



**SPRING 2025** Vol. 29 No. 1 Spring 2025

# NEWSLETTER

**Editor: Luisa Magalhaes**

## **Greetings from the President of ITRA**

*Greta Pennell*

I usually start my mornings reading the news over a cup of coffee (or 3 ☺). Once a way to ease into the day before diving into work, now it seems just the opposite. Waking up, day after day, to increasingly unimaginable headlines is unsettling. It feels perilous. Yet, as daunting as these tumultuous times are, they are not Insurmountable. When the world seems so unhinged, I believe it's our connection to one another and our communities, that is the balm we need to keep us going. For me, one such balm is ITRA. Working to advance ITRA's mission and broaden our reach provides a welcome change of pace and mindset. It continues to be an honor and privilege to share this work with so many dedicated and talented toy scholars. Over the past few months, so many of you have stepped forward to volunteer your time, insights, and expertise. I can't thank you all enough! I'm so excited about what we've accomplished thus far and what is on the horizon.

To everyone who completed the newsletter survey earlier this year please know that your invaluable feedback has informed the redesign and new features in this newsletter. Special thanks to Luisa and Rebecca Horrace for creating a colorful layout and design for our newsletter. Look closely and you will see that our ITRA logo has a new look too. A huge thanks to Brian McCarty for taking on the challenge of refreshing the logo to give it a contemporary look and color palate while preserving its iconic character.

The editorial team has also added a new feature for the newsletter to shine a spotlight on a specific toy or group of toys. And, who better to write our inaugural "Toy in Focus" than Christopher Bensch from The Strong National Museum of Play. Chris' piece, complete with images from The Strong's collections, looks at some beloved characters from children's literature that hopped from their storybook pages onto our game tables and into our arms.

Also emerging from the newsletter survey was interest in a way for all of you to more directly share information and connect with one another beyond what is possible via Facebook or the newsletter. To that end, our editorial team has established a LinkedIn account to foster discussion and information sharing between us. If you're already on LinkedIn, please take a moment to follow us at: [in](#) International Toy Research Association ITRA LinkedIn In fact, we've already posted the call for nominations for the ITRA Prize for Outstanding Toy Research there. Not on LinkedIn? Don't worry the call for nominations is also included in this issue of the newsletter and on the ITRA website.

Speaking of the website, it too has received a makeover. Same URL but an entirely new look with greater functionality all thanks to Brian McCarty's brilliant work and creative vision. Check it out at: <https://www.itratoyresearch.org/>

Last, and certainly not least, preparations for our 10th ITRA World Conference in Augsburg Germany 5-7 August, 2026 are in full swing. The organizing committee, led by Volker Merhinger, has developed a perfect theme: *The Zeitgeist in Toys & Games*. Not only does it pay homage to a theoretical construct born in Germany, it affords opportunities for a wide variety of research perspectives and toy-related topics. Additionally, it seems especially apropos given current events around the world.

Thanks to Tanya Marriott for her amazing design for the conference logo. Her ability to take the notion of Zeitgeist to Toyland and create an adorable character that captures the imagination and, if you're like me, my heart too. Now, all our conference mascot needs is a name - send your suggestions for naming our logo sprite to [itranslitter@gmail.com](mailto:itranslitter@gmail.com)!



The call for papers and submission guidelines are included in this newsletter. As we did for the 9th World Conference, we are using Oxford Abstracts as the submission portal. Special thanks to Ozlem Cankaya for her editorial eye, attention to details and tremendous help to get the submission platform up and running. The Scientific Committee is comprised of a stellar team of toy and game scholars. My sincere thanks to each of them for graciously agreeing to serve as reviewers.

There's something special about ITRA conferences, and ITRA 2026 is sure to be informative, inspiring, and a much needed opportunity to connect with one another in person. So, get a group together and organize a session, or submit an abstract for a paper or two. Remember that submissions are welcome for plaything related research, even if it is not directly tied to the conference theme. And, our ITRA conferences always strive to be supportive and welcoming to new and emerging researchers, designers, and other toy/game professionals.

Let the planning and proposing begin! I look forward to seeing you in Augsburg next year.

