

ITRA NEWSLETTER
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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 we feature reviews and reflections from the 9th ITRA World Conference held last August at The Strong National Museum of Play in Rochester, New York USA, a playful introduction of the new 2023-2026 ITRA Board, information about the ITRA Prize winners for Outstanding Toy Research, the Members' Forum, book and exhibit reviews, announcements, and calls for papers. The newsletter has been formatted to allow the document to be read in either printed form or electronically. It is also available, along with past newsletters, under the [publications tab](#) on the ITRA website.



The ITRA website (<http://www.itratoyresearch.org>) is replete with information regarding ITRA's history. Updates and additions to the website are in the works and we welcome your suggestions to enhance it. We are also working to expand ITRA's presence on social media. If you don't already, please follow us on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/itra20180>) to get news of conferences, calls for papers, member accomplishments, and other toy-focused stories to span the gap between newsletters. You can help us expand ITRA's reach by sharing our posts across your social media outlets.

A huge thanks to everyone who sent contributions for this issue. The next volume is scheduled to publish in May, 2024 – please let us know what is happening in your corner of the toy world by emailing your toy stories, news, and suggestions for reviews to our editorial team at: itranswlttr@gmail.com

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GREETINGS FROM THE PRESIDENT OF ITRA



ITRA's first World Conference in 1996 was also my introduction to this amazing transdisciplinary community of toy researchers. As a not so young graduate student, I was honored to be invited to present my work and a bit terrified given that the program featured so many of my academic heroes. My fears were quickly laid to rest as I was warmly welcomed, energized by the rich conversations and support for my research. Little did I know (or even imagine) that I would find myself almost 30 years later elected as ITRA's 9th president.

Much like my first foray with ITRA, this new opportunity is humbling, an honor and a little scary, especially considering the tireless work and accomplishments of those on whose shoulders I now stand. However, much like then, the scary part is being laid to rest by the support and assistance so many of you have already given me. My sincere thanks to our outgoing President, Mark Allen, for his leadership especially the last five years through the turmoil of covid, his guidance and patience answering my many, many, many questions, and help with the transition of the website and other technical details. Similarly, I'm very appreciative that outgoing board members Jeffrey Goldstein and Suzy Seriff, along with past ITRA president and former board member Krister Svensson, continue to share their wisdom, encouragement, and are always willing to lend a hand or ear. And then there is our current board, about whom I could go on and on. We are very fortunate to have such a dynamic group of long-time, experienced board members combined with first timers (two of whom are brand new to ITRA) at the helm. Together they have already helped tackle some tough issues and identify strategic initiatives. I think you'll agree after reading their playful introductions later in the newsletter that they bring a wealth of knowledge, breadth of perspectives/disciplinary expertise, and creativity to take us to 2026 and beyond. Speaking of 2026, please mark your calendars for the 10th ITRA World Conference in Augsburg, Germany scheduled for 29-31 July.

It is my distinct honor and privilege to work with and for you all. I look forward to the next stage of my ITRA adventure as your President and helping to write the next chapters of our toy stories in service to the supportive and vibrant toy research community that is ITRA.

Finally, with the world continuing to heating up (both literally and figuratively) and news of the next tragedy, disaster, and existential threat ever scrolling across our screens I send my sincere wish that together we can harness our hopes and imaginations to help make 2024 more just, safe, sustainable and playful for all.

Toyfully,
Greta Pennell
University of Indianapolis
gpennell@uindy.edu



*From the 1st World Conference in Sweden to the 9th World Conference in the USA.
30 Years and Still Going Strong!*

MESSAGE FROM ITRA'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



As the newly elected Editor-in-Chief I am responsible for the ITRA Newsletter. This is a challenging responsibility both because it is a new experience to me and because I am charged with the task of envisioning, soliciting, and creating content for it. I have several ideas for new features and strands for the newsletter.

For starters, I would like the Newsletter to have a more academic focus, one that features some research materials, findings, and projects about toy research. This should help increase the possibility of networking and sharing research outcomes. As the Newsletter develops in this pathway, it will serve the purposes of creating new research clusters, both within ITRA and within other organizations, albeit professional and academic – therefore enlarging the scope of thematic areas of work and aiming at developing the wider world of toy production, toy design, creative play and learning inclusiveness. It may also forge the way for joint conference presentations, book projects and special issues of journals.

We will continue to include announcements regarding exhibits, conferences, and calls for papers (CfP); member profiles, and as you'll see in this edition of the newsletter a more streamlined "Member Forum" with news of your personal achievements and projects connected with toys and toy research. ITRA specific events and news will also be highlighted from time to time, as is the case in this issue with an overview and reflections from our 9th World Conference and our tribute to long time ITRA member, Doris Bergen who passed away this summer.

We will also continue to publish reviews of recent books and documentaries. As you'll see in this issue, the book reviews are formatted (both in terms of noting reviewer authorship and scope/length) more like that of a professional journal. If you are interested in reviewing a book for an upcoming newsletter – or have heard about a new book or documentary that you would like to see reviewed please let me know.

The Newsletter will also welcome short articles to give voice to a multidisciplinary academic perspective. Moreover, it welcomes stories from professionals from the Toy Industry, Museums, and Designers/Producers around the world. This will create space for academic sharing of insights and further strengthen the networking function of the newsletter.

I am very aware of how ambitious this sounds – but I am also very sure that this will be an effort worth trying. I'm hoping that ITRA members will embrace this project with all their expertise and playful mindsets. My sincere thanks to Vicki Thomas (UK) and Rebecca Horrace (USA) who have already jumped on the bandwagon and have agreed to serve on the editorial team. If you would like to join us and to help make this vision a reality, please contact me. And, even if you aren't able to commit to serving on the editorial team, I welcome your input as to what you would like to see in the newsletter. What content or kinds of features and articles would be useful and/or enjoyable for you? How can the newsletter assist you in advancing your toy work? As the Newsletter evolves, please let me know what you think of the changes.

I wish to express deep heartfelt appreciation for the supportive and caring attitude of our President, Greta Pennell, and the rest of the board without whose dedication and priceless help you would find it very difficult to receive this Winter Newsletter – may the force be with Greta forever, and may you enjoy this reading!

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INTRODUCING YOUR ITRA BOARD OF DIRECTORS FOR 2023-2026

Per the ITRA [constitution](#), a General Membership meeting is held during each World Conference to discuss organizational matters, approve policies and/or amendments to the ITRA constitution, receive reports by the officers, and hold elections for open seats on the board. The ITRA board is comprised of 9 people, each of whom is elected to a 6-year term on a staggered schedule (Article V Section 3). This year the four members who will continue to serve until the next ITRA General Membership meeting, scheduled to take place during the 10th World Conference in 2026 are: Gilles Brougère, Cleo Gougoulis, Rémi Leclerc, and Lieselotte Van Leeuwen. Nine candidates were nominated for the remaining five open seats. The election was overseen by outgoing President Mark Allen, with the paper votes tallied by Gilles, Cleo, and Rémi. The vote was extremely close, requiring a run-off to break a tie for the fifth spot on the board. The following were elected to serve on the board through to the 11th World Conference: Paul Darvasi, Canada; Luisa Magalhães, Portugal; Brian McCarty, USA; Volker Mehringer, Germany; Greta Pennell, USA.

Our heartfelt thanks to the outgoing board members Mark Allen, Jeffrey Goldstein, Koumudi Patil, and Suzy Seriff. Their leadership, critical insights, and due diligence these many years has been invaluable.

Following the membership meeting the new board met and the following were elected unanimously to the respective board offices: Greta Pennell, President; Cleo Gougoulis, Vice-President and Co-Treasurer, Gilles Brougère, Treasurer, and Luisa Magalhães, Secretary and Editor-in-Chief.

In place of the regular “Member Profile” feature of the newsletter, each board member has provided a brief and, by presidential request, non-traditional “toyful” bio. The goal here is to go beyond what comes up in a simple google search because they each bring so much more to the board than what is on their CVs. And so, without further adieu, please meet the energetic, creative, and passionate group of folks already hard at work to help lead and grow our toy research community.

Greta Pennell, ITRA President and Professor Emerita University of Indianapolis (USA)

I was always “that kid.” You know the one, the kid wiggling in their school desk, sprinting for the door at recess and getting into all sorts of things. I always seemed to be asking why, or perhaps more telling -- why not? All that wondering led me to earn degrees in Zoology, Education and Social/Developmental Psychology. My family joked that I was a professional student. While no longer a student per se, I’m always learning and welcome the next adventure or opportunity to cover new ground. My Dad probably started me on the toy research track as a very young girl when he gave me what is often classified as a boy toy - a Marx O-gauge electric train set. Dad was a switchman on the railroad and that made it extra special. I still have (and play with) that train set. Working as Santa’s elf years later for my doctoral research on children’s gender-typed toy preferences led to me to my first ITRA conference (1996). I’ve continued with both by expanding my research on gender and toys to include pet toys, designing and teaching an award-winning course for first year students called “Doing Gender in Toyland,” and serving on the ITRA board since 2014. Along with all this toying around, my professional service includes officer positions with the Association for Humanist Sociology, executive director of Uindy’s Honors College, 5 years as an accreditation counselor for the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), and Board membership for a local environmental advocacy group.



