

**INTERNATIONAL TOY
RESEARCH ASSOCIATION**

Vol. 28 No. 2 Fall/Winter 2024

ITRA NEWSLETTER

Paul Darvasi
Gold Bug Interactive & OISE
University of Toronto
Canada

Rebecca Horrace
Playful Insights Consulting
Let's Play America
USA

Lisa Murphy
Ooey Goocy, Inc.
USA

Greta Pennell
University of Indianapolis
USA

Vicki Thomas
Vicki Thomas Associates
United Kingdom

Markus Wiemker
Hochschule Fresenius,
University of Applied
Science
Germany



Luísa Magalhães (editor-in-chief)
Universidade Católica Portuguesa
Portugal





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Greetings from the president of ITRA



Tis the season for toys, toys, toys. This is the time when toy sales peak as parents and kidadults armed with holiday wish lists drive sales to double the level of any other month of the year while others are hard at work making toys by hand. Industry reports suggest that 2024 is on track to be a very good year for the toy industry globally. I'm happy to report that it is also shaping up to be a banner year for ITRA and toy research.

In November the *American Journal of Play* published a double special Issue on the Power of Toys and Playthings (v 16; n 2 & 3) that grew out of ITRA's 9th World Conference held last year at The Strong National Museum of Play. The papers, interviews, and book reviews in this issue focus attention on the role of toys in the face of pandemic-related shutdowns, prejudices, exclusion, and marginalization, and the existential threats of war. The complete issue can be read freely online at: <https://www.museumofplay.org/journalofplay/issues/volume-16-number-2-3/>

Earlier this year, thanks to the amazing work of Gilles Brougère, the proceedings from the 9th World Conference were also published on the online scientific research document repository HAL available at: <https://sorbonne-paris-nord.hal.science/ITRA2023/>

To everyone who shared their work at the conference and contributed to these publications, thank you! If you weren't able to participate in the world conference last year, I think you'll find that they illustrate the robust, creative and interdisciplinary nature of our world conferences that set ITRA apart.

Speaking of ITRA conferences, preparations are underway for our 10th world conference to be held in Augsburg, Germany 5-7, August, 2026. Conference chair, Volker Mehringer, provides a short update in this newsletter and if you are interested in helping with conference planning please let us know – the more the merrier.

Many thanks to Luisa Magalhães and her editorial team for their ongoing work to make the newsletter rigorous, relevant, *and* visually appealing. They are committed to making the newsletter useful and using social media in meaningful ways. To that end they are launching a short survey to better understand what that means for you. Please take a moment to share your thoughts and suggestions. They've also established an ITRA LinkedIn page to share information and foster connections at: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/international-toy-research-association>

One of the great joys of serving as ITRA president is hearing from our members and helping connect folks to advance their research, teaching, and design work. That is at the heart of ITRA's mission and I'm especially excited about the opportunities featured in the Networking section of the newsletter and the requests for feedback in the Members' Forum. Even if the specific project isn't a great fit for you at this time, please share with colleagues or students who might be interested. It takes all of us to sustain and build our toy research community.

Hats off to 2024 – May the new year bring you peace and plenty of time to play.

Toyfully,
Greta





NEWSLETTER SURVEY

We are launching a survey designed to gather your insights on how we can make the newsletter more engaging, relevant, and valuable to you. Your feedback will guide our decisions on everything from content themes to frequency and format, ensuring that the newsletter reflects the needs and interests of our vibrant ITRA community.

The survey should only take about 5-10 minutes to complete, and all responses are anonymous. You'll have the chance to share your thoughts on current sections, suggest new topics, and provide input on the layout, article variety, and readability of the newsletter. Additionally, we'd love to hear your ideas on expanding our social media presence and enhancing the ways we connect with our members.



Please take a few moments to fill out the survey by **15 January, 2025** at:

<https://forms.gle/sqpc1qwtQhqv89uY8>

Your input is invaluable, and together we can create a newsletter that better serves and connects our community.

2026

10th ITRA WORLD CONFERENCE NEWS

By Volker Mehringer, 2026 ITRA World Conference Chair

The plans for the next ITRA conference in Augsburg in 2026 are underway. In September, our President Greta Pennell and her husband Jim visited Augsburg and together we had a look at the conference rooms at the university and a delicious sample at a venue for a special dinner during the conference. Greta's experience from previous conferences is invaluable.

We also took a short trip to Oktoberfest as a little crash course on Bavarian culture ;-) (see photo for evidence). Bavaria has a long and rich toy making tradition. So, as in 2023, we are planning a small pre-conference excursion which will probably take place on August 4, 2026 to see some of the many attractions to see around Augsburg related to toys. Stay tuned for details.



We are currently working on the conference theme and the call for papers which will be published next spring. We are trying to find an exciting and broad theme that offers many possibilities and connection points for toy researchers, designers and practitioners. We also want to invite people researching and working on games to take part at the conference.

Fortunately, the BTHA will again sponsor the ITRA Prize for outstanding toy research in 2026, for which we are very grateful. The BTHA is even increasing its financial support so that there will be higher prize money, and higher financial travel support. Details and applications for the ITRA Prize will also be open in spring 2025.

We are looking forward to seeing many familiar and new faces at the conference. If you have any ideas or questions about the conference, or would like to serve on either the organizing or scientific committees just contact me at volker dot mehringer at phil dot uni-augsburg dot de .





Member Profile



Siegfried Zoels is co-founder and Board member of the non-profit association Fördern durch Spielmittel e.V. (Toys for Children's Rehabilitation). He holds Master's degrees in Theology and Education and Cultural Sciences. He has worked as a social worker in a hospital of children with disabilities, scientific employee at the Board of Industrial Design, GDR, as Freelancer on the field of design and rehabilitation, and as Deputy Mayor (1990-92) with the responsibility for Family, Youth and Sports in district of Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, building up very new and democratic structures in administration.

Siegfried led the international and interdisciplinary UNESCO-Creativity workshops "Toy Design and Inclusive Play" for designers, architects, educationalists and therapists in countries around the world, based on the unique method he developed in the 1980s anchored in learning from people with special needs. Siegfried built up toy libraries, sustainability projects, workshops where people with special needs discover and create their creativity, and small enterprises where people with and without disabilities train and produce together in the regular labor market.

Volker Mehringer, University of Augsburg, interviewed Siegfried about his career and perspective on toy designing for children with disabilities and ITRA. The edited excerpts from the electronic interviews follow.

What sparked your interest in toys and playing as a profession?

SZ - Playing/toys were secondary. I was much more interested in questions about creativity: How do you come up with creative and special ideas?

Can you describe the main stages of your professional career in the field of play and toys?

SZ - Starting in 1972, I worked in the "Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung" (Board of Industrial Design) of the DDR (GDR). In 1979, I had the opportunity to set up a training system for all designers in the GDR (German Democratic Republic), including chief designers. So my question was, how can I get creatively trained experts to find creative solutions after years of desk work? My idea: The 20 head designers should live in a facility for disabled people for 2 weeks. They lived with them, saw that they are completely 'normal' people with special limitations and abilities. They were challenged to develop individual solutions and implement them as prototypes.

During these first workshops, we realized how important it is to narrow down the topic to be able to present tangible prototypes in a final exhibition. We decided to focus on TOYS, as everyone plays and is therefore, an EXPERT in this field. It simply needed to be emphasized that playing and toys are of great importance for human development. People with disabilities place exceptionally high demands on toys. A toy either works well or it does not meet their needs at all, which raised the question, "Why should such toys be placed on the general market if they don't serve their purpose?"