Toyfully,  
Greta



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## Greetings from the Editor

*Luísa Magalhães*

My address to ITRA members starts with a heartfelt tribute to Sudarshan Khanna, whose legacy will prevail over time among us. Deep thanks to Suzy Seriff who wrote a beautiful and much deserved eulogy for this edition of our Newsletter. The relevance of traditional toys deserves recognition and care, mirroring the elements of joy and sharing through child play. Sudarshan and his magic playfulness resonated with both. ITRA community is deeply grateful and can only hope to follow his wonderful example of life.

As some of our readers already know, a survey was conducted among ITRA members to assess the effectiveness of the Newsletter and to identify areas for improvement. We were thrilled to learn readers think that the frequency and length of the newsletter is just right. And that the Book Reviews, Calls for Papers, and other conference information were the features readers found most useful. And, perhaps most importantly that it helps strengthen your personal connection to ITRA.

The findings provide valuable insights into the newsletter's impact, content preferences, design limitations, and suggestions for its future development. The content evaluation reveals that members appreciate sections such as member profiles, book reviews, and ITRA conference updates. It also shows specific concerns about the growing impact of the Newsletter among readers.

The editorial board is working on the survey suggestions. As a result, this number already includes a new section, "Toy in Focus," where scholars from different disciplines analyze and present a specific toy.

We expect the future editions to include increased international coverage, incorporating perspectives from researchers in psychology, economics, and

neurobiology. This will lead to greater focus on interdisciplinary collaboration between toy scholars, therefore enlarging our ITRA community.

This Newsletter includes information and appeal regarding ITRA's next congress, in Germany, where we will address the Zeitgeist in toys and games. The dynamics of organizing an ITRA congress is challenging, and it engages a considerable amount of work – so let's all prepare for another fantastic gathering. Let's hope everyone navigates these turbulent times and manage to join Volker Merhinger in Augsburg next year!

Contact channels and networking are paramount organizational demands and our ITRA growing community needs to keep up with both. So, ITRA's logo and website were refreshed, and a LinkedIn profile was created – please engage and share, for the sake of networking around the world. Links are provided in the Newsletter pages.

The editorial board has nicely worked, and acknowledgements are in order!

We thank Rebecca Horrace – for her outstanding mastery of Canva and her help in producing this Newsletter.

We are also grateful to Brian McCarthy, for his talented review of the website, Tanya Marriot, for the conference logo, and to Paul Darvasi, for a job well one with the survey.

Last, but not least, I thank Greta Pennell forever, for her cheerful and solid support, unconditional confidence and cheerful guidance 😊.

Onwards!  
Luísa

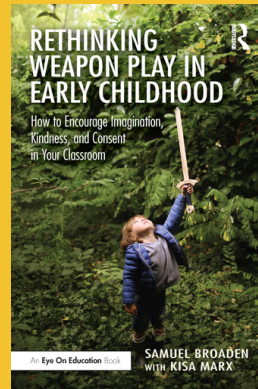




## Book Review

*Rethinking Weapon Play in Early Childhood: How to Encourage Imagination, Kindness, and Consent in Your Classroom*

**Reviewed by:** Jeffrey Goldstein.  
Institute for Cultural Inquiry.  
Utrecht University, The Netherlands  
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Samuel Broaden with Kisa Marx. (2024). *Rethinking Weapon Play in Early Childhood. How to Encourage Imagination, Kindness, and Consent in Your Classroom*. New York: Routledge. ix+98 pages. ISBN 978-1-032-67979-2

*Rethinking weapon play in early childhood* by Samuel Broaden and Kisa Marx is a deeply personal portrayal of the authors' own childhood experiences with aggressive play and their evolving thinking about the issue. In this brief book, about 100 pages, Broaden and Marx describe their experiences with young children and offer suggestions for understanding and managing aggressive play. The authors discuss not just weapon play but also risky activities that may result in injury, such as climbing trees. This is not a data-driven discussion but an experiential one. There is a list of recommended books for children and resources for careers, but no reference to previous research on aggressive play or risk-taking. There are questions and exercises for the reader, such as examining their personal views on aggressive play and their own early experiences with pretend and actual violence. The suggestions and discussions are heartfelt and helpful.

Rethinking weapon play in early childhood is intended for preschool and early years educators and careers, although parents, students and policy makers will also find the discussions of aggressive play of interest.