Cleo Gougoulis, ITRA Vice-President, Founder and Professor University of Patras (Greece)



After my retirement in August 2022, I continue to teach at the Department of History and Archaeology, University of Patras. I began my academic journey at the University of Athens (1973-1978) studying Philology, then Folklore at the University of Thessaloniki (1978-1980), and Social Anthropology at University College London (MSc 1986, Ph. D. 2004). My postgraduate studies were partly sponsored by the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation and revolved around material culture studies, folklore studies, anthropology and museum studies, focusing on Greek children’s culture and the anthropology of play, games and toys. Having spent part of my childhood years in Montreal, Canada, the favorite toy of my childhood was a miniature hockey stadium, which served-when we returned to Athens-for the re-enactment of football Eurocup games with my brother and our friends in the neighborhood. My interest in toys was initially sparked by

my work as curator of the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation's museum collection of folk toys and soon expanded to commodification of toys in Greece, the study of the Greek toy market and the use of global toys in Greek children's play, themes that I further explored in her Master and Ph. D thesis. A founding member of ITRA I have served the ITRA Board as treasurer (2003-2023), president (2006-2011, 2013-14), and currently as vice president and co-treasurer. In 2005 I was awarded the BRIO prize for my research on Greek children's play. My current research interests regarding toys focus on playful experiences of children in toy exhibitions, on the historical development of Modern Greek terminology on toys, on the relationship between toys and affect and between making and using toys. Editor of a bilingual special volume of the journal *Ethnographica* on play (vol 9, 1993) and co-editor of two books on Greek children's play (2000, 2008) I recently edited three special sections on children's play in the *Antiquity* (vol. 132/2020), in *Byzantium* (vol. 133/2020) and the *Contemporary era* (v. 134/2020) of the journal *Αρχαιολογία και Τέχνες* (Archaeology and Arts).

Gilles Brougère, A Toy Researcher by chance; ITRA Treasurer, Founder and Professor Emeritus Université Sorbonne Paris Nord (France)

My research into games and play began in the late 1970s, as part of a group study in ethnology. We were trying to understand the social, cultural and technological logic underlying the development of games and toys. The results were published. In it, I highlighted the changes in the field of board games as a result of the importance taken on by what I called "jeux d'édition," copyrighted games, showing the role of material in the transmission of rules. I was surprised to discover that young researchers had found this ancient text and were quoting it, which led me to republish it recently. (<https://journals.openedition.org/sdj/2933>).



As you'll have gathered, it was quite by chance that I came across games and toys. I'm not particularly a gamer, and although I played with toys as a child, that doesn't mean that I was ready to become a researcher in the field... because there would be a lot more. Then, again by chance, I joined a team at a young university in a suburb of Paris that wanted to develop a centre devoted to teaching and research into play, games and playthings. I therefore developed research on play and learning (and beyond that, leisure and learning), and on toys as part of children's material culture. I have directed a master's degree in *Sciences du jeu* (play and game studies). I co-edit an international French-language journal called *Sciences du Jeu*. I was one of the founders of ITRA and, to my great surprise, its first (and third after the resignation of the second) president.

Luisa Magalhães, ITRA Secretary and Editor-In-Chief, Assistant Professor Catholic University of Portugal – Braga (Portugal)



Yes, this is me, Luísa, at 6 years, with my brand-new green boat, really happy for being at seaside, ready to meet some cold Atlantic water in my bare tiny feet. Within some years, I would become a mother of three, always eager to play and laugh, always longing for buying new toys ☺ and to carry on some interesting research topics within which the complementarity between analogue and digital play would be paramount.

In 2011, at the Bursa Congress, I proudly became an ITRA Board member and in 2014 hosted the 7th ITRA World Congress, *Toys and Communication* at my University, in Braga, Portugal, together with a crew of fantastic students ☺. Later, under the guidance and expertise of Jeffrey Goldstein, I edited *Toys and Communication*, published by Palgrave Macmillan.

Much to my joy, I'm returning to the ITRA Board, now as Secretary and Editor-in-chief, starting in 2023. Here I am now, wishing you all joyful season greetings, with my newly graduated students from the 2022 class!



Paul Darvasi, Gold Bug Interactive & OISE | University of Toronto (Canada)

Play and learning (aren't they the same thing?) are my twin passions, and lie at the heart of everything I do. I teach about games and play at the University of Toronto, where I am a founding member of the PlayLab. I make games and playful experiences in my role as CEO and co-founder of Gold Bug Interactive, and I bring players together as the Executive Director of the Serious Play Conference. While based in Canada, I've had the pleasure to work with organizations around the world, including UNESCO, the US Department of Education, and diverse NGOs and cultural institutions. I mobilize knowledge about the power of games, play and learning with speaking, writing, and research, and I am a relentless media literacy crusader. My work has been featured on PBS, NPR, CBC, the Huffington Post, and Polygon, among others. When all is said and done, I'll always be that kid in the basement, sifting through a box of LEGOs and building a project one piece at a time.



Rémi Leclerc, Founder and Director, PolyPlayLab, Hong Kong



People toy. Across generations, across borders, forms are chosen, forms are shaped, playthings found, playthings made; myriad lines making a point. The point? Play foreshadows culture, while design shapes it. Lines? Lines I toy with in a Design Play, with Play a friendly Trojan hobby horse into Design.

Made in Hong Kong, then 'into' Asia, Europe and Africa, the Americas and Oceania, I play with people and with creatures, play with things and with 'thinks.' Run, fly, swim, drift; mountain, city, forest, sea; at dusk, at dawn, at day and night; I feel I play I think I live.

Moving through the years from Design for Play to Play for Design, I investigate beneficial agencies linking Design, Play, Education, being the first to leverage play to enhance design education, research, and practice in HK. Anchoring my work in diverse cultures, I revisit interactivity conventions, fuse design with social accountability, collaborating with organisations North, East, South, West, to develop systems for play and everyday: STEAM, sustainability, psychogeography, identity, and therapy projects—work we shared and won over 30 awards for, HK and internationally.

I design images, objects, bodies, and spaces, weaving rules and tropes with tools and props, context probe and culture map, deep dive for whimsy quirks, do playworks and run playshops.

I create and teach curricula for primary, secondary, tertiary, and continuing education, for a dozen or for hundreds, with students and with teachers, with peers and with partners.

So there ipsofacto: Tinker Teacher Seeker Eye, I PolyPlay a Design Play, my favorite toy the everyday.

Brian McCarty, War Toys®, Los Angeles (USA)

Photographer, Fulbright Specialist, and the Executive Director of the War Toys nonprofit organization, Brian is devoted to helping children affected by war. He is a recent addition to the ITRA board of directors but a lifelong "toy geek" and no stranger to the industry. He's spent the last twenty-five years splitting his time between personal photo series and commissioned work for clients like: Mattel, Hasbro, Disney, Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon. His photographs of toys have been exhibited by museums internationally, acquired by prominent collectors, and written about by *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Guardian*, *Wired*, *Al-Jazeera*, *Reuters*, *Huffington Post*, and countless other publications around the world. Brian has appeared on CNN, ABC News, Fox News, NPR Morning Edition, PBS News Hour, and BBC World Service. His work has been used on billboards in Times Square and stolen by ISIS and used for propaganda. Brian understands just how much toys shape and reflect our culture. Picking a favorite toy from childhood is no easy feat, but Kenner's Millennium Falcon playset was definitely in the top 10, and receiving one from "Santa" made Xmas 1979 all the more special.



Volker Mehringer, Lecturer Educational Sciences, University of Augsburg (Germany)



After finishing my doctorate on the integration of migrant children in German elementary schools, I was looking for a new research field. Teaching mostly in the field of child education, play and toys were already key topics in my lectures. But my interest in toys didn't start there. I grew up in the 80s, one of the best and most defining decades for toys (perhaps everyone feels like that about their own childhood). I especially loved He-Man and the Masters of the Universe, and I still do today. There's a He-Man and Skeletor standing on my desk, watching, and menacing me to do a good job 😊. Otherwise, they will throw me in their slime pit...

I remember how difficult it was to convince my parents to buy me a He-Man figure. For me Masters of the Universe were the best toys in the world. For my parents, they were just a bunch of ugly and violent fantasy-bodybuilders that cost too much. Even then, I wondered how could our views of a good toy could be so different. Ultimately, that question framed a major research project, SAKEF (Spielzeugbewertung und -auswahl durch Kinder, Eltern und Fachkräfte; Toy Evaluation and Selection by Children, Parents and Professionals), conducted with my dear colleague, Wiebke Waburg, who is also a child at heart. From there I rapidly transformed into a dedicated toy researcher and that transformation is far from over. In the last decade I've examined digital toys and questions related to diversity and toys. At the moment I am doing an observational study on the number of toys and its effects on play. I'm also developing a scheme of analysis to measure the emotions of people playing a board game.

I am so happy and honored to be a part of the ITRA Board. The conferences in Paris and in Rochester were like a professional homecoming for me. All the nice people, the great and interesting presentations and talks and the shared fascination for one the best things in the world: toys. I hope, I can help, maintaining that beautiful home for all those, who are interested in toys. Hopefully I will see you in Augsburg in 2026.

