Fortunately the news of the vaccine brings us some hope and a glimpse of daybreak. Just like the UK, the second/third waves are hitting the US hard on multiple fronts. The universities have been making the necessary adjustments but it has been especially difficult at the high school level. A local public school district I am working with recently announced that 40% of their high schoolers are failing classes. We are working hard to find better ways to engage and serve our students.

In terms of something that could be shared via the newsletter, here is an anecdote that's perhaps a bit more uplifting.

In 2020 we faced the trifecta of 1) the Covid-19 pandemic, 2) the murder of George Floyd here in Minneapolis and the subsequent uprising, 3) culminating with the democracy-or-bust election in November. Against this backdrop, how could "play" be used to address serious community matters?

Please see the following links for sample images from our Love Vote Rise project.

[LoveVoteRise Instagram](#)

[LoveVoteRise Facebook](#)

Love Vote Rise was a tactical, non-partisan Get Out The Vote (GOTV) art campaign during the final weeks of the 2020 election. The art/message was deployed via street projections, posters, and social media. We equipped over a dozen teams of artists/volunteers with "bat signal" projection kits. The teams were asked to have fun and light up their own communities. We encouraged them to approach the projections with the playfulness of street artists and agility of urban explorers. Most importantly, we wanted to see their individual voices come through. Our primary objective was to generate positive discourse and energy in the tense and difficult days before the election. In my opinion, this is another example of how play can help highlight our shared humanity.



Attached is a photo from the project. Location: Science Museum of Minnesota, Saint Paul, Minnesota. Photo credit: Leon Wang/LoveVoteRise

Thanks again.

Leon

CONFERENCES & EXHIBITIONS

This section covers current, up-coming and past conferences and exhibitions. Previews and reviews of conferences are sought for the Spring Edition of the ITRA Newsletter. Due to the current international Covid-19 pandemic many conference organisers have placed their conference plans on hold. More information will be published once it becomes available.

FUTURE CONFERENCES

Toys as Cultural Artefacts in Ancient Greek and Roman Cultures: Anthropological and Material Approaches, will be held at Fribourg University, 22nd – 24th June, 2021

The international conference *Toys as Cultural Artefacts*, organised by the research team of the European Research Council (ERC) Project *Locus ludi*, in collaboration with the Society for the Study of Childhood in the Past (SSCP), invites experts from different disciplines - anthropologists, archaeologists, philologists, art historians – to share reflections on the cultural notion of toy and playful experience in ancient Greece and Rome in a multidisciplinary and diachronic perspective.

Linguistic and archaeological researches have elaborated on the continuities as well as on the differences between Antiquity and modern times. The aim is to develop these first observations in order to attempt to define the specificities of ancient playthings. The conference will debate the following questions in a comparative, diachronic and cross-disciplinary approach:

Session 1. What is a “toy”? What do we mean by toy in a post-industrial contemporary society? And how was it defined in the past? Since when and how were playthings associated with a specific age group or gender? Adults have games, but what about toys? Archaeologically, can we define the distinctive features of such an object in Classical antiquity (size, material, ergonomics, cheap or costly...)? Semiologically, when did specific terms appear to qualify them, and why? In the Greek lexicon, different words, from *paignion* to *athurma*, refer to playful experiences which could include what we call toys, but the contexts of use are different, such as artistic performances, verbal jokes, as well as erotic discourses. In the Latin vocabulary, only the adjective *ludicrus* may be associated with actions that we could translate, albeit inaccurately, with 'toy.' Archaeologically, how can it be identified?

Session 2. The toy stage in the biography of objects. As Sally Crawford (2009) demonstrated, any object can become a toy in the hands of a child, and it is thus impossible or very difficult to identify it without an archaeological context (cultic, funerary, domestic). Problematic too are terracotta replicas of objects found in tombs or sanctuaries. Why were such replicas of toys made, and can we distinguish the real artefact from its symbolical substitute? Similar reflections apply to miniature objects often associated with children, but with different functions according to time and space, some clearly distinct from play, as with de-functionalised miniature offerings (see Pallas 2011). Terracotta figurines of animals also belong to that debated category.