The goal was not to design special play equipment for restricted groups but inclusive toys for EVERYONE. These toys should engage as many senses as possible and encourage interaction. The workshops focused on simple materials and technologies, enabling parents and educators to replicate the newly developed toys. Another objective of the workshops was to create opportunities for factories that employ people with disabilities to generate ideas for their product range. Finally, the workshops aimed to provide the industry with innovative concepts based on the results of the sessions.

At the same time, we saw how vital interdisciplinary work is. That's why we opened up the design workshops to other professional groups, such as therapists, teachers, architects, artists, etc., and also to people with disabilities themselves, who often have special skills. As GDR citizens with limited





international contacts, it was important to us that the workshops were advertised worldwide. We had the goal that 20 participants from 15 countries should participate in the UNESCO Creativity Workshop. We invited three design lecturers from the Soviet Union to participate in the first workshop in 1980, and three designers from Hungary participated in the second workshop in 1981.

After a few “trial workshops,” we were able to hold the first UNESCO workshop in the GDR in September of 1990 (14 days before German reunification) at the Bauhaus Dessau. The (old) GDR government had registered the workshop with the UNESCO in Paris as its contribution to the UNO/UNESCO World Decade for Cultural Development 1988-1997. In the meantime, the Peaceful Revolution of 1989 had fundamentally changed the overall situation: The organizers of the workshop were now not only the “Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung” of the GDR and the “Verband Bildender Künstler” (Association of Visual Artists), but the co-organizer was now the district of Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg, of which I was now deputy mayor. The patron of the workshop was the current President of the GDR, Sabine Bergmann-Pohl.

Following the workshop, committed people founded the association “Fördern durch Spielmittel e.V.” (Fostering through toys), on the one hand to publish the workshop’s results and more importantly, to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities. At the request of the German UNESCO Commission, the association held the next creativity workshop in Potsdam in 1993. By 2019, we had held 18 creativity workshops with 400 participants from 61 countries, extending beyond Germany to locations such as Mexico, India, China, Armenia, etc. The UNESCO workshops in Sweden, Italy and the UK were also part of the EU’s INNOVATION program.

It quickly became apparent that public and professionals often underestimate the potential of games and toys and their significant role in human development. Accordingly, we expanded our activities to include further education and training for educators and pedagogical professionals. We continuously built on our experience with children with special needs and abilities.

Can you briefly describe the work of the association you founded, “Fördern durch Spielmittel e.V.”? What is most important to you about the work of the association?

SZ - The association pursues a holistic and inclusive approach, focusing on the intersection of play, toys, creativity, integration and employment. Since 1991, it has developed a multi-layered commitment for and with people with disabilities and those experiencing exclusion. We’re active in several areas including:

- Early support for children with and without disabilities: The organization operates two toy libraries in Berlin, which serve as inclusive family centres, providing opportunities for social interaction among families with children with and without disabilities, welcoming approximately 6,500 guests annually.
- Global learning/fair play/sustainability: Toy-making workshops using recycled and natural materials, play materials from various cultures while addressing aspects of global justice; development of “Global Learning Method Handbooks” for primary and secondary schools.
- Computer lab/creative computer and media activities: Movie projects with young people with severe cognitive impairments; stop-motion technique so that all participants can take part.
- Projects in prisons: Toy-making and social initiatives inside prisons to strengthen family bonds and assist inmates in preparing for their reintegration after release.
- Promoting creativity: collaborating with adults with disabilities to develop new play materials. In addition to the 18 international UNESCO creativity workshops, we have conducted workshops where groups with support needs can refine and finalize unfinished toy ideas.
- Vocational training/employment: For many years, we ran two special-purpose businesses, a tailoring workshop and a carpentry workshop, where people with and without disabilities or a migration background worked and gained training for the primary labor market. Unfortunately, we had to discontinue this work.

Are there any new projects and ideas you are currently working on?

SZ - Yes, the history of the “Amt für industrielle Formgestaltung” (Board of Industrial Design) of the DDR (GDR).





How did you first come into contact with ITRA?

SZ - Before ITRA was founded, living in the GDR meant being one of the “regular citizens” who didn't have a permit to travel to the West. International conferences were largely unfamiliar to us. Even in 1988, during the ICCP (International Council on Children’s Play) conference in Suhl, GDR, I could only hear about it from afar and could not attend. So, participating in the ICCP conference in Salzburg in 1995 with a small group from our association was quite exciting. It was our first opportunity to give international presentations and showcase a small exhibition of our work. Later, we heard about ITRA’s founding on the initiative of Birgitta Almqvist, among others, and that industry and practitioners in particular should also be involved. This was well aligned with our ideas. We eagerly participated in the conferences of both organizations whenever possible and valued the diverse exchange. We capitalized on our contacts when we became aware of the EU's INNOVATION program. We contacted several partners to see if they would be interested in applying to the EU together with us for a series of projects. Through this collaboration, we demonstrated that our method of UNESCO creativity workshops consistently produced high-quality results, regardless of who the organizers were. Those partnerships included university educators (Nordic Center of Halmstad University, Sweden, 1999), designers (Associazione Donatella Gazzola, Italy, 1999), and Artisan Toy Makers (British Toymakers Guild, Great Britain, 2000).

What do you particularly like about the ITRA?

SZ - The interdisciplinary and international approach, the combination of science and practice.

Where do you see the greatest challenges and/or opportunities for the ITRA as an organization?

SZ - We repeatedly see the differentiation of learning outcomes among children in different age groups, depending on early support, type of school, teaching methods, social backgrounds, cultural backgrounds and so on. The theoretical understanding and practical involvement of play and toys have influenced this. Indeed, we need to look at the role of play and toys in a broader context:

- Creativity and its enhancement, in innovation skills and abilities are crucial in fostering social cohesion. This includes identifying unique talents in individuals with alleged ‘disabilities,’ promoting their inclusion, and drawing on their experiences.
- In the economic sphere, there are essential interactions between the economy and ecology, particularly in the context of globalization.
- Complex connections and interactions exist in fields such as computing, the web, and artificial intelligence—all areas where we are in the early stages of development..

Looking ahead to the 10th ITRA Conference 2026 in Augsburg, what do you think are the critical areas or issues in the field of play and toy research that the conference should address?

SZ - The topics that would interest me would be, for example

- Connections between games/toys and brain research,
- Examples of projects and practical work related to game addiction and addictive behavior,
- Examples of fostering creativity and innovation and developing those skills through games and toys,
- Fostering social cohesion through games and toys in different cultures and cultural groups,
- Examples of artificial intelligence and how to deal with it,
- Recent design concepts, especially ecological and economic, including company visits.

What advice would you give to new researchers, designers and/or practitioners who are interested in working in the field of toys and games?

SZ - In a way, we see our work as a continuation of Vygotsky’s concept of the zone of proximal development. I recommend starting from this understanding, and then creating conditions for children and adults with and without special needs so that they can ACTIVELY participate in a “zone of proximal development. Finally, test and evaluate active involvement.

Last, but not least, what is your favorite childhood toy?

SZ - A tin toy car from Schüco.





BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review: *The psychgeist of pop culture - Bluey*

Reviewed by: *Bhoomi Thakore, University of Connecticut*

Dunlap, K. (Ed.). (2024). *The psychgeist of pop culture - Bluey*. Play Story Press. 287 pages; 13 illustrations. Available for free download at: <https://playstorypress.org/books/the-psychgeist-of-pop-culture-bluey/> and <https://works.hcommons.org/records/gjrk1-d8a64>



Despite the vanished proverbial “Saturday morning” broadcasts for children, young people today have so many choices about what to watch. Public broadcasts continue to cultivate content for learning, and commercial cable channels like Disney and Nickelodeon rely on content that extends through to their commercial products. Not to mention the ubiquity of online media facilitated by streaming services and the YouTube Kids app. Now more than ever, children’s attention is both highly sought, and highly difficult to achieve. Many programs have effectively kept children’s attention for decades with their light-hearted humor, educational efforts, and corresponding commercial products.

Enter: Bluey. Commissioned by the Australian Broadcast Company (ABC) and British Broadcasting Company (BBC), Bluey first premiered in Australia in 2018. It has since been distributed globally by BBC Studios and Disney, airing in over 60 countries to date, and its global toy line is produced by Australian based company Moose Toys. Creator Joe Brumm wanted to develop a show for and about his own kids, that parents would also enjoy watching. Brumm studied socio-dramatic play, consulting the works of scholars like Sara Smilansky and Vivian Paley. The series follows the titular character Bluey, a six year old (later seven year old) Blue Heeler, her four year old (later five year old) sister Bingo, mom Chilli, and dad Bandit, living in the city of Brisbane. Episodes cover the sisters’ imaginative play and interactions with their friends, neighbors, and extended family. In many ways, Bluey speaks to the balance of celebrating all the joys of parenthood with the emotions of its inherent struggles. The series has received critical acclaim, including an International Emmy Kids Award in 2019 and a Peabody Award in 2024.

As part of the Psychgeist of Pop Culture Book Series, series editor Rachel Kowert and book editor Kelli Dunlap approached this volume through their lenses of adults who thrive in their personal roles as parents but, as academics are wont to do, overthink and overanalyze every single thing about it. The contributions in this volume range from reflective essays to theoretical and empirical contributions, from a range of disciplines including psychology, game studies, and education. The final chapter is a compilation of artwork by young Bluey fans that convey their love of the show. Some chapters are academically rigorous, while others function as reflective/auto-biographical essays. Unfortunately, a few key chapters are missing references or citations to foundational work on which they draw or contain other inaccuracies. Perhaps this is a reflection on the final copy editing rather than the contributors’ scholarship. While these notable shortcomings were disappointing, the academic rigor of other chapters were quite strong . Below, I will highlight some of the chapters that resonated the most with me.

The book is divided into three sections, although this isn’t immediately apparent from the Table of Contents. Section one (Chapters 2-5), Let’s Play, includes chapters focusing on the importance of play in everyday life. In “The Ludology of Ludo Studios,” author Samuel Liberty references Huizinga’s “Magic Circle” in emphasizing the show’s ability to highlight the magic of play and its secretive inclusion. Liberty also relies on Piaget’s Moral Judgment and Goffman’s Fun in Games to discuss the characters’ reliance, relationship, and even rebellion of the various rules of their play. In “I Want to Play it the Proper Way’: Social Contracts of Play,” author Sasha Soraine draws attention to the importance of game





typologies (competition, chance, make-believe, and giddiness), the embedded social contracts and structured hierarchies in each, and the fundamental importance of players in play.

Section two (Chapters 6-11), *You're Doing Great*, serves to reassure parents that they are doing their best. This section includes chapters that humanize the experiences of parenting. In, "Dance Mode and Dragons: Family Makes Us Who We Are," Alison White highlights how the Heeler family embody the fundamental tenets of Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST), specifically differentiation of self, multigenerational transition, emotional process, and anxiety. In "Iiiiiit's Dad!: Paternal Parenting in the Pandemic," author Ali Mattu uses his own experiences of how Bluey facilitated opportunities to create lasting family memories of indoor play amid COVID. This chapter resonated with me and my experiences parenting a 2.5 year old and newborn in 2020.

Section three (Chapters 12-18), *Seen, Heard, and Felt*, aims to affirm the struggles of childhood and parenting. In "Heeler's Playroom: Processing Childhood Trauma through Play," author Rachel A. Altwater identifies instances across episodes in which the tenets of posttraumatic play are exemplified and offers some concrete guidance on how to employ its therapeutic value in practice. In "Early Baby: Psychological Effects of Premature Birth and the Importance of Representation on TV," author Stephani Pautz Stephenson reflects on the accuracy of this episode in its portrayal of the premature baby experience. Covering the range of emotions of fear, anxiety, stress, and post-partum depression for her and other parents of 'early babies,' it deserves as much attention as even the most emotional and sentimental Bluey episodes.

There are a few chapters that highlight diversity of identities and family types. In "Unmasking Parental Perfection: Laughing Through Chaos and Feeling Seen," author Ashley Elliott also highlights the timing of Bluey's contributions to parenting amid the pandemic, and the ever-present balance of identity as parent/identity as a queer neurodivergent woman of color. Elliott's chapter also does well in connecting themes across Bluey episodes to these real life dynamics. In "Beyond the Bark: Modern Fatherhood with a 'Paw-sitive' Attitude," author Nick Schiner highlights how the character of Bandit functions to challenge traditional media representations of the patriarch through a lens of masculinity. With its reliance on history and case studies, I am likely to use this chapter in one of my undergraduate classes – that is, once the Bluey-generation makes it there.

This volume is best suited not only for fans of Bluey, but also for scholars and practitioners who are interested in the subjects of children's media, media representations, parenting, and play. It is a contemporary contribution to the literature, although limited also for its lack of structure and thematic organization with too much overlap and not enough distinction across sections. As Dunlap concludes in Chapter one, Bluey is a show for families, about families, meant to highlight the meaningful values of play and shared experiences. Sadly, Dunlap shares that the person who first introduced her to Bluey, her sister, died tragically. This personal event, while it has stymied her engagement with the show, nevertheless motivates her to speak of its contributions to society and its core connection to her own family and upbringing.

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and

***Follow us on Facebook to get the most up-to-date toy news,
member highlights, conference and CfP announcements.***

<https://www.facebook.com/itra2018>





Book Review: *The Environmental Game Design Playbook*

Reviewed by: Vicki Thomas, Toy & Play Sustainability Hub



Whittle, C., York, T., Escuadra, P.A., Shonkwiler, G., Bille, H., Fayolle, A., McGregor, B., Hayes, S., Knight, F., Wills, A., Chang, A., & Fernández Galeote, D. (2022). *The Environmental Game Design Playbook* (Presented by the IGDA Climate Special Interest Group). International Game Developers Association. 84 pp. Available for free download at: <https://www.playing4theplanet.org/resources>

Was I the right person to review this title? I am not a computer gamer, beyond solitaire, and I even resisted playing that for many years as I suspected I would get addicted. I tend to get absorbed until a game or puzzle is resolved. I love the “play” in games, the tactics and strategies - the pick yourself up and start all over again. As a working mother I never had time...so as a postscript I asked my son for his thoughts.

But in the real world I am not sure we as humans can start again at the beginning, to resolve the environmental crisis or even leave it to the next generation. As the psychology described in this text states, hope is vital. So, the *Playbook* does provide a series of ways that game designers can create a game that: “that creates a persistent change in players” by providing “knowledge, pro-environmental attitude, efficacy and hope.”