Lieselotte van Leeuwen, Senior Lecturer, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg (Sweden)



Not being trapped in one specific role was the thing I remember from playing as a child – we had dolls and Meccano, my favorites were my dad's toolbox and an old coffee tin filled with buttons of all kinds. All the things you could do with them.... My PhD in developmental psychology at the Radboud University Nijmegen (NL) was about tool use in young children. After that I joined a project at the University hospital in Bern (Switzerland) investigating emerging parent-child interactions using toys. I got more and more interested in the role of objects/toys in those interactions. 'Toy research' was what I typed in the then young Internet of the 1990ies. An E-mail address in Sweden popped up and after some conversations I packed my bags and went to the 1996 ITRA conference in Halmstad, Sweden. Without that I would have probably not pursued my interest in the way I did. My research topics included play as a life-time activity; the 'translation' of psychological concepts into design for play; tools for play and expression in children with disabilities, participatory/co-design with children of all abilities. I did this as a senior lecturer in Psychology at Sunderland University, UK, in a number of EU and UK-based research projects and as a consultant for the toy industry. Currently I'm a senior lecturer in the MFA course 'Child Culture Design' at Gothenburg University, SE. The very existence of this course in design has its roots in those very early emails connecting me to the people of ITRA. The essence of my work is to support freedom for interpretation in interacting with the social and material environment. Maybe it is still about what I learned as a child....

9th ITRA WORLD CONFERENCE REVIEW



Typically, ITRA holds its World Conference every three years, but as with so many things that cycle was disrupted by Covid. Five years is a long time, but somehow 2018 and the 8th World Conference held in Paris felt even longer ago than that. Being able to be together in person again to celebrate ITRA's 30th anniversary at 9th World Conference was a joy. And, there couldn't have been a more perfect venue for ITRA's first conference outside of Eurasia than The Strong National Museum of Play, home to the Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives with Brian's personal archives and nearly 230,000 volumes related to the history and study of play, the National Toy Halls of Fame, and the World Video Game Hall of Fame located in the heart of Rochester, New York's Neighborhood of Play. Our sincerest thanks go to the amazing team at The Strong for both their attention to every logistical and other details and for their gracious hospitality and warmest of welcomes. A special thanks to Steve Dubnik, President and CEO at The Strong and Chris Bensch, Vice President of Collections and Chief Curator for their unflagging support from day one. Not only did they hold the keys (sometimes quite literally) to our successful conference, they opened doors for future collaborations toward our shared purpose of being the internationally recognized sources for research on the historical and cultural power of playthings throughout our lives and worlds.

Prior to the official start of the conference, 41 delegates attended the excursion to Fisher Price's corporate headquarters where they had the extraordinary opportunity to tour the Heritage Center (a museum of all things Fisher Price), see the PlayLab Research Facility in action, and learn about their design processes based on examples for infant/preschool toys, Imaginex, and PowerWheels. We deeply appreciate Chuck Scothorn and his team at Fisher Price for their collaborative spirit and warm welcome. Even though it was a long day, coming on the heels of jet lag inducing travel for many, the bus ride back to Rochester was humming with chatter as we reflected on our experiences and looked forward to the coming days of the conference.

From antiquities to AI, baby dolls to board games, character toys to card games, toys in museums to the toys in the marketplace ITRA's 9th World Conference featured keynote speakers, workshops, symposia and more than 80 paper presentations (Note: the [complete program](#) is available on the ITRA website). We also celebrated ITRA's 30th Anniversary with a gala evening in the Toy Halls of Fame and E-game Revolution gallery where delegates enjoyed a walk down memory lane with some iconic toys and stories of their designers, tested their electronic game prowess, and enjoyed local culinary delights including a gourmet "Tater Tot" bar served under the watchful eyes of Mr. Potato Head. With 95 delegates from 20 countries across 5 continents all coming together to share their work on the power of playthings the conference highlighted a wide array of cutting-edge toy research, design, and pedagogy. We were greatly assisted in our efforts to shine a global spotlight on the many ways toys matter, by Amber Brewer and the *Visit Rochester* organization. Their assistance with local arrangements and promotion were invaluable. News stories about the conference appeared on almost every local broadcast media outlet in the Rochester area. Here are links to just a few of the stories:



<https://www.visitrochester.com/convention-blog/post/international-toy-research-association-hosts-world-conference-in-rochester/>

<https://foxrochester.com/news/good-day-rochester/toy-strong-play-conference-museum-playmaker-rochester>

<https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nys/rochester/good-news/2023/08/10/international-toy-conference-happening-at-strong-museum>

<https://www.whec.com/local/the-strong-is-hosting-international-conference-on-toy-research/>

Tim Walsh, a 33-year veteran of the toy industry and CEO of *The Playmakers USA*, kicked off the conference in grand style and set the stage for an exciting three days. Tim graciously arranged to have his keynote address, "Serious Play," recorded and has allowed us to share it with you [here](#). From there we were off and running with full days of sessions culminating on the last day with Paul Darvasi's thought-provoking keynote "How They Race in Los Santos: A Critical Decolonization of the World's Most Controversial Game" that had delegates talking into the evening. And, what a delightful last night it was as Organizing Committee member, Karl Rosengren treated us to an All-American backyard Bar-B-Que at the Witmer House, complete with lawn games and wonderful performances by a jazz trio comprised of students from the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester.

Following are reflections by three delegates, summaries of the Outstanding Toy Research Prize Winner's work, and selected images from the conference. There were many other highlights and memorable moments -- too many to fully recap, but are reflected in delegates' comments that the conference was "ever so welcoming" and that they felt that had "found their tribe." In the end, the ultimate success of the conference was due to the efforts of the entire ITRA community – to whom your program chair is forever grateful.

SPECIAL FEATURE – Our Work is Child's Play: Reflections on the ITRA Conference

Vicki Thomas, University of Northampton, Northampton, UK

The ITRA Conference 2023 was a very warm and welcoming event. Delegates arrived from all corners of the globe with stories of their travels. Gathering at The Strong seemed particularly relevant, not primarily for its astonishing collection but because of its encouraging role in toy and play research. Let me expand a little for those who could not make the trip.

Most of us stayed in a brand-new hotel adjacent to The Strong. Greta Pennell, Conference Chair did face challenges with speakers delayed by storms in New York and a local delegate testing positive for Covid, after the trip to East Aurora, New York to visit Fisher Price.

The tour of Fisher Price was fascinating. Half was in the Play Lab research centre, where they invite families and caregivers to bring their children to play, from the tiniest babies to pre-schoolers. We also toured their museum/showroom. There was much enjoyment in seeing how some of the oldest and classic toys from our childhoods within the context of a changing market. I thought of Hilary Page's book *Playtime in the First Five Years* (1953) because his ideas and the toys he produced based on child psychology using the new plastic materials of the day were echoed in the work at Fisher Price from the 1950's. At other ITRA conferences, we have visited toy collections at museums – but at Fisher Price the link between child psychology and materials used in the toys was obvious following key development lessons shared through toys with families.



There was an opportunity to talk to the design and research teams during lunch and then again when Ron Asbach and Tim Trapp gave a joint paper in the same session as mine on the last day. Thanks are due to everyone that made the visit possible. My own paper about sustainability is certainly a very current issue for Fisher Price. There were several other papers which had an environmental focus (e.g., *Wild Play: An Exploration into the Design of Eco-Fiction Character Toys* by Tanya Marriott from New Zealand), but I think design and social issues linked to toys were more keenly discussed in the sessions I attended. Gender issues, inclusivity (Luisa Magalhães), playthings in indigenous cultures (Apirom Kongkanan), toys as helping adults and children with their well-being (Anne D. Williams) and toys as a form of protest and expression times of upheaval (Rémi Leclerc) and war (Brian McCarty).



Behind the scenes of the world's largest and most comprehensive collection of historical materials related to play with Chris Bens.

The sessions and some social gatherings were held within the Museum and adults were allowed – even given-tokens to play – after hours. The Strong was packed with families having fun in all the galleries. The Strong team – including Christopher Bens, were very welcoming to us and opened up their collections, asked for our input and arranged for tours of the library too. The library seemed particularly important as it holds Brian Sutton-Smith's personal library and archive. Rémi Leclerc and Katriina Heljakka both spoke enthusiastically about working in the library as research fellows partly funded by The Strong. Both said how valuable their collection is to toy researchers.

The Strong's toy collection is very broad covering traditional dolls and games but also computer gaming and TV game shows. It is very much an American collection and the difference in culture and history was obvious to an outsider.

It felt more like an indoor theme park in places than a toy museum. It was not a museum of childhood nor was it a junior design/creativity Museum as the Young V&A in the UK seems to be pitching itself. It seemed a celebration of the commercialization of play in American culture. I wish I had had more time to explore and observe. There were several papers on toys in museums in parallel sessions so I couldn't attend them all; always a problem at conferences.

Our Work is Child's Play ~ continued

Rochester was very welcoming. Learning about the links to Kodak for The Strong and the Rycroft origins of Fisher Price added another layer to why it was an important place for ITRA to hold its Conference in this corner of New York state. I came away feeling that toy design is seen as a commercial invention to be exploited, that adults are allowed to be playful, so toys in the US are not reserved for the child. It is a commercial business - the social elements we discussed in the sessions were less obvious in the galleries. A light was thrown on the acceptance of authorship and external inventors in the US, where the designer is compensated by a royalty.

It was wonderful to see and discuss with everyone I had met before at three previous ITRA events. I made some wonderful new colleagues/friends and that encourages me to continue toy research and design. The Strong was and will remain a great resource for all of us. I may have to make a return visit and read the papers I missed.