Session 3. Cheap or costly toys? Are toys self-made by children or caretakers, or products of specialists? More work should be undertaken to identify the making of playthings by children, their caretakers or specialised craftsmen. Did one play with self-made or manufactured artefacts? Written sources describe remarkable playthings that were made by specialists, such as the flying dove of Archytas or luxurious puppets. Some of these costly productions are literary fictions, but few surviving exceptional objects in bronze, amber or other precious material, such as an articulated bronze warrior, testify precious objects imitating what we would call toys. But are these toys?

Session 4. Playful rites or ritual play? How can we account for the complex relationship between playful activities, on the one hand, and religious and devotional experiences on the other in the ancient world? Apart from the so-called “dolls” which are a key feature of sanctuary offerings, other playthings such as knucklebones, balls and spinning-tops were dedicated in sanctuaries, each with varying associations and manipulations to explore. Game and divinatory practices are contiguous, as displayed by dice and knucklebones which belong to objects able to activate divine action.

Session 5. The agency of toys: for the ancients, did toys generate a fictional universe, and did they possess a subjectivity? Toys participate in the construction of social identity. Did they differ according to age groups and gender? Did they promote interaction between children, siblings, or friends, between individuals of different sex or status? Did adults (child-minders or parents, mothers or fathers) play with children, and how? And where, in domestic, public or sacred spaces? On a more general level: did toys transmit cultural values shared by a Mediterranean *koinê*? and can we trace transmissions and transformations in later historical periods?

How to apply: Please send a title, abstract, bio-bibliography

Contact: veronique.dasen@unifr.ch, marco.vespa@unifr.ch

For more information: [https://locusludi.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Call.Conference-](https://locusludi.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Call.Conference-Toys.ERC_.LocusLudi.2020.pdf)

[Toys.ERC_.LocusLudi.2020.pdf](https://locusludi.ch/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Call.Conference-Toys.ERC_.LocusLudi.2020.pdf)

FUTURE EXHIBITIONS

Play Lives – Design for Play series of exhibition, playshops, and events, will be held at the Design Spectrum Gallery, Wan Chai, Hong Kong, 22nd February – 30th April 2021.

Play is useless. Play is good. Everybody plays. Not all the time. So what is play? How does it work? Why is it good? How do we design for play? So many questions – is there enough time? Enter the rabbit hole: the PLAY LIVES exhibition, playshops, and events will take visitors through design for play’s wonderland, toying with the concept of play as a positive agent in people’s lives. Visitors of all ages will step out of time and space for an hour or more of their real lives, to reconnect with play lives – a pressing need in these challenging times – and appreciate how play can be designed to better our lives.



Curated and designed by Rémi Leclerc (PolyPlay Lab) and Lee Chi Wing (Milk Design) and organised by Design Spectrum, Play Lives will tentatively be held from 22nd February to 30th April 2021, CoViD permitting, at 7 Mallory Street’s restored Grade II historic pre-war buildings in Wan Chai, Hong Kong. Design Spectrum, Hong Kong Design Centre’s public face, was launched in 2019 to nurture local creative capital and cultivate a flourishing design and design thinking culture within the community.

While play opens minds, design shapes futures: the exhibition will raise the public’s awareness of play and design’s transformative agencies – their ability to shape culture – and why there is no design for play without play for design. Showcasing play through design eyes, the exhibition will stage play’s value by design, while demonstrating play’s value to design.