The first part of the book explains environmental psychology. Despite the clear graphic layout - with summary points and explanations - it felt thorough, I found this section, especially with integration of Ajzen’s Theory of Planned Behavior (1991) and Kollmuss and Agyeman’s theory of Pro-Environmental Consciousness a little abstract and heavy going. I yearned for the examples. The references are there if you want to learn more which is excellent for this type of publication aimed at a practitioner audience. I think this section might be useful to others designing physical games and toys and educational campaigns. Education at all levels is being gamified to some degree but I think toy designers might benefit from reading this when designing for players aged 7 years and above.

When the examples arrived in the form of specific tactics in part two of the book, I found it more immediately stimulating and interesting. Many games I knew of like Sims, Minecraft and Civilization were cited. I was surprised how long specifically sustainable ones had been on the market, often 15 or 20 years. I also realized that I had been actively involved in proposing games for the UK National Parks - using citizen science and data collection. So, I have been a developer of sorts.

The third much shorter section looks at the bigger social picture. Primarily the world of gaming outside of the games themselves. Players meet when they play games together, there are further interactions on social media platforms. This month we had Comicon in our neighborhood and most of the Cosplay characters I saw were from games rather than graphic novels, TV or film. In short, there is clearly a mini world where there are opportunities to collaborate and explore these issues together.

If I have critical observations to make, then first, would be for the *Playbook* to step back and look at the big picture maybe as an introduction. E-Gaming is contributing to global warming, because of the power needed to run the cloud storage systems. Much of the hardware uses rare materials and the recycling systems are still not adequate. These mega questions do not seem to be addressed.





Second, some of the existing games seem to have been adapted to tackle environmental concerns - almost just “greened.” War or space games have been adapted to fight and win a new type of race. Maybe we need some alternative or fresher approaches that are not reworking of older concepts.

Third, the knowledge of the problem we face seemed to be assumed. The environmental challenges we face I understand are getting worse and the possible solutions are changing. Maybe the references could also include sources to the newest scientific findings and innovations? As I write COP 24 is happening and even its remit is being questioned. Is a meeting in person, setting sustainability goals that are not met, all in the middle of an oil field, the best we can do? It jarred.

Maybe I’ve a similar feeling about this book. The Playbook has a clear purpose, and the contributors are eager to support game developers and students. But despite their good intentions I was left with a little bit of a feeling that the games industry ought to get their “own house in order first.” The game developers need to make sure that the sustainability playbook allows them to question and initiate action by their commissioners or employers. They certainly have the power to influence and make a positive change for players, technology firms and the planet.

Postscript - my son is a gamer and a magazine journalist. He has written for children’s gaming magazines and attended gaming exhibitions. He said he did not find the first section light reading. From my teaching days I think that would put student readers off sticking with it. So, I sent him my review and suggested he skip forward a few pages.

“Particularly liked the idea of the gaming industry needing to get its own house in order, and the rarer earth metals in consoles and computers.”

But he went on to raise issues about the effect of designing with AI and the power that would use. He was also concerned about the wider effect on games developers’ creativity and rights. They already work very long hours, often on short contracts.

“Reading through I’d agree that while the ideas for promoting environmental messaging are sound and interesting, the key issues are structural.”

Pointing out we can all recycle but we need the big polluters to change and that includes the games industry. Nevertheless, he went on to conclude that the Playbook is a worthy effort:

“If developers can get more people to think environmentally it is a net positive.”

INVITATION TO REVIEW

The Editorial Board invites ITRA members to share their insights, comments, perspectives, criticism and positive arguments about their last readings. We foster the participation of ITRA members, enhancing their creativity and troubleshooting feelings to obtain interesting book reviews, play reviews, exhibitions or thematic collections that might have reached their interests.

Please send your review to the Editorial Board at itranswsltr@gmail.com. Whenever possible, please add some knowledge about the authors you are re-visiting and their lives and work.

May we all benefit from a beautiful collective newsletter production in the coming years!

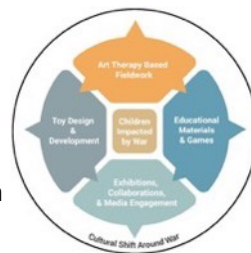




NETWORKING

Invitation to Scholars interested in the Global Generic Toy Market

The *War Toys*[®] nonprofit organization is looking for academic partners who are interested in researching the global market for low-cost, generic toys exported primarily from China. We're hoping to improve understanding of the generic toy market, the prevalence of inexpensive imports (particularly outside of the West), and the types of toys that are most popular with down-market consumers (and the retailers who serve them). Through our work with war-affected children, we've seen just how much generic toys utterly dominate the market in large parts of the world. However, because profit margins are so low, there has been little interest or support from the industry for research, despite the massive social impact and influence of millions of generic toys sold annually. We hope to bridge that gap with the right partners. Interested faculty and student advisors may contact us at: info@wartoys.org



Join the Toy & Play Sustainability Hub

Interested in sustainability, creating an efficient circular economy for toys, or harnessing the power of playthings to address the environmental challenges facing our planet? Then consider joining the *Toy & Play Sustainability Research Hub* chaired by Vicki Thomas, Research Fellow in Sustainable Futures at University of Northampton in the UK. The Hub's start-up was featured in the "Networking" section of the Spring, 2024 *ITRA Newsletter* and is now off and running with some 60 contributors from all around the world.

Hub meetings are held virtually on the 4th Monday of the month at 15:00 (3 PM) GMT. Each meeting shines a spotlight on one or two initiatives being undertaken to address sustainability issues in Toyland with the format for future meetings tailored to the needs of Hub members. Topics range from programs designed to promote more environmentally responsible consumer behavior, to global treaty and regulatory issues, to safety guidelines and technical challenges related to recycling and "re-homing" toys and games. As part of an academic research center, the Hub's aims include facilitating the transfer of knowledge and expertise, fundraising for collaborative research, and ultimately to see how we (members of the toy industry and academia) can work together to make a difference for future generations and the planet.

If you are interested in joining the discussion and sharing the journey, contact Vicki Thomas at either vicki.thomas@northampton.ac.uk or at vicki@vickithomasassociates.com

Member's Forum

BELGIUM

Rossie Jean-Pierre (2024). Sound toys in North African and Saharan children's toy and play cultures. *TELESTES: An International Journal of Archaeomusicology and Archaeology of Sound*, Institut Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Fabrizio Serra Editore, Pisa – Roma, IV, p. 129-138.
<https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5810078>





Jean-Pierre's article is the first of six articles that have been written and transferred to the chief editor of TELESTES, Angela Bellia. Five additional articles, each focused on a specific category of instrument (e.g., percussion, wind, string) or aspect of musical play (e.g., singing, dancing) are planned to be published over the next five years, one per year.

BRAZIL

Danielle Almeida & José Maria Sarinho Júnior (2024). Letramento do Brinquedo: Deficiência, diferença e inclusão (Toy Literacy: Disability, difference and inclusion). In Guilherme Brambila (Ed.). *Territórios do Letramento (The Territories of Literacy)*. Editorial contexto.



CANADA

Emilie St-Hilaire (forthcoming, 2025). Non-reproductive Parenting with Dolls: Facts and Fictions on Reborn Mothers. In Elizabeth Podnieks, E. & Wahlström Henriksson, H. (Eds.) *The Handbook on Parenthood in Popular Culture*. Palgrave.