SPECIAL FEATURE –A First Time Experience at ITRA 2023 (Rochester, NY)

Ozlem Cankaya, MacEwan University Canada

For the past 15 years, I have been passionate about understanding cognitive development through research. Children's play with toys offers a unique opportunity to explore their cognitive growth. A friend, aware of my dedication to research, shared an advertisement for the 2023 International Toy Research Association (ITRA) Conference and encouraged me to consider it. I was intrigued.

Attending the ITRA for the first time was a transformative experience I would like to be part of every time! Held at Rochester's Strong Museum of Play, the event was flawlessly organized, from venue selection to speakers, fostering an atmosphere conducive to scholarly exchange. Being surrounded by exhibits dedicated to the history and impact of toys and play made the conference environment uniquely exciting. The presentation topics were diverse and ranged from traditional toy-making practices to the latest advancements in digital play and museum displays, showcasing the broad scope of current toy research. What struck me most was how these talks catalyzed interdisciplinary discussions. Some sessions brought together psychologists, educators, designers, and industry professionals, fostering a rich, multi-dimensional understanding of the subject.



Fine Collectibles or Playthings? And The Golden Age of Dolls-just two of the many displays of dolls at The Strong. Photos compliments of Ozlem Cankaya.

I was particularly impressed by how the conference stimulated dialogue and collaboration. The keynote speaker, Tim Walsh, was particularly memorable for his engaging and insightful presentation. His firsthand experiences created a captivating narrative. Walsh was dynamic in his delivery and actively participated in conference activities, sparking genuine discussions with participants. Similarly, Dr. Paul Darvasi made a significant impact through his eagerness to engage in conversations. This was particularly evident during the gala dinner, which provided an invaluable opportunity for participants to engage in in-depth conversations and explore potential collaborative projects. During the structured Q&A sessions or the more informal networking events, the atmosphere was conducive for sharing ideas, debating methodologies, and laying the groundwork for future research partnerships. I have started collaborating with two other attendees on research projects already.

My experience at the conference significantly expanded my knowledge and deepened my understanding of toys and their essential role in development from multiple angles. The gathering of experts, scholars, and enthusiasts committed to advancing the field was truly inspiring. As a first-time attendee, the conference surpassed my expectations. I left Rochester with a renewed sense of purpose, excited about the collaborations and research opportunities that opened up during this engaging event.

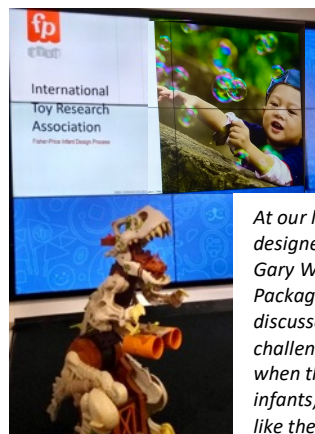


Agenor Pereira da Costa and Ana Valéria de Figueiredo (Brazil) are greeted by Ma & Pa Berenstain Bear as they arrive for the 30th Anniversary Gala Celebration.

There was no shortage of fun and competitive spirit as ITRA delegates leveled up their skills in E-Game Revolution.



Opening Night Gala Dinner Celebrating ITRA's 30th Anniversary.



At our luncheon with designers from Fisher Price Gary Weber, Design & Packaging Design VP discussed the special challenges of designing toys when the end user (i.e., infants) can't tell you if they like the toy or not.



Paul Darvasi delivering the closing keynote reminded us "youth live IN not with media," and since toys also live in media we "can't and shouldn't separate media and toys."



A perfect summer day to celebrate a successful conference and say Auf Wiedersehen until 2026 when we will meet in Augsburg, Germany for the ITRA's 10th World Conference.

SPECIAL FEATURE –A Special Trip to Learn About Toy Research at Fisher-Price

Jim Pennell, University of Indianapolis USA

As a social researcher for many years, I often wondered what kinds of research went into decisions about the production of toys. Certainly, sales possibilities, safety, fun, and perhaps learning opportunities are important to a toy manufacturer, but how are chances of success in these areas improved prior to manufacture and even beyond? The day before the ITRA conference formally started, forty-one of us set out to Fisher-Price's research center in East Aurora, NY. In addition to the Play Lab research facility and corporate offices, the campus includes the Heritage Center toy archive and a toy store. Only the toy store is open to the public.

I was stunned by what we observed and learned. What struck me the most was both the sophistication and the amount of research being conducted there and at other sites, including in China. I have never seen that many dedicated research spaces at any university research center. The research facility has observation rooms with one-way mirrors that also are wired for multiple video cameras and audio recordings. Families bring their children to play with toys while being observed and recorded. We were told that across the globe, Fisher Price has about 10,000 participants in their various research efforts. Even as a sociologist, I rarely see an "n" like that, much less with observational studies. There was also a summer program with a spacious room that offered a different kind of setting where teachers could interact with children while observing and being observed. We learned that they also do in-home research with families.

In addition to informative presentations during a nicely prepared lunch, we had the opportunity to visit the toy archive that has a museum-style space with toys Fisher Price has produced over the ninety years of its existence. We all seemed to gravitate to the toys of our childhood and the stories started flowing. We also had an opportunity to visit the toy store on site with our 20% discount. I probably could have used a bit more time there but didn't want to miss the bus!



One thing that ITRA might consider is to try to tap into the research opportunities at Fisher Price. The proprietary nature of the research being done makes it tricky to do publishable research, but the opportunity to learn and perhaps consider a research career outside academia through internships or fellowships might appeal to some ITRA members, including student members. Perhaps older research data and reports could be made available for academic researchers to use. I suspect there is so much we don't know about toys and play that is buried in the archives of Fisher Price and other toy manufacturers. It would be a tremendous opportunity to dig through some of that.



2023 ITRA PRIZE FOR OUTSTANDING TOY RESEARCH

The purpose of the ITRA-BTHA Prize is to recognize outstanding toy research. To qualify for the prize, the work must have been conducted or published since the previous ITRA World Conference and be submitted by the researcher or nominated by a member of ITRA. Papers, either published or unpublished, in any area of toy research, are eligible. Research on the uses, design, and effects of toys in child development, education, science, and medicine are considered for the awards. Theoretical and historical papers will also be considered as long as these are linked to potential research.

The ITRA Prizes for outstanding toy research were awarded on 10th of August, 2023 at the ITRA World Conference in Rochester, New York USA.

Mark Allen began the ceremonies by thanking the British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA) for their long-standing and generous support of the award since its establishment in 2008. As chair of the Awards Committee, Mark thanked the other committee members, Barry Kudrowitz (USA), Koumudi Patil (India) and Lieselotte van Leeuwen (Sweden) for their diligence, in-depth discussions, and careful evaluation of each submission. The committee based their decision on the submissions' originality, significance of the work, creativity, methodology, clarity of presentation, and importance. Mark noted that the field of nominees was exceptionally strong this year, and that selecting just one senior and one junior prize winner from so many outstanding candidates was quite challenging.

Mark introduced Rebecca Deeming and Matt Jones from the BTHA who presented the junior and senior awards respectively.



From Left to Right: Matt Jones, Janaïne Rolim, Antonietta Loffredo, and Rebecca Deeming

The 2023 ITRA Junior Prize was awarded to Janaïne dos Santos Rolim for her Masters thesis “Female Empowerment: A Multimodal Analysis of Representations of Women in Images of Barbie Dolls' Packages” completed under the direction of Danielle Barbosa Lins de Almeida at the Universidade Federal da Paraíba, João Pessoa (UFPB), João Pessoa, Brazil.

Drawing on the Grammar of Visual Design of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 [2006]), and on the System of Transitivity and ideational metafunction of Halliday's Systemic-Functional Linguistics (1978; 1985), Ms. Rolim's thesis is a semiotic analysis of Barbie and her packaging in order to examine female representation in relation to traits of empowerment. Her focused on five dolls selected from a set of 84 that based on information on the package suggested independence and the potential for empowerment. Evidence of empowerment themes were then considered in relation to claims associated with historical waves of feminism. The analysis revealed several forms of power expressed through the packaging and accessories and material qualities of each of the five dolls. Specifically, the women represented by Barbie have the power over, that is, the power to be leaders and guide others who have less power in order to achieve their goals. But not only that, they have power to make decisions, to go after their dreams, find solutions to problems and to be creative. Also, they have power with others, they can share objectives with other for a common good to all. And, finally, they have the power within themselves, that is, to change their lives and the lives of others, evidencing the initial purpose of her creator Ruth Handler.



Ms. Rolim was the first person in the university's Postgraduate Programme in Linguistics to write and defend her thesis in both English and Portuguese. Her research also has a special connection to The Strong in that many of the images of American Barbie Doll packages analyzed came from the museum's collection. Ms. Rolim is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in Linguistics and Social Practices at Federal University of Paraíba (UFPB) in Brazil.

The 2023 ITRA Senior Prize was awarded to Antonietta Loffredo an Independent Scholar, pianist and musicologist from Como, Italy for her detailed historical book *The Toy Piano: From the Playroom to the Concert Platform* published by UT Orpheus, Bologna (Italy), 2018 ISBN: 978-88-8109-511-7. (https://www.utorpheus.com/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=3450)

The committee noted that they were impressed by the originality of Ms. Loffredo's work combined with the interplay between her analyses of serious musical scores and patent drawings while juxtaposing these tiny instruments as both plaything and real thing for education and entertainment to be played and played with. Indeed, the underlying premise of this book that the "toy piano is not a toy" goes to the heart of a recurring question at ITRA conferences – that is "What is a toy?"