The exhibition will invite visitors to rediscover play through a five-step design narrative. In Room 1, play lives: engaging with whimsical fixtures, visitors will bring to life attributes of play and playing, exploring chance, sensorimotor, imagination, manipulative, creative, cognitive, social, and competition play, thus contextualizing design processes and visual literacy for play. Where play lives, there are stories of play lives to tell: articulating the double-Play Lives entendre from fact to story, Room 2’s showcase embodies the value of play through a catalogue of exhibits arranged along four design disciplines: Image, Object, Body, and Space, mapping Hong Kong play stories, with tentacular escapades to the Chinese Mainland, Korea, Japan, and the USA. In Room 3, experimental design projects will entice visitors to contemplate how play, as a conceptual Trojan Hobby Horse, enhances designers’ critical and speculative practices. Straddling Art and Design, the playworks will invite visitors to appreciate the value of ‘design play’ in addressing issues such as identity, corporate culture, information, technology, environment, or... food. Room 4, the exhibition’s playroom, will display pre-exhibition ‘playshop’ outcomes, providing visitors a multi-perspective interpretation of play from their HK peers, and opportunity for intergenerational play. The series of playshops, facilitated by HK designers in the weeks leading up to the exhibition, span a comprehensive range of play forms, including creative STEAM, narrative, and urban community play. Designed to explicate how play stimulates design thinking to shape culture, they connect community perspectives to the exhibition’s contents. Also in Room 4, a toymaking playbench will allow visitors to create toys from simple materials. A lucky draw from a capsule vending machine will direct visitors to specific components, including PLA plastic clips manufactured on site by a tabletop 3D printer, and other biodegradable toy parts, to assemble a simple plaything for keeps. Finally, an installation on the venue’s Public Outdoor Space co-designed by partners *Making on Loft* with members of the Wan Chai community will serve as a two-way door; an entry bringing the community to the exhibit, and an exit taking the exhibition to the community and enticing exploratory urban play.

Play Lives’ visual communication, organised around a quirky representation of the exhibition’s concepts articulated by designer-artist Benny Lau and the curators as a DIY DNA code system of icons, will allow visitors to connect the diverse elements and principles of design for play and chart their own maps of the meaning of play and value of design.

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.

Bergen, D. (Ed.) (2021). *The Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys*
By Doris Bergen

Doris Bergen is the editor of a new publication, which discusses both traditional and technology-enhanced toys. The 24 academic authors of chapters provide information about the developmental importance of toys, their social and cultural influence, and the research related to the potential impact of such toys. It also includes information on the historical influences of various types of toys and on issues related to toy design. The handbook may be of interest to educators, parents, toy designers, and developmental psychologists and may serve as a catalyst for further research and ongoing toy development. Readers can also find out more about their favourite toys from childhood, relive satisfying play experiences, and learn ways to foster the developmental growth that comes from toy play.

Bergen is Distinguished Professor of Educational Psychology, Emerita, Miami University

Contributors:

Jason Abbitt, Christopher Bensch, Doris Bergen, Annerieke Bolland, Gail Burnett, Lynn Cohen, Brooke R. Spangler Copenbaker, Darrel R. Davis, Myae Han, Olga S. Jarrett, James E. Johnson, Barry Kudrowitz, Lena Lee, Eleni Loizou, Sohyun Leachate, Shirley K. Morgenthaler, Kathleen Roskos, Jean-Pierre Rossie, Dorothy Justus Sluss, Tracy Settleberry, Sandra J. Stone, John A. Sutterby, Sonia Tiwari, Valerie A. Ubbes.



Sharp, J., Thomas, D. (2019) *Fun, Taste, & Games: An Aesthetics of the Idle, Unproductive, and Otherwise Playful*

“Fun” is somewhat ambiguous. If something is fun, is it pleasant? Entertaining? Silly? A way to trick students into learning? Fun also has baggage – it seems inconsequential, embarrassing, child's play. In *Fun, Taste, & Games*, John Sharp and David Thomas reclaim fun as a productive and meaningful tool for understanding and appreciating play and games. They position fun at the heart of the aesthetics of games. As beauty was to art, they argue, fun is to play and games – the aesthetic goal that we measure our experiences and interpretations against.

Sharp and Thomas use this fun-centred aesthetic framework to explore a range of games and game issues – from workplace bingo to Meow Wolf, from basketball to *Myst*, from the consumer marketplace to Marcel Duchamp. They begin by outlining three elements for understanding the drive, creation, and experience of fun: set-outsideness, ludic forms, and ambiguity. Moving from theory to practice and back again, they explore the complicated relationships among the titular fun, taste, and games. They consider, among other things, the dismissal of fun by game journalists and designers; the seminal but under influential game *Myst*, and how tastes change over time; the shattering of the gamer community in Gamergate; and an aesthetics of play that goes beyond games.