FINLAND

Kati Suomi & **Katrinna Heljakka** (2024). Playful Learning as a pedagogical method in entrepreneurship education. In Alain Fayolle, Sandrine Le Pontois, & R. D. M. Pelly, (Eds.). *Big Questions and Great Answers in Entrepreneurship Research: Discussing Up-to-date Methodological and Philosophical Issues*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

https://www.elgaronline.com/edcollbook/book/9781800888661/9781800888661.xml?fbclid=IwZXh0bG9hZWOCMTAAAR1y9-QpHleNXSm50VWzF1YM9MDPy7rvduJfm9nDpXv9kHFWR9rHxpcWXY_aem_HrCW1lJTVp_75laHEpgPbA

GERMANY

Artemis Yagou (forthcoming, 2025). *Construction Toys and Modern European Culture: Education, Politics, and Technology, 1830 to 1940*. Routledge Studies in Cultural History series.

INDIA

In early November, **Aakash Johry** co-chaired a track on game design during The 15th International Conference of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) Design & Research [IndiaHCI2024] in Mumbai, India. The dedicated game design track including papers, workshops and demos brought game designers and researchers together for the first time in Indian academic community.

Aakash has a forthcoming article on using voice assistants to design games for children with visual impairment, and earlier this year published the following with his student, Radhika Sharma: Designing Pachi: A Verbal Language Learning Application for Children with Hearing Impairment in India. In: Miesenberger, K., Peñáz, P., Kobayashi, M. (eds) *Computers Helping People with Special Needs. ICCHP 2024. Lecture Notes in Computer Science*, vol 14751. Springer. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-62849-8_8 (Images provided are from the game and one of the testing sessions).

He is also actively involved in teaching game design, and in December his students will exhibit a collection of 12 table-top game prototypes as an outcome of his game design course in a small scale exhibit at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi.



Surabhi Khanna conducted a toy workshop "Toying with Joy and Curiosity" at Bulbule Festival, Lucknow, November 2024, held on 8th, 9th, and 10th of November 2024 at the India Literacy House. Around 350 children (boys and girls) per day from 13 rural and urban government and private schools participated in this program. The theme of this year's festival was Curiosity.





Koumudi Patil (2024). Shape of the design worldview: Does language inform the design sense? *Design Issues* 40(3): 88-104. <https://direct.mit.edu/desi/article-abstract/40/3/88/123241/Shape-of-the-Design-Worldview-Does-Language-Inform?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

NETHERLANDS

Mathieu Gielen at Delft University of technology and colleague Niko Vegt at Erasmus University Rotterdam have created a free online course module, “Co-creation with youth” (CCWY). Children’s rights to participate in society and to have their voice heard on matters that affect them are part of the “UN convention on the Rights of the Child.” That includes their rights to have a say in how society provides opportunities for play – and playthings. But involving children in the development of toys, games and other playthings does come with challenges. The module was developed for innovators, researchers, designers and other interested professionals. The module looks at the fundamentals of co-creation, the distinction between a research and design focus, and presents methods and tools to organize co-creation and analyze its outcomes. Though the scope of the course is broader than playthings alone, its contents are easily applicable to this domain.

The course is free, contains approx. 2 hours of video lectures and some support documents as well as references to useful materials. All you need to do is send an e-mail to Mathieu Gielen (m.a.gielen@tudelft.nl) requesting access to the online course CCWY (co-creation with youth). There is no exam or study credits attached to the course, and it is fully self-paced.

This is a first version. Mathieu and Niko aim to improve and extend it over time. So, any feedback on content or otherwise is well appreciated – you can send it to the same e-mail address listed above.

NEW ZEALAND

Double congratulations to **Dr. Tanya Marriott!** First, on successful completion of her doctoral degree from the College of Creative Arts at Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa Massey University. And, second on her award winning Underfoot Toys! Tanya’s designs took bronze at The New Zealand Designers Institute Best Awards and were recognized by The Core 77 Design Awards Program for excellence and inclusivity in the category of Notable Toys & Play. The Core 77 Design Awards program annually celebrates the richness of the design profession as well as the insight and perseverance of its practitioners.

<https://designawards.core77.com/Toys-Play/129697/The-Underfoot>

See more about Tanya’s designs and the Underfoot Toy crew’s story at:

<https://marmalademonkey.com/marmalade/underfoot/>

You can also read about Tanya’s research on these toys at: <https://tanyamarriott.co.nz/underfoot/> as well as in the latest special issue of the *American Journal of Play*. Her complete thesis is available to download at: <https://mro.massey.ac.nz/items/b9efa33c-7e0e-44fc-8cf8-5cd610713c7b>

In addition to working and researching her own designs, Tanya is helping develop the next generation of toy researchers/designers. Their work was recently showcased at Massey University at the Exposure Exhibition that ran 9-22 November, 2024. **Genevieve Fulton** has reimagined and expanded the idea of child-focused virtual worlds in a hybrid ecosystem called Mycohaven. Mycohaven seeks to ameliorate the loss of physical third spaces available in our communities and the loss of time children spend outdoors compared to previous generations. Mycohaven provides players opportunities to explore identity, provide community, and become empowered relative to their internet engagement rather than absorbed in algorithmic consumption. By recognising the failures of previous virtual worlds and taking thematic and theoretical inspiration from the Solarpunk genre, Mycohaven is intended to be both immersive and community-orientated. Its features extend beyond the digital space, creating a comprehensive and holistically engaging play experience. For more about Genevieve’s work see:

<https://exposure2024.massey.ac.nz/students/concept/genevieve-fulton>

Ngāti Kahungunu, Rangitāne (Billie Ihaka), another of Tanya’s 4th year honors students, has designed a new doll line that showcases alternative subculture through the styles and personalities of four teenagers





who form the fictional band “Beat Street,” named after the street they all grew up in. The design of this doll line aims to go against the mainstream societal standards of dress and conformity to show children a form of authentic and timeless expression using the themes and styles of alternative communities. The Beat Street crew consist of four dolls and a variety of clothing designs each based on a different genre of music and the subculture linked to each one. See Billie’s Beat Street collection at:

<https://exposure2024.massey.ac.nz/students/concept/billie-ihaka>

PORTUGAL

Alakesh Dhibar along with his colleagues Eduardo Goncalves, Antonio Gorgel (2024) published their work “Play and gender expression: A critical design exhibition to generate and measure awareness about gender differences within the context of children and toys” in the conference proceedings from the 26th HCI International Conference held in Washington DC USA June 29-July 4, 2024.

Earlier in the spring, Alakesh also conducted a workshop at the school Jardim de Infância in Cacém, Portugal with children and parents using his choice-based character-building game to further develop and test the tool “Toy Trouble” designed to inspire discussions between parents and children regarding social gender biases. Following three levels of the Inclusive Play Framework to fulfil the objective of promoting gender-inclusive awareness, the game takes a step forward in proving the theory of 'state of flow as a form of awareness'. To know more, please stay updated by following Alakesh’s work at: <https://sites.google.com/view/alakesh-dhibar/research/social-awareness-cultural-significance-in-designing-non-gendered-toys>



Above images from Alakesh’s workshop

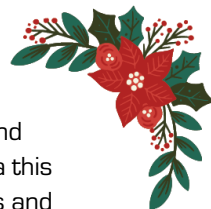
Luísa Magalhães has been editing a book series since 2022 and the first five books in the series are just coming out. The core argument in the series is about the conception of *the Other*, in various contexts, analyzing the perspective of *Otherness* as a possibility of interaction. This collection of books results from the feeling that not enough voice is given to the people that handle prejudice from others, on the basis of their alternative ways of being, living, playing, feeling or working. It is mostly based on communication research and editors-in-chief are Luísa Magalhães, from the Catholic University, in Portugal, and Enrique Castelló-Mayo, from the University of Santiago de Compostela, in Spain. But a large group of scholars has been invited, and the book covers are out!