Starting with an overview of the physical characteristics, components and mechanisms of toy piano, Ms. Loffredo traces the history of toy pianos and their precursors in Europe, the migration of the toy piano to the United States along with how it was positioned by manufactures and advertisers. This little piano was different from the standard piano both for its small dimensions and for its sound produced by hammers striking different length metal rods. From there the book looks at music composed for the toy piano and its acceptance and performance on concert stages around the country. Into the first decade of the 21st century, several cultural and musical initiatives around the world have increased and spread repertoire dedicated to the toy piano, making it a key player in the contemporary music scene. All aspects of the toy piano are discussed in this book which offers a comprehensive source of information to those interested in widening their knowledge of this topic. After detailing the origin of the



toy piano, its constructive characteristics and its challenging acoustic behavior, the book provides an extensive overview of the scored repertoire, as well as an analysis of the cultural contexts which saw the toy piano continue the tradition of toy instruments in art music.

In her presentation at the conference, Ms. Loffredo provided a brief tour through the cultural and musical contexts that allowed a "toy" created to emulate the adult world to become an instrument in its own right in contemporary classical and art music scenes. She followed her insightful talk by performing three pieces on her toy piano that she brought with her to the conference – *In Veils* by Erwin Deleux, *Black* by Paolo Ricci and *Cobblestones* by Paul Smith to provide attendees with a taste of the magical sound produced by this fascinating instrument.

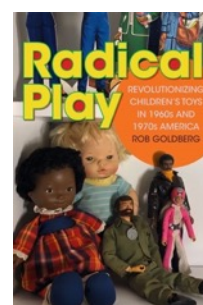
BOOK REVIEWS

Book Review: *Radical Play: Revolutionizing Children's Toys in 1960s and 1970s America.*
Reviewed by: Stephen Jacobs, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, NY USA

Rob Goldberg, 2023. *Radical Play: Revolutionizing Children's Toys in 1960s and 1970s America.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2023. 312 pp. 33 illustrations. \$US 28.95 (sb)
ISBN-10: 1478025115 <https://www.dukeupress.edu/radical-play>

Goldberg's fascinating, and well-researched book tells three tales under one umbrella. The main topic is the impact of the socio-political changes during the 60's and 70's in the U.S. and their impact on toys, play and the toy industry. It documents the interplay between grassroots and national groups in the anti-war, civil rights and women's rights movements and their efforts to eliminate toys of war, put non-White dolls and action figures onto toy stores shelves and to establish other roles in children's play for women beyond those of mother and housewife.

Goldberg's introduction states that he had three goals in writing the book, "...to expand our understanding of the 1960s and 1970s progressive and radical politics by returning to the reform of children's media culture...to place business and cultural industry at the center of our understanding of the era's familiar cultural upheaval and spirit of dissent... and make the claim that toys produced for children not only illustrate cultural change but also help shape it" (pp. 7-8).



Each of the three political cultural efforts Goldberg describes began as a grass-roots effort, that initially met with resistance, then found champions within the mainstream industry to provide support, with varying degrees of social consciousness, enlightened self-interest or jockeying for position in each case.

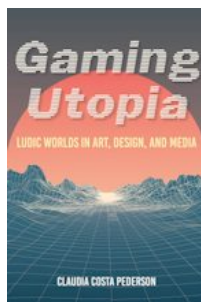
In the first chapters of the book “Parenting for Peace,” “Parents for Responsibility in the Toy Industry” (PRITI) and “No More War Toys” Goldberg tells what might be the least well-known of these three movements, in part perhaps because it was the earliest of the three and had the least enduring impact. For example, roughly two years after groups like the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Women Strike for Peace (WSP) began protesting outside of Toy Fair, holding press conferences, and performing other actions, Lionel responded with a “Sane Toys for Healthy Kids” campaign, when just a few years earlier they had marketed train cars equipped with missile launchers. The recently introduced (to the US) Lego company soon followed suit with an ad campaign stating that their toy didn’t “...shoot or go boom or bang or rat-tat-tat-tat. It’s name is Lego. It makes things” (p. 71).

In “Integrating the Doll Shelves” and “Black Power in Toy Land,” Goldberg covers the history of Black dolls beginning in the early part of the 20th century to track their rise, disappearance and return in the marketplace within the shifting cultural and political zeitgeist. Early on black dolls were merely dolls that were designed on the same “bodies” and faces as white dolls, just with different skin tone pigments. In the mid-Sixties with calls for “ethnically correct design” (p. 86), Black dolls featured natural-looking Black hair and facial features. There were also more culturally appropriately represented dolls across ethnicities. One of leaders in this space was Remco, a toy company that was started by reskinning and/or remodeling surplus military walkie-talkies. Not only did Remco take a leading role in the creation of these dolls, they extended (and promoted) their support of “toy integration” with a \$5 million television ad campaign featuring Black and white dolls together in the same ad (p. 92). Remco, didn’t stop there. They also ran ads highlighting their hiring of Black designer and established artist, Annuel McBurrows, to design and oversee the development of a line of four new dolls billed as “the first truly authentic colored dolls” (p. 105).

Later, an effort to support new Black-owned businesses in South Central Los Angeles, Operation Bootstrap, had under its umbrella Shindana Toys, (Shindana is Swahili for “compete”) a producer of dolls that featured natural-looking Black hair and facial features. Shindana would eventually produce board games as well. LA-based Mattel was a financial supporter of Shindana, despite the fact they had their own “Black Doll products. Mattel provided direct financial support and arranged for additional loans through one of the Black-owned banks in LA. Goldberg tells us that Mattel “Surprisingly expressed no interest in maintaining a controlling voice in the new manufacturing outfit’s management, or an official voice of any sort” (p. 129).

In the last two chapters, “Equal Play” and “Feminist Toys,” the reader learns of the efforts of a number of previous players like PRITI joining forces with the National Organization of Women and others to better represent women’s roles in society on the toy shelves too.

Goldberg’s analysis does not shy away from laying out the motivations of all involved across the spectrum of change in the book, or the often key motivator for industry to improve general outreach to the primarily upper middle class purchaser of toys. For anyone with an interest in the history of the US Toy Industry, Goldberg’s book is a great read and offers a look into a segment of that history that has rarely been discussed or explored until now.



Book Review: *Gaming Utopia: Ludic Worlds in Art, Design, and Media*

Reviewed by: Paul Davarsi, *Gold Bug Interactive & OISE* | *University of Toronto, Toronto Canada*

Claudia Costa Pederson. 2021. *Gaming Utopia: Ludic Worlds in Art, Design, and Media*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press. 280 pp.; 27 illustrations/\$US 85.00 (hb), \$US28.00 (sb), \$US 27.99 (e-book)
ISBN-10: 0253054494; <https://iupress.org/9780253054494/gaming-utopia/>

The origin story of modern video games is one of dominance. They emerged from the white male worlds of military bases and science labs and marched in lockstep with the advent of home computers to become the world’s most lucrative entertainment industry. With tens of thousands of games in circulation, game-inspired films, endless merchandise, cross-overs, streaming, and e-sports, play has never been more successfully commodified. It’s fitting that a hegemonic cultural product with so much market power is produced

and consumed in a broth of dominant categories. And, as is often the case with sustained dominance, the history of video games is one marked by violence, conflict, and controversy.

There is, however, another side to the story.

In *Gaming Utopias: Ludic Worlds in Art, Design, and Media*, Claudia Costa Pederson offers a compelling re-examination of video games that challenges the prevailing narrative of games as male-dominated, violence-centric entertainment. Pederson's book, published by Indiana University Press in April 2021, effectively interweaves the advent of video games with critical art history to reveal a rich tapestry of social commentary, art, and activism. The book renders an alternate genealogy of games, rooted in the utopian impulses and emancipatory politics of avant-garde art over the past century.

A work of art history, *Gaming Utopias* follows a chronological survey of successive politicized art movements through the lens of ludic activism. It culminates with the fifth and final chapter's focus on contemporary efforts to develop video games designed for social betterment. While squarely academic in tone and intention, Pederson's style is crisp, lucid and informed, and each chapter is grounded in fascinating case studies that make for an engaging read.

Utopia famously means “no place” in Ancient Greek, underscoring that the search for a perfect society is, ultimately, destined to fall short. However, a *better* world is always possible, and the examples assembled by Pederson share the common aim to disrupt in the name of social progress. Early Dadaists intervention, for one, were farces and playful absurdities that flew in the face of the dehumanizing systems of corporations, consumerism, fascism and the military. The staged provocative game-like experiences to “open and participatory space, cultivating democracy and opposition to authority” (p. 21). The movement's rejection of war and corporate interests translated into a rejection of logic, rationality, aesthetics, and even art itself, especially the convention of the solitary artist exhibiting in a cloistered gallery. The Surrealists also shared utopian aspirations and worked to undermine the foundations of reality with playful projects. They aimed to bend reality to produce a “crisis of consciousness” and effect change by liberating the imagination.