The International Journal of Play

2021 Special Issue Call for Papers entitled *Play: Resilience and Vulnerability in Difficult Circumstances*

This special issue focuses on play and providing for play during times of crisis and stress including homelessness, abject poverty, natural disasters, border crossing/trafficking, imprisonment, refugee/mass migration, pandemic, terrorism, and war. Drawing on Sutton-Smith's (2017) conceptual framework on play as emotional survival, this issue is broadly organized around play as a coping mechanism in the face of external adversities and as a way to foster resilience and hope. As such, an organizing principle is how play serves a protective function against risks to children but also how it might be compromised in difficult circumstances. To this end, the special issue calls upon multidisciplinary scholars who are exploring the interrelationship between play, resilience, and vulnerability to contribute reviews or empirical papers that capture the dimensions of this process.

The guest co-editors of the special issue are James E. Johnson (The Pennsylvania State University), Jaipaul L. Roopnarine (Syracuse University), and Michael M. Patte (Bloomsburg University).



Archaeology and Arts (Αρχαιολογία και Τέχνες)

By Cleo Gougoulis

Issue No 132/2020: In this special section on Play during Antiquity three archaeologists deal with questions regarding the interpretation of findings often associated with children's toys in graves and sanctuaries (Bobou, Care) and the depictions of children and adults playing with or holding toys in iconographic material and sculptures (Dasen). In her introduction to the section Cleo Gougoulis (University of Patras, Greece) reviews the rise of archaeological and historical interest in children's play in the context of 20th century developments in social history, demography, history of the family and the development of two important interdisciplinary fields, the "New Sociology" of Childhood and Material Culture Studies.

Olympia Bobou (*Children's play in Ancient Greek Sculpture*) deals with interpretation problems regarding portrayals of children holding or – less frequently- playing with toys in Hellenistic sculpture, arguing that archaeological contexts should be taken seriously into account. The low frequency of children holding toys in Hellenistic sculptures placed on public display is an expected outcome of the idealized versions of childhood that usually prevail in public space.

Barbara Care, in her article on knucklebones ("*Something more than a toy? Placing astragali in the archaeological context*"), continues the discussion opened by Bobou by turning her attention to one of the most frequent objects found both in child and adult burials and in sanctuaries. Knucklebones have often been interpreted in most of the extant archaeological literature as a toy without considering the possibility of ritual, divinatory and symbolic functions implied by the huge number of these objects, their particular arrangement in graves and their relationship to other objects present in the same site.

The metaphorical aspect of play scenes in Ancient Greek art featuring young individuals of both genders is discussed by Veronique Dasen in her article "playing with life uncertainties in Antiquity." Images of adolescent girls, in Classical Greek vase-painting, playing at games of skill and chance, point to ideas of prenuptial girlhood as a risky period. Rather than interpreting the vase paintings as a realistic portrayal of rule-governed games, Dasen suggests that the painters seem to be more concerned with the depiction of play as a metaphorical space where maidens display remarkable agency vis-a-vis the uncertainties of courtship the hope toward a successful marriage.

Issue No 133/ 2020: Play in the Byzantine era is presented in this special section in which four Byzantine historians deal with ideas of childhood and play from the 4th AD to the 12th century drawing on literary and archaeological sources covering a wide geographical area ranging from Egypt and Sicily to Thessaloniki and Asia Minor, with an additional special mention to Crete under the Venetian rule in the 14th and 16th centuries. The section is opened with an introduction of Cleo Gougoulis who analyses the works of the four authors dealing with various aspects of Byzantine children's play and toys in the light of the revision of Aries's thesis on the absence of childhood as a distinct social category during the Middle Ages.

Beatrice Caseau and Charis Messis (*Exploring disorderly preadolescent games*) discuss the methodological difficulties in gaining insight into play and the everyday life of children during the Byzantine era due to discontinuities in extant archaeological evidence and the limited interest of most Byzantine scholars in childhood and adolescence. Discovering what with and how Byzantine children played involves reading literary texts depicting the close relationship of authors with their grandchildren or reading the lives of saints and martyrs and especially their pious avoidance of any childhood mischief and unruly or nonsensical symbolic play. Religious sources and legal texts point to an attempt of the Byzantine official culture to control adolescence by setting the age of marriage at twelve for girls and 14 for boys

Anna Lamporpoulou's article (*Where sources remain silent - archaeological findings speak*) calls for a revisiting of Byzantine texts in light of recent archaeological evidence. The important number of toys deposited in children's graves and iconographic material such as play scenes featured on mosaics of Byzantine houses and churches seems to point to an average Byzantine family where children were loved and cherished. While Byzantine children lived different lives from children in Classic Antiquity and the Roman era, a long durée can be visible in the endurance of popular toys and playthings and many structures of everyday life such as the reported love of Byzantines for spectacles despite the restrictions towards the ancient traditions imposed by the State.