SPAIN

Miriam Morante Bonet completed a one-month stay in August as a visiting researcher at the University of Indianapolis (Uindy). During her stay she collaborated with Dr. John W. Somers from the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences and Associate Dean Dr. Kenneth Reid from the R.B. Annis School of Engineering as well as ITRA President, Greta Eleen Pennell. The research focuses on applying self-awareness strategies





from the fields of design thinking and life design to improve students' motivation, autonomy in learning, and emotional well-being - the need for which became magnified in the wake of disastrous flooding in Valencia this fall. Through the project, a team of professors from both universities will work with engineering, fine arts and product design students to improve their knowledge of what they want to achieve in their careers and their lives. The transdisciplinary collaboration will propose innovative teaching practices with plans for wider dissemination of the results. The project is financed by the Polytechnic University of Valencia through the "call A+D projects for innovation and educational improvement."

SWITZERLAND

Véronique Dasen (2024). *Le jeu comme métaphore. Images ludiques de Grèce ancienne* (The game as metaphor: Images of ancient Greece). Presses Universitaires de Liège.

<https://pressesuniversitairesdeliege.be/produit/le-jeu-comme-metaphore/#>

UNITED KINGDOM

Gürpınar, Avsar and Cansu Curgen (2024, online). When pigs fly. *Public Artwork*, Istanbul, Turkey. Published interview (2023) in at <https://doi.org/10.17028/rd.lboro.25447501.v1> and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjigApC7FPc>



UNITED STATES

Krystina Castella is now on the Board of Designing for Children's Rights.

<https://designingforchildrensrights.org/> She's also working on the second edition of her book, *Designing for Kids Creating for Playing, Learning, and Growing*. Stay tuned for more next year.

Brian McCarty gave an invited talk on generational cycles of trauma and the impact of war on children in conjunction with a special exhibit "The Little War" and the opening of "War Toys: Ukraine" at the National World War I Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri. His talk is available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8b2YPwmPg8> and an overview of the museum's exhibit that runs until 9 February, 2025 at: <https://www.theworldwar.org/exhibitions/little-war>

Brian and the nonprofit organization he founded - War Toys (<https://wartoys.org>) - also debuted an educational board game that they fostered as part of a groundbreaking toy industry program. The game *War Toys: Evac Ops™* invites children to play war as a "humanitarian hero," working together to save civilians. War Toys is taking an unorthodox approach to positively influencing how children play and investing in new, generic toy designs for down-market consumers, bridging the play gap for millions of children who cannot afford name brand toys. They are giving factories in China free use of their original designs and production tools and, in the process, harnessing long-established markets to impact millions of children for relatively little cost. Bolstered by free lesson plans and a supporting mobile app (<https://evacops.app>), the game is being released in over thirty languages, making it accessible to an estimated 1.678 billion children around the world.



Brian recently wrote that:

"with conflicts raging around the world, it is imperative to provide children with an age-appropriate understanding of war, beyond 'good guys' and 'bad guys.' Evac Ops gives parents and educators new tools to engage in play with a purpose. Peace isn't just the absence of war. It's a willful rejection of it. And it takes understanding."





Recognizing the significance of this groundbreaking game and approach to production and distribution, The Young V&A museum in London has added a prototype of the *War Toys: Evac Ops™* boardgame to their permanent collection. The prototype game set pictured here is officially number B.8-2024 in the V&A's collection. Congratulations Brian and the entire War Toys team!

Suzie Sheriff (2024). My grandfather's west Texas salvage store: Prophetic lessons for twenty-first century museums. In Gabrielle Anna Berlinger & Ruth von Bernuth (Eds.). *The Lives of Jewish Things: Collecting and Curating Material Culture*. Wayne State University Press. ISBN 9780814350454.
<https://wsupress.wayne.edu/9780814350461/>

SPECIAL FEATURES

Products of Change Sustainability Conference 2024 – A Review

Held 6th November, 2024 at the Royal Geographical Society, London

<https://www.productsofchange.com/poc-sustainability-conference/>

Reviewed by: *Vicki Thomas, Toy & Play Sustainability Hub*

Products of Change was established five years ago and has galvanized a diverse range of licensing related businesses to act on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. I have attended two of their conferences where they invite people – inside and outside companies to share what they are doing to try to make a change. It is not a conference where businesses come and learn about the latest research – although they do. Or to be frightened into action by the latest global warming figures. Yes, they may be challenged by changing governments policies, but it is not a talking shop for lawmakers to reflect.

So, who was there, what did they share and what did I take away from it?

The Licensing industry crosses industry boundaries so there were presentations from major content producers like Paramount and DK, major retailers like Primark and Dunelm, representatives from organization like the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Ethical Supply Chain Program, food, toy, furniture and clothing producers, companies producing innovative materials and a child stepping up to speak for the next generation. It was not often the CEO but those tasked with making a difference within their organizations that shared their wins and losses.

Dr. Sourav Roy and Moksha Roy spoke first. Moksha urged us to improve things for our **own** children and be those fairies and pixies with the magical powers to make things right. This was swiftly followed by Chocolonely presenting on their efforts to reduce child labour and exploitation, in the cocoa industry through their products, campaigns and partnerships with major brand like Waitrose, Ben and Jerry as well as Oxfam retail outlets and Glastonbury.

The next session was less playful as it focused on the changing legislation globally. Much is still under discussion in Europe but seems to be setting a benchmark. In the US – California initiatives may take a similar lead even if Federal policies are reworked (the conference was held just as Trump won the US election). In this session and other tools and case studies were shared to collect the data, or what is required for digital passports and to not fall foul of advertising regulation to stop greenwashing. POC set up a working group to provide a system of producing the data that will be required by law for companies involved in licensing companies. They are proposing two alternative strategies; one just linked the carbon emissions based on the royalties earned and the other of all the licensed merchandise produced. The feeling in the room was that large toy companies and media firms will try to account for





everything produced with their brand or property featured, whilst smaller enterprises may only account based on what is returned to them in royalties leaving the producing companies or licensees to account for say the other 90%.

Materials were the focus of other case studies and some tabletop displays. There was a panel discussion of companies all involved with timber including representatives from FSC, Scandinavian forestry companies, publishers of books and calendars. Did you know that a hardback book would have at least 6 different types of paper that all need to be sourced sustainably and emissions accounted for....and reduced? FSC's remit is much larger than I expected covering palm, cocoa, rubber and soya plantations as well as: natural and managed forest and woodlands. All these materials are used in gifts and toys - toiletries, Easter eggs, trainers and vegetarian alternative treats and educational toys.



Designers and licensing teams from Primark, Dunelm and Bravado gave case studies of their efforts to shift production particularly in textiles to more sustainable alternatives. It was clear that the retailers and licensors do have authority to encourage suppliers to change. Often it might be the lead is being made by a musical artist or a nature-based charity, which then allows them to make an internal case for a change in practices. Finding ways to get consumers to think differently seemed key to making the supply chain to shift. Influencers seem to come in all shapes and sizes. Digital tools were being developed by companies like Dayrize and Fabacas to enable producers like Pure to supply more ethically produced ceramics, all duly stamped with a digital passport to Dunelm.

I last attended the conference in 2022 and then magazine publishers and distributors were just starting to talk. Children had spoken out in the media about the plastic toy incentives mounted on the covers. At this conference they appeared as a panel showing how much progress had been made in two years because of POC and its members like Wastebuster providing a forum.