The ethos of the early avant-garde period is perhaps best captured by the activities of Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore. The gender-fluid couple leveraged the techniques of surrealist games to undermine the Nazi occupation of the Channel Island of Jersey, where they had taken up residence during the war. The duo planted subversive notes to be found by occupying soldiers. They also spread satirical commentary with altered comic books, parody magazines, photo montages, graffiti, and even modified slot machine tokens. The stakes of their playful resistance could not be higher, and they were eventually caught, arrested and condemned to death. Fortunately, the island was liberated before they were executed.

In the 1950's, the Situationists, a Dadaist offshoot, shed the political affiliations of their predecessors and aimed to collectively organize “situations” or game-like events to challenge the “spectacle” of consumer culture. Games, and by extension play, are necessarily participatory, and thus a suitable dynamic to inform art projects that demands active involvement. The Situationists favored technique was the *détournement*, an approach designed “to infiltrate and mobilize the tools and ideologies used to uphold the dominant order for ends diametrically opposed to this purpose” (p. 61). In practice, it is a playful repurposing of advertising, propaganda, and even urban planning to parody and subvert their commerce-driven intentions. The legacy of the Situationists legacy is still present today in spoof ads, street art, punk music and urban exploration games like *Pokémon Go*.

Later, in the 60's and 70's, the Fluxus movement continued the Dadaist trajectory with decentralized art and politics that favored process and performance over a finished product. The movement, whose membership included John Cage and Yoko Ono, was loosely organized around global networks that anticipated decentralized web communities. Like their predecessors, members of Fluxus also employed games and play as a means to question and destabilize the power matrix of the status quo. Examples include absurdist puzzles, various card games, and Yoko Ono's all white chess set that dissolves the binary logic of war.

At this point in Pederson's timeline, the center of gravity shifts from art as game, to game as art.

The Situationist spirit of *détournement* and decentralized Fluxus networks influenced later Internet-era tactical media activism. Notably, *modding* or altering commercial games opened a new frontier for electronic civil disobedience. In 1997, programmer Jaques Servin worked on the *Simcopter* title for Maxi, a large commercial video game developer that also develops popular titles like *The Sims* and *Simcity*. Servin secretly coded the game to periodically trigger the appearance of scantily clad men kissing each other, a hack that drew significant

media attention during the game's Christmas release. Similarly, Carbon Defense League activists distributed kits to encourage young players to hack Nintendo's *Super Kid Fighter* with sexual content to thwart asexual and heterosexual roles endemic to game industry content. Later, a disparate network of artist-programmers collectively hacked *Counter-Strike*, a popular post-9/11 first-person shooter. An intervention known as *Velvet-Strike*, participants modified in-game art to create a virtual exhibition space that depicted homoerotic graffiti and anti-war messages. The group also produced a website that offered a menu of possibilities for players to subvert the game's war-on-terror ethos.

Pederson also examines how video game conventions migrate into real world dynamics. One striking example is Wafaa Bilal's *Domestic Tension*, where the Iraqi-born Chicago artist imprisoned himself for 30 days in a room in a Chicago gallery outfitted with cameras and an automated paintball gun. Internet audiences could remotely observe him and fire the gun from the comfort of their bedrooms, mirroring the desensitized video game-like disconnect that separates US-based military drone pilots from their Middle Eastern targets. Bilal was pelted by yellow paint balls day and night, with many empathetic participants working to turn the gun away from him. The site attracted participants from 128 countries and accumulated 80 million hits. Another project created by a group of women scholar-artists in India called *Gendered Strategies for Loitering* blends research, ethnography and a video game interface to interrogate women's inability to move safely and freely in the urban streets of Mumbai and Singapore.

In the final part of *Gaming Utopia*, Pederson digs into what games scholar Ian Bogost terms "persuasive games" – digital games specifically developed to disrupt the status quo, raise awareness, and spur sociocultural change. These include Gonzalo Frasca's newsgames genre that engage players in political and social events, such as *September 12th* and *Madrid*, anti-war games that problematize the global aftermath of 9/11. Also, the advent of accessible game-creation tools and online distribution networks have empowered a generation of grassroots developers to express their stories and circumstances through digital games. Digital decolonization efforts include *Tropical America* explores the complexities of Latino immigrants to the US negotiating gang violence, while *Never Alone / Kisima Innitchuna* preserves the language and folklore of the indigenous Iñupiaq people in Alaska. These games were created by the affected communities who represent themselves and recuperate their voices in a medium where they are traditionally othered.

A significant focus of the final chapter is on queer games, particularly in the context of game creation tools like Twine. Twine, an interactive fiction creator, democratized game development by enabling those with minimal programming skills to craft and disseminate games. Pederson notes that Twine and similar platforms have found favor within queer communities, and cites examples such as Zoe Quinn's harrowing *Depression Quest* and the potent surrealism of *Howling Dogs* by Porpentine. These projects are situated within a broader context of DIY, zine, and hacker subcultures, and Pederson argues that this new avant-garde of game developers is reinvigorating the concept of a ludic utopia explored in various degrees by their artistic forerunners.

Gaming Utopia arrives at a moment of compounding global crises to remind us that play is not only important, but crucial. The book is a captivating read that draws a persuasive throughline to show how games and art combine to provoke social change. However, it is most pertinent as a toolkit of practical examples that persuasively establish the liberating force of play as a potent means to help shape a better tomorrow. These ludic transgressions are apertures to agitate hope and achieve what Pederson terms "the unfulfilled promise of utopian art."

NETWORKING

ENTRÉ; European Network of Toy Research, is a small European network for researchers who share a particular interest in the study of toys. The network's primary goal is to facilitate collaboration and knowledge exchange among its members in an informal setting. Researchers within ENTRÉ aim to share insights into their ongoing research, explore potential collaborations related to specific funding opportunities, and collaborate on projects such as book proposals and similar academic ventures. This network serves as a platform for like-minded researchers to strengthen our collective expertise and contribute to the field of toy research. The ENTRÉ network was initiated by Katriina Heljakka (University of Turku, Finland) and Jesper Falck Legaard (Kolding School of Design, Denmark) along with four other founders: Michaela Honauer (University of Twente, Netherlands), Nicole Bianquin (University of Bergamo, Italy), Mathieu Gielen, (TU Delft, Netherlands), and Luisa Magalhaes (Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal). To learn more about this fledgling organization contact Jesper Legaard at: jfl@dskd.dk

MEMBER'S FORUM

BRAZIL

Here grows our toy research community! Congratulations to **José Maria de Aguiar Sarinho Júnior** on completing his PhD the Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFPB). His thesis entitled *"Multimodality and toy literacy: A look at inclusive handmade dolls and children's narratives regarding disability, difference and inclusion"* examines the narratives and their underlying ideological meanings generated during children's play with inclusive handmade dolls. The dolls used in the study are part of "Amiguinhos +Q Especiais" collection made by the Brazilian artisan Clotilde Melo. The dolls are important not only because they represent children with disability, but also because they establish singular relationships with people who can touch them, smell them and observe them. From the perspective of these toys' multimodal configurations and three-dimensionality, it was possible to emphasize aspects such as sensorial and affective meanings, which reaffirm that toys are authentic texts. Finally, this research showed that socio-historical, cultural and ideological readings are maximized in a multisensory way, mainly in relation to what inclusion has to make us feel nowadays. Mr. Júnior's thesis was directed by ITRA member **Danielle Barbosa Lins de Almeida** and the complete abstract in both Portuguese and English is available at: <https://repositorio.ufpb.br/jspui/handle/123456789/26861>. Although they could not attend the 9th ITRA World Conference themselves, Professor Almeida and Dr. Júnior arranged for three of the dolls from his research to be donated to The Strong and for their colleague **Vania Soares Barbosa** from the Universidade Federal do Piauí to present the findings during the session *"Culture Codes and the Stories Toys Tell Us."*



Danielle Barbosa Lins de Almeida (2023). Multiculturalism, diversity and empowerment in fashion dolls' multimodal configurations: The Bratz - a study case. In Santos, Z.B. and Gualberto, C.L. (Eds). *Social Semiotics and Multimodality: A Tribute to Gunther Kress*. pp.104-122. EDUFES, Vitória, ES Brazil. Published in primarily in Portuguese with some chapters in English. Available for free download at: <https://repositorio.ufes.br/server/api/core/bitstreams/cdd8b41a-0c9d-40ec-a3a3-faa1ce07520d/content>

Vânia Soares Barbosa (2023). Do leitor ao leitor-olhante: Percursos de uma leitura multimodal (From reader to sight reader: Routes of a multimodal reading). In Santos, Z.B. and Gualberto, C.L. (Eds). *Social Semiotics and Multimodality: A Tribute to Gunther Kress*. pp.194-221. EDUFES, Vitória, ES Brazil.