Play fighting and toy or imaginary weapons are a source of anxiety, fear and uncertainty for parents, teachers, and caregivers. Many preschools and classrooms, to say nothing of family households, prohibit aggressive play and toy weapons in an effort to curtail the unseemly, unruly behavior. Despite these efforts, children continue to engage in superhero play and to fashion weapons from ordinary materials like sticks or building blocks. Rather than the beginning of an inevitable slide towards anti-social behavior, Broaden and Marx regard aggressive play as a form of imaginative play that contributes to personal coping and social development. Broaden and Marx, both experienced preschool educators and advocates, present an alternative view, one in which rough-and-tumble play is considered innate, and through which children learn to express and understand their own and others' emotions. Cooperation, communication and problem-solving are required to initiate and terminate play episodes without adult interference.

A key message in *Rethinking weapon play in early childhood* is that aggressive play is not the same thing as aggressive behavior. That the two are distinct can be seen in both their form and consequences. There is no intent to injure another person during play fighting, whereas this is the primary purpose of actual fighting. Given the similarities between the two – loud, animated, apparently unconstrained – there are surprisingly few injuries during play fighting because injury is not the goal of the behavior. Unlike real fighting, episodes of play fighting last far longer, players laugh and smile during their play, and the same players perform the activity repeatedly.

In her study of children exposed to war, crime, and domestic violence, Tina Hyder (2005) observes that "For those children... whether as witnesses or victims

in the home or in a war zone, acting out scenes of violence through play can be seen to be more than an exploration of identity it represents a need to come to terms with extreme experiences” (p. 92).

Broaden and Marx confirm this view and encourage teachers and caregivers to rethink their own experiences and attitudes toward aggressive and risky play. With an emphasis on inclusion and acceptance, the authors stress the importance of engaging in dialog with children to understand how and why they play as they do.

Despite their sympathy for children’s aggressive play, the authors do not suggest that it is appropriate for every child in all circumstances. According to the authors, “Knowing when and where it is appropriate to play these games is a matter of safety” (p. 63). In high crime areas, some children have been shot in the mistaken belief that their toy weapons were real. “Our goal for you after reading this book is not to go back into your program and give all the children toy guns and let them all do weapon play. The goal of this book is to get us to think a little bit differently and a little bit deeper about this type of play and our feelings about it.” There are many programs and communities where this type of play would not be safe, appropriate, or fitting. But “once those children get to even a sliver of safety, they’re going to need the space to process what they have experienced, and they will inevitably do that through their play” (p. 67). Even where there are restrictions on this type of play, it is always appropriate to allow discussions about it.

In settings where zero tolerance has been relaxed, as described by Penny Holland (2003), many practitioners have found that children are far more effective at managing play fighting themselves, both to avoid injury and to sustain play. Where children are allowed to construct weapons and enact superhero scenarios, the

experiences of both children and practitioners are generally positive. The writing is informal and breezy but sometimes unnecessarily trendy, as in ‘folx’ for ‘folks.’ The book may be of greater interest to those who work with children than it is to researchers, but the plea for better understanding of children’s aggressive play through discussion and careful observation is of universal merit.

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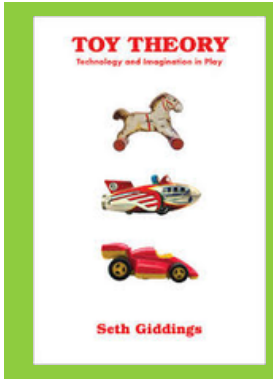
Penny Holland (2003). *We don’t play with guns here: War, weapon and superhero play in the early years*. Open University Press: Maidenhead, U.K.

Tina Hyder. (2005). *War, conflict and play*. Open University Press: Maidenhead, U.K.

Toy Theory: Technology and Imagination in Play

**Reviewed by:** Katriina Heljakka, University of Turku Finland

Seth Giddings (2024). *Toy Theory: Technology and Imagination in Play*. MIT Press. ISBN: 9780262548212. \$US 50.00 (pb). 282 pp., 61 b&w illus



Seth Giddings, opens his book, *Toy Theory: Technology and Imagination in Play*, with a bold assertion: “Contemporary childhood in the developed world is thoroughly postdigital” (p. 3). His concern is not that toys are disappearing but that engagement with them—play itself—may be shifting. Giddings argues that toys will persist, not merely as relics but as integral elements of cultural, social, and technological landscapes: “Toys are not only representations of prevailing (or past, or future) cultural, social, and technical phenomena, they are, in various ways, part of them” (p. 218). In other words, toys do not just symbolize childhood; they capture contemporary

realities and anticipate possible futures.