The final presentation was from Bio-fluff. They are producing an alternative plush fabric currently for fashion designers like Stella McCartney and Italian furniture producers. Could this be scaled up for toys? Originally, Teddy bears were not cheap. As a child I was taken to see the famous "pet department" at Harrods, but I remember the soft toy hall as much and the staggering costs of the animals on display. Today, these toys continue to be treasured and traded. Is the future - higher quality, yet fair priced and long-lived soft toy companions?

For me the conference has shown progress from mere conversations and reactions to small voices in the press. Certainly, some of the pressure to become more sustainable is from proposed EU legislation but the toy and other companies involved in licensing are looking to meet the highest standards being set globally. For me involved toys as gifts (a la Marcel Mauss) then when "we do take from the planet" (Jo Seddon, Dunelm Designer) or accept nature's bounty, we are obliged to pay back. Mauss says gifts – including toys – contain an obligation or message – to make a return. We need to make sure that we pass on a sustainable story/message/obligation, through the products we make, license, sell and buy. All these products have a story and message for our loved one or even to ourselves - that we care for them and the planet. Moksha was right, **we have "magical powers" to make a difference through what is made and exchanged.**





**Back to Childhood:
Analyzing the New Lion King Poster according to the Grammar of Visual Design**

By Danielle Almeida^[1], Driele Souza, Fernanda Douetts, Heloisa Almeida, & José Tayrone Pereira



The story of the young lion **Simba**, who struggles to become king after the death of his father, marked a generation and, in 2019, got a live-action version. In December 2024, the franchise will release a prequel entitled **Mufasa, the Lion King**, directed by Barry Jenkins. The film poster aims to reflect the depth of the character, emphasizing the essence of the work and, above all, maintaining a communication with the public.

To understand the significance of this image, we must recognize that images produce social relations and communicate facts similarly to textual messages (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; 2006). In the analyzed poster, composition is crucial. The young lion gazing at his reflection of an adult lion that creates a compelling visual narrative of growth and transformation. The reflection not only links Mufasa's past and future but also symbolizes introspection and hidden potential.

The words 'Orphan', 'Stranger', and 'King' enhance this journey, guiding the viewer's understanding of the poster's story. The composition influences how the viewer perceives and interprets the message, making theories such as the Grammar of Visual Design and its metafunctions by Kress and van Leeuwen valuable tools for our analysis. Their theory identifies three main metafunctions that aid in decoding visual communication through their representational, interactive, and compositional meanings.

The representational meaning of **Mufasa, the Lion King** poster focuses on the way its visual elements are placed in the image. Its interpersonal messages seek to analyze the imaginative connection between the participants in the image and its observers. Finally, its compositional meanings focus on the arrangements of elements including information value, framing and salience, to depict the meaning of an image. Through the Grammar of Visual Design, we have understood the symbolism in **Mufasa** about its rise and how it impacts the public in its affection since the original work. @Lu

Our analysis of the poster is the result of our presentation in the Visual Grammar class in the Language and Literature Advanced English course at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), Brazil, taught by Professor Dr. Danielle Almeida. This course had a significant impact on us. We chose the poster of **Mufasa: The Lion King** because of its information, a rich design and nostalgia that bring back memories from our childhood.

[1] Danielle Almeida is a Full Professor at the Department of Modern Foreign Languages (DLEM) at the Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB), Brazil. She has been developing, for almost two decades, projects related to the research of the multimodality of toys and playful culture in Visual Semiotics, focusing on the meaning systems based on the Grammar of Visual Design by Kress & van Leeuwen (1996; 2006). Since 2008, she has been coordinating the Research Group in Visual Semiotics and Multimodality (GPSM) and also worked as a representative of the Brazilian Northeastern Region at the Latin American Association of Systemic Functional Linguistics (ALSFAL).

See the trailer for the movie to be released 20 December, 2024: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MlQG-a7d41Q>





CALLS FOR PAPERS

Submission Deadline: 15 December, 2024

International Conference on Victorian and American Myths in Video Games

9-11 April, 2025

Colégio Almada Negreiros, NOVA University Lisbon – School of Social Sciences and Humanities (NOVA-FCSH), Portugal

<https://vam2025.fcsch.unl.pt/victorian-and-american-myths-in-video-games/call-for-papers/>

Submission Deadline: 15 January, 2025

The Conference on BIPOC Game Studies (C-BIPOC)

12-14 September, 2025

The Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY USA

<https://conference.blackgamestudies.com/Calls.html>

Submission Deadline: 25 January, 2025

The Human Touch: Nurturing Consumer and Societal Well-Being

The Association for Consumer Research Latin America 20205

25-27 June, 2025

São Paulo Brazil

<https://acrwebsite.org/events/saopaulo2025/>

Submission Deadline: 1 February, 2025

Board Game Academics and Journal

submissions@boardgameacademics.com

<https://boardgameacademics.com/>

Submission Deadline: 10 February, 2025

Oh, You Beautiful Doll": Childhood, Gender, Play, and Culture Conference

21 March, 2025

Hybrid/In Person at University of Pittsburg Pittsburg, Pennsylvania USA

<https://www.childrenslit.pitt.edu/event/oh-you-beautiful-doll-conference-childhood-gender-play-and-culture-cfp-available-now>

Submission Deadline: 1 May, 2025

Edited Book: Til All Are One: Gender, Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity/Gender Expression (SOGIE) in Transformers

contact the editors at esanders5@lamar.edu and dlook@stlawu.edu.

<https://call-for-papers.sas.upenn.edu/cfp/2024/09/25/transformers-and-sogie-call-for-proposals-for-edited-collection>





Submission Window: 1 October, 2024-1 December, 2025

Special Issue: Dolls, Dolls, Dolls

Fashion, Style, & Popular Culture

<https://www.intellectbooks.com/fashion-style-popular-culture#call-for-papers>



Conference Dates: 23-26 June, 2025

24th annual ACM Interaction Design and Children (IDC) Conference

Conference Theme: Hope

Location: Reykjavik, Iceland

<https://idc.acm.org/2025/>

Conferences

26 February – 1 March, 2025 The Association for the Study of Play (TASP)

South Padre Island, Texas USA

Theme: Sustaining Play

<https://studyofplay.org/tasp-2025/>

27-29 March - 5th Global Conference on Children and Youth

Oxford, UK

<https://www.gccy.org/>

15-17 April, 2025 National Conference on the Value of Play (aka The Play Conference)

Indiana University

Bloomington, Indiana USA

Theme: Create, Explore, Inspire!

<https://usplaycoalition.org/conference/index.html>

16-19 April, 2025 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (PCA/ACA)

New Orleans, Louisiana USA

<https://pcaaca.org/>

30 May – 1 June, 2025 - UK Games Expo

NEC Birmingham, UK

<https://www.ukgamesexpo.co.uk/>

And Save the Date for 2026!!





Toy Fairs/ Current Exhibitions

**28 January – 1 February, 2025 Spielwarenmesse
Nuremberg, Germany**

<https://www.spielwarenmesse.de/en/>

This specialized trade fair is the world's leading toy fair for industry professionals, journalists and other media representatives.