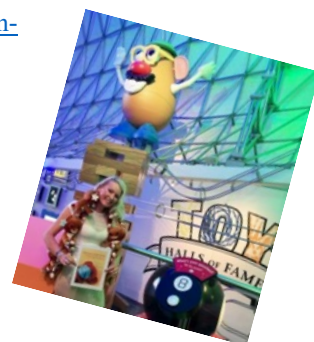
FINLAND

Katriina Heljakka (2023) Masked Belles and Beasts: Uncovering Toys as Extensions, Avatars and Activists in Human Identity Play. In: Magalhães, L., Martins, C.O. (eds) *Masks and Human Connections*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-16673-0_3

Kati with co-author Juulia Räikkönen published an article in the *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism* (May, 2023) entitled "#Instadolls on staycation – doll dramas narrating popular culture tourism and regional development" as part of the Traveling Doll Pants project. The full text of the article is available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15022250.2023.2199699> For more on Kati's work on Toy Tourism (toyrism) featured in Lilith Diringer's (2022) podcast "Toyrism. How Your Toys Can Save the Travel World" listen in at <https://anchor.fm/chargeholidays/episodes/Toyrism---how-your-toys-can-save-the-travel-world-e1s5krf>

Ever busy, Kati's chapter "Hobby Horses: A Hobby, Sport or Pure Play? A Contemporary Plaything as Part of Girlhood Leisure Activities in Finland" was published this year in: Mukherjee, U. (ed.) *Childhoods & Leisure. Leisure Studies in a Global Era*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-33789-5_5. Followed by publication of another chapter, "Objects of resilience: Plush perspectives on pandemic toy play in Finland." in Bersein, A. and Bishop, J. (Eds). *Play in a Covid frame: Everyday pandemic creativity in a time of isolation*. pp. 143-166. Open Book Publishers.

<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0326/chapters/10.11647/obp.0326.07>



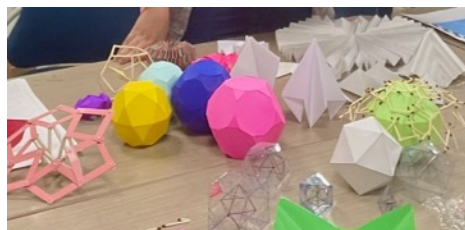
Kati and her colleagues, Assistant Professor Kati Suomi and Professor Kirsi-Mari Kallio, received a starting grant for the EntrePlay project at the Turku School of Economics at the University of Turku. The project examines playful learning as part of entrepreneurship education with toys, games, and other playful tools playing a central role.

FRANCE

Thomas Bonnetcarre (2023). *Anarco Zhack et les cauchemars éclairés* (*Anarco Zhack and the Lightning Nightmares*) a book for young adults (ages 12-18 years) published in French.

INDIA

Surabhi Khanna help organize and moderate panels at the National Workshop on Design Education and National Education Policy (NEP2020, India) held at the National Institute of Design, Haryana (1-2 December, 2023). She also recently concluded a 3-week course entitled Geometry and Structure for first year students in the Bachelor of Design program. The course included several playful explorations along with small-scale models and larger constructions. If you would like to see her syllabus or learn more about the course, please contact Surabhi directly at: khanna.surabhi@gmail.com



PORTUGAL

Luísa Magalhães with co-editors Maria José Ferreira Lopes, Bruno Nobre, João Carlos Onofre Pinto (2024). *Humanistic perspectives in happiness research*. Springer. The fifth volume in the Happiness Studies Series, the book provides innovative perspectives on the scholarly connection between the humanities and happiness, and considers the narrative expressions of happiness and recent investigations about happiness, its metrics, and objective insights about human wellbeing. <https://www.springer.com/series/10117> Luisa's chapter in this volume is entitled "The communicative role of TV toy advertising in fostering children's happiness through play interaction."

SPAIN

Imma Marín Santiago (2023) *Jugar: Crecer y aprender jugando en familia* (*Play: Growing up and learn playing with family*). Published in Spanish by Ediciones Paidós, ISBN 108449341264 <https://www.planetadelibros.com/libro-jugar/378346>

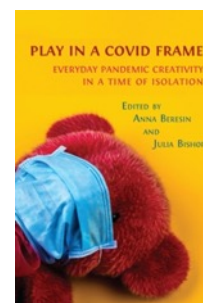
This book looks at the importance of children's play within the family sequentially, age by age, to explain what children play and with what and how they to play together. A playful and fun book that appeals to curiosity and wonder so that children and adults alike discover the gift of sharing life by playing.

SWITZERLAND

Véronique Dasen delivered the James E. Gordon Lecture at the Ure Museum in the UK on 16 October, 2023. Entitled, "Play or cheat? Games in Greek and Roman antiquity," her lecture coincided with the museum's temporary exhibit, *Locus Ludi. Anyone can play!* — with loans from the British Museum, Colchester Museum, Museum of Reading, and University of Reading collections — that was on display until the end of November. The Gordon lecture honors the memory of Professor James Edward Gordon (1913–1998), his interdisciplinary spirit and enthusiasm for the relevance of science to our understanding of the ancient world. For more on the Locus Ludi project see: <https://locusludi.ch/>

USA

Anna Bersein and Julia Bishop (2023). *Play in a Covid frame: Everyday pandemic creativity in a time of isolation*. Open Book Publishers. (<https://www.openbookpublishers.com/books/10.11647/obp.0326>) In addition to serving as co-editor of the book and co-authoring the introduction and conclusion, Anna authored two chapters "This Is the Ambulance, This Truck:" Covid as Frame, Theme and Provocation in Philadelphia, USA. pp. 167-190 and "Techno-mischief: Negotiating exaggeration online in quarantine" pp. 371-394. The book concludes with an edited transcript of two conversations with the book's contributors that provides suggestions for play advocacy.



Bhoomi K. Thakore with co-author Andrea C. Smith (2023). "Let's Play, Zoomers: Cultural Authority and Stereotypical Representations in Video Games." *Sociation Today*, 22(1): 6-20. https://sociation.ncsociologyassoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/zoomer_proof_final.pdf



IN MEMORY OF DORIS BERGEN

Doris Bergen joined ITRA in 2008 and was an extraordinary researcher, visionary leader, and prolific writer (12 books and more than 150 journal articles and book chapters, including her most recent book *The Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys*). Ever curious about children and play, she would ask and seek answers to questions about toys and play that none of the rest of us in the field had considered. She was among the first to explore technology as an important toy, connections between play and the brain, and the contributions of humor to child development.

Jeffery Trawick-Smith describes Doris as “the strongest advocate for children’s play in our field.” She elevated the status of play and play research to the important position it deserves in psychology and education, but underlying all of her scholarship was her strong desire to support children’s right to play. It is precisely this tireless advocacy that led him to refer to Doris as “the *grande dame* of play.”

Her passion for play is literally on display at The Strong. As Chris Bensch notes, she “held a special place for us here at The Strong National Museum of Play. Her work informed our institutional decision to focus on the topic of play when The Strong revised its mission in the early 2000s. Doris was a charter member of the editorial advisory board of our *American Journal of Play*, and we were honored to be entrusted with a collection of her professional papers that now lies in the care of The Strong’s Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play.”

Her ever-inquisitive mind, which never rested, is exemplified in this anecdote Jeffery shared about another conference where Doris was to present on a particular aspect of play. Instead, she excitedly shared a new interest—her keen observations of a group of children playing in front of an interactive video wall at the airport. The airport! Was this a new kind of play? she asked. Could this technology be adapted for classrooms to support play? She never stopped thinking about children and play.

Not only was Doris always thinking about people and play, she was also willing to share her time and talent in support of young scholars and well-established colleagues. Doris was an invaluable member of the scientific committee for ITRA's 9th World Conference this year. She was scheduled to present her latest research project “Older Adults’ Memories of their Childhood Toy Play,” a study she was conducting in collaboration with her daughter Gail Burnett at our conference. Sadly, Doris was diagnosed with late-stage cancer in June and passed away on July 5, 2023. In recognition of her many contributions to toy and play research as well as to ITRA we dedicated the session “Toybox to Toolbox: The power of playthings through the lifespan” in her memory.



Doris with her daughter Gail Burnett

Her kind and generous spirit is evident in the memories that colleagues shared for this tribute to her.

“What I will remember most about Doris is her kind and generous guidance. I met her and her close friend and colleague, Doris Fromberg, at a conference when I was just beginning my career. The two tucked me under their wings, offering advice, recommending me for a leadership position in a national organization, inviting me to write chapters for books they were editing. They even picked up the tab once for the most exquisite and expensive meal a struggling young scholar would ever eat.” ~ Jeffery Trawick-Smith, Professor Early Childhood Education, Eastern Connecticut State University

“I met Doris at my very first conference that I attended as a graduate student, presenting my very first academic paper. It happened to be at ITRA in Greece in 2008. I recall talking to her on a boat ride about my interest in studying play and toys and that is when I found out she also studies humor. I think I ended up talking with Doris more than anyone else at the conference and then later invited her to be a member of my PhD committee. She became my informal mentor throughout my academic career as a professor as my research often connected creativity with

domains of play and humor. I am grateful that I was able to learn from her. She is an inspiration for my work and I am sure she was an inspiration for many students throughout her career.”
~Barry Kudrowitz, Professor Product Design, University of Minnesota

“Personally, I was grateful that Doris approached me to contribute to her final book, The Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys, a process which showed me her generous and thoughtful side as an editor.” ~Chris Bensch, Vice-President for Collections, The Strong National Museum of Play

A mentor, advocate, colleague, and friend, Doris touched the lives of many and will be, no doubt, central to her legacy. She will be missed but certainly not forgotten by all of us who had the good fortune of working with her. Rest in Play Doris.