Following Sutton-Smith and numerous other play scholars, Giddings establishes the 21st century as a ludic one, with play at the center of cultural life. However, despite growing academic interest in games, he laments that the study of toys remains marginal. While game scholars explore the mechanics and aesthetics of play, they often overlook the nuances of toy design, toyification, and contemporary toy cultures. This neglect is puzzling, given that toys and games frequently intersect in form, function, and engagement. It is also a neglect noted by the pioneering scholars who founded ITRA in 1993.

Giddings revisits characteristics of toys addressed by Brian Sutton-Smith—miniaturization, abstraction from what they represent, contextual meaning, and their place in childhood play. He extends Sutton-Smith's ideas by emphasizing the toyetic—the material, tactile, and operable qualities that define toys. These aspects have already been explored in toyification studies, where objects are intentionally imbued with playful aesthetics and functionality (Thibault & Heljakka, 2018). Notably, Giddings acknowledges the metaphor of "adult toys," highlighting how luxury cars, yachts, and gadgets exhibit toyetic traits (p. 33).

The question of what makes something a toy—or rather, what makes something toy-like—is central to contemporary toy theory and continues to be a point of debate. Instead of defining toys by their material properties or their intended use, considering them in the form of activity, or "toying" has been suggested as a more productive framework (e.g., Thibault & Heljakka, 2018). Giddings' discussion of playability – the extent that an object invites engagement – aligns and extends this view. Yet, games and toys invite engagement in very different ways. Whereas one plays a game within a system of structured rules, one plays *with* toys through open-ended, imaginative manipulation (Heljakka, 2013;

Levinovitz, 2017). The distinction is critical.

Despite concerns about digitalization overshadowing traditional toys, their unique tactile and manipulative qualities ensure their survival (Heljakka, 2024). Handling a toy sparks intuition about how it might be played with (p. 179). The industry recognizes this, embedding specific "preferred" modes of engagement into toys, echoing the idea of precise or pre-programmed play. Yet, real-world play practices often subvert these intended uses, demonstrating the adaptability of toys across age groups and cultural contexts.

While Giddings does not center on adult toy play, he acknowledges its significance. Collecting, customizing, and displaying toys are well-established adult pastimes (e.g., Heljakka, 2017; Heljakka & Harviainen, 2019). The rise of photoplay—documenting toy interactions through photography and videography also illustrates how toys extend beyond physical play into media culture. This intersects with Giddings' discussion of dolls, robots, and cinema toys as key categories within contemporary toy culture.

A crucial argument in *Toy Theory* is that toys are not merely playthings but technical objects embedded in technoculture. Giddings resists defining toys as texts, instead calling them machines—material-semiotic entities within digital and physical networks (pp. 17-18). This aligns with the concept of play machines—interactive devices that blend toy-like qualities with digital functionalities (Heljakka, 2024). From smart toys to IoT playthings, the toyification of technology is increasingly evident. Giddings' notion of digital automata—machines designed for play—further supports this shift (p. 23).

The future of play with objects, Giddings argues, requires more ethnographic attention to everyday connected play (p. 220). Indeed, in an era where the line between toys and technology blurs,

understanding how people engage with playthings—both digital and physical—becomes more important than ever. Giddings does not offer definitive answers but invites deeper inquiry into the evolving landscape of toy culture. As toy scholars, it is our task to take up this challenge.

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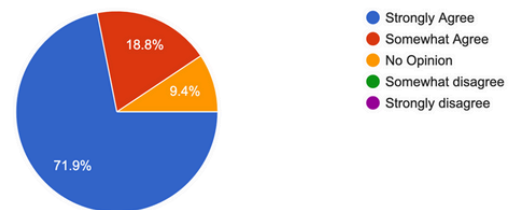
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### Survey Feedback

You spoke, and we listened! Below are some data and quotes from our recent survey regarding the newsletter. We took this information and have already made improvements to our website, created new social media accounts and redesigned our newsletter! Stay tuned for more exciting changes from the ITRA community this year!