**Now through 26 January, 2025 Microworlds: Tin Figures
The Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg Germany**

<https://www.gnm.de/your-museum-in-nuremberg/exhibitions/highlights/micro-worlds-tin-figures>

<https://www.gnm.de/your-museum-in-nuremberg/exhibitions/permanent-exhibition/toys>

Curated from 145,000 donated items from the world-class Swiss collection of Alfred R. Sulzer, in donation the items on display were mainly produced as children's toys between 1750 and the end of WWI. The most important production sites were Nuremberg and nearby Fürth. The tin figurines reflect many major media events and the cultural history of their day. Images of contemporary history and society were disseminated across Europe in the form of this mass medium. As playthings, these objects reveal how contemporary events and scenes from public life were translated into relatable imagery for children, and thus provide exciting insights into the contradictory and rapidly changing societies of the 1800s, as they entered the age of modern globalization. This special exhibit compliments and extends the museum's extensive permanent exhibition of toys and games from 1550 to the 20th century.



**Now through 23 February, 2025 Barbie: The Exhibition
Design Museum in London**

<https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/barbie-the-exhibition>

<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/london-exhibition-looks-barbies-design-evolution-over-65-years-2024-07-03/>

A major exhibition exploring the design evolution of one of the world's most famous dolls: Barbie®. Journey into the Barbie universe to discover rare, unique and innovative dolls dating from 1959 to the present day.

Now through 23 February 2025 Silk Roads Exhibition at British Museum, London

https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/silk-roads?gad_source=1&gclid=CjOKKQiAo5u6BhDJARIsAAVoDWu9TOgViEtV9to7Q5VZoh2AIRdwBquFKXh3mtqCJIWey_f8VCpwuFgaAjC5EALw_wcB



28 February – 2 March, 2025 Cannes Festival International des Jeux

<https://www.festivaldesjeux-cannes.com/en/>

The Cannes International Games Festival is an intensive week-long & highly interactive celebration of what is new in the international games industry. The festival welcomes game industry professionals (studios, publishers, authors, illustrators) along with gaming enthusiasts.





Now through March 3, 2025 Portraits of Childhood: Black Dolls from the collection of Deborah Neff
The National Museum of Toys/Miniatures
Kansas City, Missouri USA

<https://toyandminiaturemuseum.org/event/portraits-of-childhood-black-dolls/>

Now through March 9, 2025 Special Exhibit: 65 Years of Our Sandman - The Cult Figure as a Toy („65 Jahre UNSER SANDMÄNNCHEN - Die Kultfigur als Spielzeug“)

German Toy Museum

Sonneberg, Germany

<https://www.spielzeugmuseum-sonneberg.de/veranstaltungen/presse-medien/presseinformationen/65-jahre-unser-sandmaennchen-die-kultfigur-als-spielzeug/>



Now through March 16, 2025 Barbie: A Cultural Icon
Museum of Arts and Design (MAD) in New York City

<https://madmuseum.org/press/releases/new-york-city-museum-arts-and-design-presents-barbie-a-cultural-icon>

This exhibition charts the 65-year history of Barbie and the doll's global impact on fashion and popular culture through an expansive display of more than 250 vintage dolls, life-size fashion designs, advertisements and exclusive video interviews with the doll's designers.



Now through 16 March, 2025 Francis Alÿs - Ricochetes / Children's Games (1999–present)
Fundação de Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art Porto Portugal

<https://www.serralves.pt/en/ciclo-serralves/1810-francis-alyis-ricochetes/>

A great exhibition, with wonderful video and photographic images, ranging from war zones (Mosul, Iraq, Kiev, Ukraine) to Central Africa and Scandinavia. Play and Games that survive difficult contexts and promote happy interaction in spite of the surrounding crisis. A nice switch of theme for Francis Alÿs, who broadcasts very engaging smiles 😊.

Complementing the expansive universe of Children's Games, the exhibition presents some animation works, building on Alÿs's interest in play through a focused exploration of hand games. Play is integrated and encouraged in the galleries through dedicated playrooms. The exhibition Ricochetes is organized by Barbican, London with Fundação de Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art, Porto and is curated by Florence Ostende.





Now through April 1, 2025 A World of Games
Museum of World Culture Södra vägen 54, Göteborg
<https://www.varldskulturmuseet.se/en/exhibitions/a-world-of-games/#>

Interactive exhibition on games and gaming through the ages. Here, 4,000-year-old board games meet today's gaming culture, with games from around the world side by side.

Now through May 5, 2025 Level Up Writers and Gamers
American Writers Museum Chicago, Illinois
<https://americanwritersmuseum.org/level-up-writers-and-gamers/>

Spanning two gallery spaces at the museum, visitors will embark on a thrilling adventure into the world of game writing and explore the role of narrative and storytelling in gaming, from the 1970s to today.

Now through August 25., 2025 Out of the Toybox: The Toy Photography of Mitchel Wu
Science Museum Oklahoma in Oklahoma City, OK USA
<https://www.sciencemuseumok.org/out-toy-box>

Renowned toy photographer, Mitchel Wu spent the first half of his career as a product design and development lead for major entertainment companies, creating products for The Walt Disney Company, Warner Bros, Sony Pictures, Cirque Du Soleil and others. His current clients include The Walt Disney Company, Marvel Entertainment, Nick Jr., Warner Bros, schleich, Hasbro and Mattel. This first of its kind interactive exhibit features over 50 prints and visitors can use their creativity to create toy photos in an interactive photo studio opportunity, equipped with schleich® toys and pre-constructed dioramas. Photos can then be entered to win monthly prize packages on social media. For more about the exhibit and Wu's work see his interview published in the July 13th issue of *The Bloom Report* [here](#).



New Permanent exhibit dedicated to the puppets of Aube Breton, daughter of the surrealist André Breton.
Museu del Joguet de Catalunya
Figueres (The *Toy Museum of Catalonia Spain*)

The new exhibit is part of the extensive renovation of the museum completed in 2024.

<https://www.mjc.cat/en/>





Message from ITRA's Editor-in-Chief



Greetings to all incredible ITRA members across the globe! 🌍

As the year approaches its end, we're filled with gratitude and optimism for the journey we've shared together at ITRA. This vibrant community thrives because of your passion, ideas, and unwavering support.

We're excited to expand ITRA to reach further. Thanks are due to Rebecca Horrace, who created ITRA's official LinkedIn profile — your new hub for updates, discussions, and professional networking opportunities.

created Be sure to follow us and join the conversation!

We're also taking a moment to reflect and improve. A short survey was designed to capture your thoughts and feedback about the format and content of ITRA Newsletter. Thank you Paul Darvasi 😊 The voice of our readers matters, and we can't wait to see what exciting ideas you have in store!

A huge thank-you to Greta Pennell, and to our editorial board for bringing this edition of the newsletter to life. Your hard work and strong support ensure that we stay connected and informed.

As we move forward, we're brimming with hope and excitement. Let's continue to grow, collaborate, and make ITRA an even stronger force for progress. After all, the possibilities are as endless as the enthusiasm of this amazing community! In fact, we have a challenge for you:

We encourage you to send the editors articles, news of exhibits, calls for papers, invitations for collaboration, and professional accomplishments for the next newsletter.

Know of a new or forthcoming book that would be of interest to ITRA members?

Send us that information too and we will consider it for review.

Plans for the Spring 2025 issue are already underway, so the sooner we hear from you the better in order to ensure your ideas and contributions are included.

Contact the newsletter team at: itranewsltr@gmail.com

Here's to a year ahead filled with new ideas, new connections, and plenty of reasons to celebrate. Let's make it happen, ITRA family!

Warm wishes and high hopes,

Luísa Magalhães

P.S. Don't forget to fill out the survey—it's like sprinkling magic dust to make our newsletter sparkle!