Oana Cojocar (*Children's play and socialization*) focuses on portrayals of children's play in Byzantine art and the growing number of toys found in children's graves. Taking into account Classical antiquity archaeologists' warning against the straightforward interpretation of miniatures and other objects found in children's graves as toys, Cojocar nevertheless adopts a view of Byzantine children as active agents and contributors to their socialization process. In light of this view, objects found in graves might have served multiple functions. Metaphoric, symbolic and ritual intentions of adult use of objects however do not preclude their use as toys by children. The author also questions the stereotypical attribution of particular toys and games to a specific gender. A close reading of the biographies of saints reveals that girls were not necessarily absent from public space. In agreement with Lamporpoulou, Cojocar finally argues that the indifference or suspicious attitude of Byzantine religious texts towards childhood is not necessarily representative of Byzantine society as a whole.

The final article of the special section on play during the Byzantine era authored by Angeliki Panopoulou focuses on the consecutive attempts of the Venetian authorities in 14th century and 16th century Crete to control unruly aspects of child and adolescent play forms such as stone wars. The repetitive issuing of anti-stone war



laws and prohibitions is indicative of the construction of boyhood and male adolescence as dangerous social categories and potential threats to public order. Venetian rulers sought to control dangerous boyhood and adolescence through recruiting youngsters to the army.

Issue No 134/ 2020: Children's play in the contemporary era (in Greece) features in the December issue of *Archaeology and Arts*.

In her introduction to the section, Cleo Gougoulis clarifies the scope of the section which presents aspects of play and playthings in the 20th and 21st centuries such as the portrayal of toys in the playthings depicted in Contemporary Greek Art (Kouria), the use of toys beyond play as objects of biographical significance (Gougoulis), the introduction and development of playgrounds in Greece (Karakatsani), and the use of various popular videogames for educational purposes (Gouscos- Voulgari).

The section begins with an article by Cleo Gougoulis (*Toys as biographical objects*) which draws on Igor Kopytoff's notion of cultural biography to understand those toys that escape modern rites of passage to adolescence, a process typically marked by the separation of children from most of their toys. Her findings are based on an ethnographic study of children's play in Palaia Phocaea, Attica, and a study of children's toy collections in the context of two primary school exhibitions organized in a South Athenian suburb and a Piraeus working class neighbourhood. As Greek children move from childhood to adolescence their toy collections are dismantled with the initiative of both children and their mothers. While most toys are donated to younger relatives and friends, or simply discarded, toys with biographical significance are kept by children and/or their mothers as memories of past childhoods, as symbols and materializations of family ties and as inalienable family heritage linking the past, present and future of different generations of children.

Aphrodite Kouria (*Aspects, meanings and functions of toys in contemporary Greek art*) highlights the portrayals and use of play and playthings in the works of contemporary Greek artists. Toys in modern paintings and artistic installations are used as points of entrance to dream worlds and as means for the symbolic expression of personal explorations, dead ends and anxieties. Artistic expression draws on play and is often identified with playfulness in the interactive installations of artists who furthermore employ the same artistic playfulness as curators of contemporary museum exhibitions in an attempt to foreground children's points of view.

Despina Karakatsani explores the history of Greek playgrounds in light of the development of analogous organized spaces for children's play in the US and Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries as a means to employ modern educational and childhood theories on the one hand and to control the children of the urban poor on the other. Children's playgrounds in Greece were introduced by the fascist regime of Metaxas in the 1930s in the context of a discourse on public hygiene, and physical education as a means to recruit and control Greek young people. The first playgrounds were attached to the fascist youth EON and were introduced in working-class neighbourhoods of Athens and Piraeus as recreational spaces where children played with the provided equipment under the supervision of gymnasts, trainers and EON officials.