Please indicate the extent this statement reflects your experience: The newsletter helps strengthens my personal connection to ITRA.  
32 responses

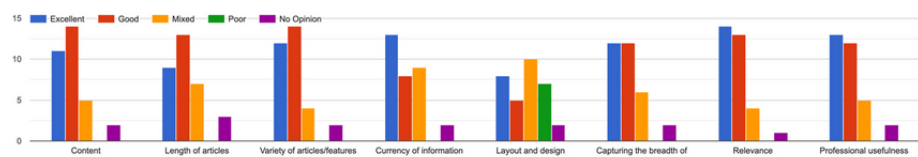


“It is a reminder of the many bright minds connected to ITRA in-between the conferences.”

“Getting to know ITRA, and especially being able to participate in the 2023 event, opened my eyes even further as a researcher and helped me see myself as someone who produces impactful research. Often, in the case of a researcher, who studies toys, I would say that our own research is not well recognized in our academic or professional environments simply because it focuses on childhood, play, and the analysis of toys...I am deeply grateful to the founders of ITRA for starting and continuing this beautiful work.”

“I believe that sharing opportunities for conferences and publications is an excellent way to keep researchers engaged. You should definitely continue doing this, but not only on Facebook. I think LinkedIn and Instagram are extremely important tools for sharing information as well.”

Thinking about the last two newsletters, please rate their overall quality on the following:





The Uncle Wiggily Game, 1937.  
The Strong National Museum of  
Play, Rochester, New York.



## Toy in Focus

### *Hop to It: The Rise of the Rabbits*

By Christopher Bensch, The Strong National Museum  
of Play, USA

As spring makes its way to Rochester, New York, days are longer, new birdcalls fill the air, and I'm newly aware of—rabbits. Yes, there's the Easter Bunny each springtime, but my rabbit radar ranges much more broadly. Since I'm a gardener, rabbits aren't always my friends. Cute as they may be, rabbits seem somewhat less charming as they mow down seedlings or nip off the fresh and delicious growth on perennials in my flowerbeds. On the other hand, as a curator, the rabbits I find in The Strong's collection are a different matter and I'm much more inclined to smile benevolently as they crop up in toys or games.

One rabbit that I recall from my childhood is Uncle Wiggily. Not familiar with him? He started back in 1910 in stories that Howard Garis wrote for the Newark News and he and his fellow characters went on to help Garis publish almost 80 children's books in his lifetime. I'm not certain that I inherited any copies of those books from my mom, but my sister and I played an Uncle Wiggily board game that pitted the elderly rabbit with his candy-striped cane against various adversaries and obstacles as he hobbled down the path to Dr. Possum's office to get his rheumatism medication. At least in the game version, Uncle Wiggily was on the innocuous side (a bit like Mickey Mouse in that regard), but I was much more amused by the names of his foes such as Skee-zicks and the Bad Pipsisewah.

Uncle Wiggily is a simple race game, akin to the "Goose Game" variants that have proliferated over the centuries in Europe and North America. Players' progress down the game's path is controlled by drawing cards that are printed with simple rhyming instructions. The first player to arrive at Dr. Possum's house wins the game. Since reading is required, Uncle Wiggily is aimed at slightly older children than such other early childhood games as Candy Land or Chutes and Ladders.

Game historian Bruce Whitehill reports that the Milton Bradley Company introduced the first game based on the Uncle Wiggily stories in 1916. Bradley modified the game in 1923, 1949, and 1955. Parker Brothers obtained the rights to Uncle Wiggily in 1967. However, in 1989 both Milton Bradley Co. and Parker Brothers reintroduced different version of the same game. Hasbro now owns both the Parker Brothers and Milton Bradley rights, but has also licensed the title to Winning Moves for the current market.

While Uncle Wiggily ranks as a senior rabbit, the younger end of the spectrum is represented by the little bunny in Margaret Wise Brown's 1947 picture book *Goodnight Moon*. Reportedly Brown gave illustrator Clement Hurd minimal instructions as to what she was looking for and Hurd adapted to the assignment by making the characters rabbits—he felt more confident drawing bunnies than people.