CALLS FOR PAPERS

Open Call - The International Journal of Games and Social Impact (IGJSI) is a new semiannual open-access publication, launched in 2023 at Lusófona University to research, discover, and foster links between games studies in academia and civil society through educational and knowledge exchanges. The journal invites submissions of original research and critiques from all fields that examine the intersections between games or other playable media and human activities, with a special focus on their impact on society and all its actors. The Journal is supported through Hei-Lab (<https://hei-lab.ulusofona.pt/>) and CICANT (<https://cicant.ulusofona.pt/>) research units as a strategy to foster multidisciplinary, fundamental, and applied research approaching the intersections between games and human activities. For submission guidelines see: <https://revistas.ulusofona.pt/index.php/ijgsi/information/authors>



Submission Deadline: 10 January, 2024

Fashion and Play Symposium 12-13 April 2024

University of Minnesota St. Paul, MN USA

Conference Homepage & Submission Info: <https://sites.google.com/umn.edu/fashionandsymposium/home>

The way we play with fashion reflects and constructs evolving societal tastes and values. This symposium explores both the play of fashion and the fashion of play. Scholars and practitioners are invited to submit original abstracts related to broad definitions of fashion/design and play classified into one of the following categories: Research, Teaching, Concept, or Creative Design.

Submission Deadline: 11 January, 2024 (for Posters and Doctoral consortium notes, the paper submission deadline has passed).

8th Annual International GamiFIN Conference 2024 2-5 April 2024

Ruka, Finland

Themes: Gamification is a multi-faceted phenomenon that affects many domains of human life. Therefore, we welcome submissions related to this ludic transformation of reality under several domains.

Submission Info: <https://gamifinconference.com/cfp2024/> or contact: info@gamifinconference.com

Conference Homepage: <https://gamifinconference.com/>

Submission Deadline: 17 January 2024

23rd Annual ACM Interaction Design and Children (IDC) 17-20 June 2024

Delft, The Netherlands

Conference Theme: Inclusive Happiness

IDC 2024 invites submission of original work (not previously published) in the form of either full papers (less than 10,000 words) or short papers (less than 6,000 words). Submitted work should identify and cite relevant published work and explain how the paper furthers research in the field relevant to technology and interaction design for and with children.

For more information see: <https://idc.acm.org/2024/>

12-14 February 10th Anniversary of DiGRA Australia Conference (the Australian chapter of the International Digital Games Research Association)
The University of Melbourne in Melbourne, Australia
Hybrid – Registration is Free
<https://digraa.org/post/digra-australia-2024-conference-10-year-anniversary-call-for-papers/>

Submission Deadline: 5 February, 2024
Playful Learning Association 3-5 July, 2024
University of Sussex Brighton, UK
Submission Info: <https://playfullearningassoc.co.uk/submit-a-session>
Conference Homepage: <https://playfullearningassoc.co.uk/conference/>

Submission Deadline: 18 February 2024
Play Make Learn Conference 17-19 July
University of Wisconsin Madison, WI USA
Conference Homepage: <https://web.cvent.com/event/513f1d8b-d6a7-4fc2-986d-4973dc37c524/summary>



Submission Info: <https://web.cvent.com/event/513f1d8b-d6a7-4fc2-986d-4973dc37c524/websitePage:fd00ee5e-f337-450e-a6ac-1c668e50caf2>

Invites proposals for hands-on workshops, short presentations, or full panel sessions. The conference is a place for collaboration and discovery in the design, research and practice of playful learning, games for learning and positive social impact, making and makerspaces, STEAM education, and arts in education. PML creates an inspirational space for preK-12 educators, designers, developers, innovators, librarians, museum professionals, makers, and researchers to tinker together, share knowledge, and celebrate one another's work.

Submission Deadline: 13 March 2024
18th European Conference on Games Based Learning October, 2024
Location: Aarhus University, Denmark
For more info and submission guidelines: <https://www.academic-conferences.org/conferences/ecgbl/>

12-14 August 2024 Serious Play Conference
University of Toronto, Toronto Canada
This conference brings together scholars and practitioners at the intersections of game development, play, education, and interactive media. The new conference website, along with the call for speakers, will be ready by January 2024. We encourage interested parties to start thinking about possible contributions, talks, or workshops they might want to present. For more information contact: elisa@seriousplayconf.com

TOY FAIRS AND UPCOMING CONFERENCES

22-23 January, 2024 CUNY Games Conference 10.0
The CUNY Games Conference combines workshops, idea exchanges, interactive participant presentations, playtesting, and playing tabletop games into a two-day hybrid event to promote and discuss game-based learning. The conference focuses on creative pedagogy, such as playful learning activities or games, that teachers can use in the classroom every day. Day one of the conference will be held online while Day two will be held in-person at Manhattan Community College in New York City.
Note: The conference is free to attend, but you must be registered.
Conference home page: <https://games.common.gc.cuny.edu/2024-conference/>

23-25 January, 2024 The Toy Fair - 70th Anniversary
Olympia London
Grand, National & Upper West Halls
Kensington, W14 8UX
<https://www.toyfair.co.uk/>

30 January – 3 February, 2024 Nuremberg International Toy Fair: Life's a Playground
Messezentrum Nuremberg (Nuremberg Exhibition Center), Germany
<https://www.spielwarenmesse.de/en>



20-23 March, 2024 The Association for the Study of Play (TASP) Annual Conference
Theme: 50th Golden Anniversary of Play Research: Embracing the Past, Inspiring the Future
Location: The Strong National Museum of Play, Rochester, NY USA
Register before 9 January, 2024 for reduced fees. <https://studyofplay.org/conference-registration/>

16-18 April, 2024 The 2024 National Conference on the Value of Play
Eppley Institute for Parks & Public Lands at Indiana University Bloomington, Indiana USA
Theme: The Value of Play
Conference Homepage: <https://usplaycoalition.org/playconference24>

23-26 April 26th Board Game Studies Colloquium
Tampere, Finland

Conference Homepage <https://boardgamestudies.jimdofree.com>

Board games exist in continuous interaction between tangible and intangible elements. The close relationship between material culture and ephemeral play in board games assume a new dimension with digital technologies. This year's Board Game Studies Colloquium will focus discussion on the complex relations between the material and the immaterial in play. How do material culture and ephemeral play relate to each other? How is contemporary in/tangible game heritage documented and understood? How do different im/material cultures coexist? Can we reconstruct the immaterial aspect of historical games? How does the dematerialisation and digitisation of board games affect the ways we play and make sense of them?

CURRENT EXHIBITIONS



September 23 to January 7, 2024

Black Dolls

The Strong National Museum of Play Rochester,
New York, USA

Produced by the New-York Historical Society, Black Dolls is a landmark exhibition that explores handmade Black dolls through the lens of race, gender, and history. The exhibit immerses visitors in the world of dolls, doll play, and doll making while examining the formation of racial

stereotypes and confronting the persistence of racism in American history. The exhibition examines how these toys serve as expressions of resilience and creativity, perseverance and pride, and love and longing. They provide a unique view of the history of race in America, revealing difficult truths and inviting guests to engage in the urgent national conversation about the legacy of slavery and racism. The museum also provides a discussion guide with activities for further engagement with topics and issues highlighted in the exhibit (<https://www.museumofplay.org/app/uploads/2023/09/Discussion-guide.pdf>).

Complimenting this exhibit, The Strong is also hosting *Black Doll Designers* featuring Black creators and contemporary Black dolls.

10 November, 2023 to 16 March, 2024

War Toys: Ukraine

Fidelis Care Gallery at The Strong National Museum of Play Rochester,
New York, USA

<https://www.museumofplay.org/exhibit/war-toys-ukraine/>



War Toys: Ukraine explores the impact of armed conflict on children and showcases the power of children's play, creativity, and resilience amid adversity. The exhibition combines firsthand accounts drawn by Ukrainian children with photographic recreations, made with locally-sourced toys and staged at the actual locations, whenever possible, by renowned photographer and ITRA board member Brian McCarty. The exhibit offers visitors the opportunity to learn more about the lives, dreams, and impact of war on children and their communities. Curated by Barbara Griffin and Lauren Steel, and produced by the [Mid-America Art Alliance](#) and [Exhibits USA](#), the exhibition also includes large scale prototypes of army-man-like [figures](#) of noncombatants,

supported by a [board game](#) designed by the War Toys nonprofit organization to provide children around the world with fun, accessible, equitable, representative, trauma-informed, and culturally-appropriate toys that cultivate a more nuanced understanding of war. This is the start of a five-year tour around the United States for the exhibit. Please see <https://wartoys.org/news> for announcements regarding future dates and locations (An exhibit featuring War Toys work with children from Ukraine, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, and Palestine over the last decade closed at the end of May, 2023 at the renowned [Musée de la Photographie](#) in Charleroi, Belgium).

21-23 November, 2023 (continuing online)

Play and Gender Expression

IADE, Universidade Europeia

Lisbon, Portugal

<https://sites.google.com/view/play-and-gender-expression/home>

Organized as part of ITRA member, Alakesh Dhibar's doctoral work, the objective of this exhibition was to promote inclusion and awareness regarding gender differences through the context of children and play mediums, such as toys. The exhibition showcased several critical design artefacts with an innovative data collection mechanism to understand the knowledge and perception of the viewers. The website includes a way to experience the exhibition and record the responses in the virtual medium.



EPILOGUE

We encourage you to send the editors articles, news of exhibits, calls for papers, and professional accomplishments to 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. If there is something that you would like to see in the newsletter please let us know. Plans for the Spring/Summer issue are already underway, so the sooner we hear from you the better in order to ensure your ideas and contributions are included.

The Editorial Team would like to wish all ITRA members a healthy, happy and joyous new year. We look forward to hearing from you.