The special section closes with the study of Dimitris Gouscos and Iro Voulgari on the use of popular MMORPG videogames for educational purposes. Voulgari and Gouscos review the critical approaches to the violent and /or sexist or racist content of many commercial videogames to argue for the need for the development of digital literacy among primary and secondary school students. The scope of digital literacy includes the decoding of encoded messages in contemporary digital games and the encouragement of critical assessment of the rules governing the games as systems. Values such as empathy can be promoted both through the development of specially designed serious games and through the use of extant commercial games.

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

- 1) This holiday season, North Dakota State University students are hacking toys so kids can play
<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2020/12/21/this-holiday-season-ndsu-students-are-hacking-toys-so-kids-can-play>
- 2) IKEA advertises for ‘chief play officer’ to test new toys
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9063475/amp/Ikea-advertises-chief-play-officer-test-new-toys.html>
- 3) Couple create app which lets parents swap their kids’ toys for free
<https://www.heart.co.uk/lifestyle/parenting/couple-app-swap-kids-toys-free/>
- 4) The pandemic captured through children’s play
<https://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/news/stoke-on-trent-news/pandemic-captured-through-childrens-play-4815295>
- 5) ‘STEM toys will have an invaluable role to play in a post-pandemic world’, says Osmo CEO
<https://www.toynews-online.biz/2020/12/02/stem-toys-will-have-an-invaluable-role-to-play-in-a-post-pandemic-world-says-osmo-ceo/>
- 6) The Harmful Chemical Lurking in Your Children’s Toys
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/23/parenting/home-flame-retardants-dangers.html>
- 7) The 17 best toys for imaginative play – no screens involved
<https://www.romper.com/parenting/best-toys-for-imaginative-play>
- 8) 12 great fidget toys that can help soothe away anxiety
<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/health/wellness/g34935171/fidget-toys-for-anxiety/>
- 9) Accessible and representative toys key for development of kids with disabilities
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/gusalexioiu/2020/12/15/accessible-and-representative-toys-key-for-development-of-kids-with-disabilities/>
- 10) Distanced Play. No Hugs. How Everyday Child Care Routines Are Changing
<https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-12-21-distanced-play-no-hugs-how-everyday-child-care-routines-are-changing>
- 11) McDonalds’s opens playground made from recycled happy meals
<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/uk-news/mcdonalds-opens-playground-made-recycled-19480977>
- 12) Mum’s genius toy jail hack teaches her children to tidy up
<https://metro.co.uk/2020/12/18/mums-genius-toy-jail-hack-teaches-her-children-to-tidy-up-13771972/>
- 13) Logic games and puzzles are on the rise as smart toys and games sees sales double over 2020
<https://www.toynews-online.biz/2020/12/03/logic-games-and-puzzles-are-on-the-rise-as-smart-toy-games-sees-sales-double-over-2020/>
- 14) Stay-at-home toys from Fisher-Price put playtime into the coronavirus pandemic
<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2020/08/12/coronavirus-work-from-home-fisher-price-baby-toddler-toys/3339205001/>
- 15) 20 gender neutral toys that are inclusive for all kids
<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/childrens-products/toy-reviews/g33491418/gender-neutral-toys/>
- 16) Why Ancient Toys Are Elusive Artifacts
<https://www.discovermagazine.com/planet-earth/why-ancient-toys-are-elusive-artifacts>
- 17) 30 toys from the 90’s that you know you or someone had when you were a kid
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/briangalindo/90s-toys-millennials-loved-to-play-with>
- 18) Do STEM toys actually teach kids science and math?
<https://www.livescience.com/how-stem-toys-teach-math-science.html>



ITRA 2021 Fees Notice

Please note that, according to the ITRA Board's decision in Alicante, 8th August 2005, conference fees cover ITRA membership fees until the following conference. This means that conference participants who paid full registration fees for the 8th ITRA conference in Paris, France, 2018 have been exempted from paying ITRA dues for the years 2019 through 2022.

If you were not able to attend the conference in Paris, you must submit your annual membership fee for 2021 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, 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, events or research you would like to recommend, or if you would like to propose an ITRA member we could profile, do not hesitate to contact either Suzy or Mark, via itranwsltr@gmail.com. We intend to publish a Spring edition in May 2021. 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)