Despite sluggish initial sales, the book went on to become a children's classic and a favorite bedtime story to wind down the day and send kids peacefully off to dreamland. Naturally, some of those kids wanted to snuggle into bed with their own plush version of the rabbit from the story.





Another storybook rabbit, this time from 1921's *The Velveteen Rabbit*, has also made the leap into The Strong's collection. Margery Williams's tale about a stuffed animal who yearns to become real through the love of his owner has endured in the hearts of children and adults for more than a century now. Certainly, looking around the plush animals and dolls in the museum's holdings, I can see signs of the deep affection that has been lavished upon them over the years as they were clutched for comfort. Their repaired stitching and threadbare fur make tangible some of the meaning they held for their little owners. Some may find The Velveteen Rabbit too sentimental for their tastes, but the story holds powerful emotions for some of us (including yours truly). It therefore feels fitting that a 3-D version of that rabbit makes its permanent home at The Strong.

I have no doubt that the rabbits in The Strong's collection will continue to thrive and multiply. Even as I write this, I'm visualizing more examples on shelves and in cases throughout the museum. Roger Rabbit. Peter Rabbit. Bugs Bunny. The Runaway Bunny. The list goes on and on. I guess you can't keep a good bunny down.



pedagogical development, which explores methods of playful experience design for social change and the character as a communication tool. Tanya is an internationally recognized character designer, and the past president of international consortia, the National Institute of American Doll Artists, and an alumna of the Pictoplasma Academy. Tanya has contributed design expertise to the toy industry in the UK, and the film industry in New Zealand and internationally. Tanya is a senior lecturer at Massey University, College of Creative Arts, and is the Bachelor of Concept Design program lead. Her doctoral research - *The Underfoot: An exploration into eco-fiction character toy design* - explores how to design character toys for outdoor nature play.

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

I have always been fascinated by toys. When I was about 10 years old I made my own Star Wars figures - I was too young for the original toys, so I made my own out of polymer clay. My dad helped me put soldering wire in the arms to make them articulated. I then transformed my toy box into the moon of Endor, complete with trees made from toilet paper rolls. The scale was different, so the characters were poly-pocket-sized. I was never really interested in dolls as playthings. Growing up in Aotearoa, New Zealand, we store-bought toys, but my parents made a lot of our toys, plushies and doll houses. I don't remember having a lot of dolls; I never had a Barbie; my parents preferred her English counterpart, Cindy. I had My Little Pony instead. I was the only daughter in my parent's friend group, and many Americans were working in the oil industry in our town. They bought me lots of ponies. I remember doubling my herd one birthday. Ponies became my main and only toy; by the time I was ten, they were the only toy I wanted. I was drawn to making playsets for them, extensions for play. My crafting was pretty terrible, but in my mind, I could make anything!

### **Member Profile**

Tanya Marriott



Dr. Tanya Marriott is a character designer who works in various media, including interactive storytelling, playful interaction and character-centric communication. Her practice-led research seeks to build meaningful experiences and storytelling opportunities between digital and tangible activities and objects. Tanya has led

I used cardboard, tape, fabric, glue, clay, and LEGO. Whatever I could get my hands on. My parents encouraged my creativity, helping where they could. These formative years making toys shaped my interest in the profession, although it was not until my twenties that I realised I could have a profession in toys and play.

### **What a start! Can you describe your current professional career in the field of play and toys?**

I was never interested much in dolls as playthings when I was younger, but I loved sculpting. At about twelve, I went to a workshop for kids to make a porcelain baby doll. I was fascinated by the process, so when I got home, I had a go at making my own doll. I showed the tutors; one told me it was the most horrific thing she had seen. The other thought it was fantastic and became my lifelong mentor. By 20, I was a nationally recognised original doll artist. At 33, I became an artist member of the National Institute of American Doll Artists, the world's pre-eminent art doll organisation, and served 4 years as their president. My interest in making dolls and toys opened other doors. I designed toys for almost every assignment during my Bachelor of Industrial Design study. Still, when I graduated, there was no toy work, so I moved into film, working on the Lord of the Rings trilogy for Wētā Workshop as a prosthetics technician and a miniature artist.



**Buller's Assistant Art Doll (2013)**  
Designed by Tanya Marriott

Moving to Canada and the UK, I moved into stop-motion and puppet fabrication for Bowes Productions and Aardman Animation. I finally started working in the UK Toy Industry on projects for Seven Towns and Evolve before returning to New Zealand to complete further illustration studies. This turned into further study at Massey University and then a tenured position as a

Design academic. I was introduced to play research in my first year of teaching at Massey and developed the Play, Research and Design honours class. Fifteen years later, this class is still going strong with current collaborations with the national conservation body, Kiwi Conservation Club, where students design toys and games for nature play. My research focused on character design for nature advocacy through various research and commercial toy game outputs. I have just completed doctoral research into designing eco-fiction character toys while concurrently developing and serving as program lead for a new 4-year bachelor's degree in Concept design. This program focuses on design for the entertainment industry - games, toys, experience, film and animation- and is the first of its kind in New Zealand.

### **Thinking about your toys and overall career, how does creativity and play factor into your thinking, work, and beliefs?**

Creativity is part of my everyday life. In New Zealand, we have a term "number 8 wire," a cultural mantra of do-it-yourself and making it work with what you have. Living isolated at the bottom of the Pacific has made Kiwis creative by necessity. Creativity is the ability to imagine anything and bring it to life, and I carry this attitude in every aspect of my work and beliefs. If I can dream it, I can work out how to make it, or find others to collaborate with to make it happen. Being creative is a community act; the more you are around creative people like my students and colleagues, the more inspired I feel to develop my ideas. There are no right or wrong solutions, and also no absolute paths to the end result. I encourage this divergent thinking with my students, often working with students from different design disciplines and perspectives, and it is crucial to understand that all voices have creative agency. There is a positive euphoria in working with teams of different people and collectively developing a magical thing that never existed before.



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

I have just completed my PhD, so I am in the magical transition period where I'm developing new projects. I have several on the go. First up is a digital browser-based game about Kākāpō, a large and rare nocturnal parrot. In the 1890s, New Zealand conservationist Richard Henry pioneered using island reserves for endangered species by single-handedly catching and rowing Kākāpō to safety in a small dinghy to protect them from invading predators. In the game, players are challenged to persuade the unruly birds on the boat before the predators arrive. It mirrors playfully the challenges conservationists face to bring species back from the brink of extinction. My doctoral research into eco-fiction toy design has opened up new opportunities. My toy design, The Underfoot, explored designing for toy play outside, and my next project looks at bringing nature inside for play.



*The Underfoot, Range of Eco-fiction Toys (2024)  
Designed by Tanya Marriott*

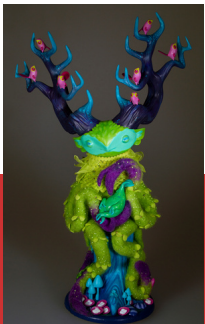
**That sounds fantastic! So, looking at these new opportunities and your career, what is the most rewarding part of your job?**

It's a twofold answer: first, getting to work with my amazing students, and second, having the autonomy to work on my own design research. Often these two areas are not mutually exclusive. I teach predominantly into the honours level design, where students are working on their own self-directed research projects. These projects are so varied - digital games about online communities, board games about insect advocacy, using toy design to explore gender identity, how to ensoul puppets, minimal spaces within location-based experiences, all manifest in one single class. As supervisor, you wear many hats and constantly learn about all sorts of fascinating design aspects. These

connections and relationships often fold into my research where students and graduates collaborate on industry projects and ventures. I am currently serving as the Festival manager for NZ Games Festival, and many of the 20+ team of volunteers running the events are my graduates. The role of mentor evolves into that of colleague, and I am constantly learning and growing as a practitioner.

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

One key credential for success I have seen with my graduate designers is being good to work with. Most of our appointments into roles come from relationships formed through networking and developing connections, so when that specific role comes up, they have you in mind. Skills can be honed and developed on the job, and talent can be nurtured, but a colleague who is motivated and good to work with is gold! Talent and skill is necessary, but it is essential to remain open to new perspectives and to adapt to new challenges. It may take some time to get into the role you have trained for, or want to be in, but if you show your value within the company, I have seen graduates move through different roles and opportunities to land where they want to be. A T-intersection of skill is good - having a generalist skill across various areas, and then one or two aspects of more profound knowledge and potential. The last takeaway is that new researchers and designers are often brimming with enthusiasm to show their potential. It's good to sit back and drink everything in, to show you have absorbed your surroundings and add to the pool of knowledge. Different levels of experience all have valuable offerings to the project, but it can take some time to feel like you are being seen. Just be patient and strategic.



*Kākāriki Guardian art doll (2022)  
Designed by Tanya Marriott*



## Speaking about new challenges and changes, what trends do you see in toys or games that excite or worry you?

I'm concerned about the prevalence of AI within the design process. In some situations, its application can be beneficial, especially in automation and repetitive tasks, but the shift towards its use within the ideation process is disturbing. Most visual AI generators are trained on other designers' work, so inevitably, they start to cycle through ideas and lose innovation from lived human experiences. I am also concerned about nature play, how toys can be designed to encourage children to play imaginatively outdoors, and all of the benefits that independent nature play can bring. I am heartened by the small steps towards sustainable manufacture within toys, although this probably needs some of the bigger players to lead the change revolution so others can follow. The toy industry, like fashion, is consumptive and wasteful. We can learn much from the fashion industry's exploration of circular design or design longevity to keep products in circulation longer. This cannot only be tackled from a sustainable perspective, but also changes on consumer behaviour need to happen for this positive change to stick.

## Last, but not least, what was your favorite childhood toy?

My favorite childhood toy is My Little Pony. I am well known for my obsession with little plastic horses and have a complete collection of Generation One My Little Pony toys and playsets - about 750+ ponies. I also have some rare original packaging brand illustrations, mint in box ponies, and tooling molds for manufacture. You can check out my collection here:

<https://ponygeddon.wordpress.com/>

Thanks so much, Tanya!

To connect with Tanya or check out what playful things she's up to next, visit:

<https://tanyamarriott.co.nz/>

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

<https://creative.massey.ac.nz/>

## Rest in Play

Sudarshan Khanna

*by Suzy Serif*



The world of folk toy and design research has lost a legend. A founding member and former president of ITRA,

Sudarshan Khanna passed away peacefully at the age of 78 in January, 2025, at his home in Vasant Kunj, New Delhi. Those fortunate enough to have crossed paths with Sudarshan knew him as a force of nature—always delighting children and adults alike with a twinkle in his eye, a quick sleight of hand, and an animated flip of the wrist to make a toy monkey jump, an acrobat climb a wooden ladder, a paper bird chirp as it takes flight, or a whirligig twirl in the air. If he was feeling particularly mischievous, he'd surprise a crowd engaged in serious conversation with the strike of a paper cobra, or a toy old man pouring himself a drink. As he acknowledged: "I am a people person. The bulk of design is creativity but it is also about reading people's minds and understanding what they want and what they should want."

Unlike the circumspect magician, Sudarshan never tired of sharing the secrets of the dynamic folk toy, bringing physics to life as he carefully walked his fascinated audiences through the step-by-step process of the toy's animation. Although known internationally as a toy designer, he was always quick to give credit to the hundreds of humble—often illiterate—indigenous toymakers from every region in

India from whom he learned to make handmade toys.

He was an inveterate ethnographer, careful to document not only the process of toy production, but the life stories of the colorful men and women—often of the lowest caste-- who ingeniously crafted the animated toys and sold them for pennies to children at local melas or fairs. In his first book, *The Dynamic Toys of India*, he paid homage to several of these master craftsmen who could transform the simplest and most accessible of materials—sticks, leaves, bamboo, tree gum, insect juice, cow dung, reed grasses or discarded paper or metal clips—into everyday toys that whistled, changed shape, danced, and charmed in the wind. His meticulous records of these encounters over decades of original field research form an invaluable archive of a now dying traditional art form.

These humble festival toys also formed the core of his elementary physics lessons at the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad India, where he held positions as Principal Designer, Head of the Toy Innovation Centre, and Chairman of Education & Research. An internationally acclaimed designer and educator, he pioneered new courses and programs, including the Post Graduate Program in Toy & Game Design at the National Institute of Design, which trained generations of designers through the simple physics and art of traditional toy making. Sudarshan, a lifelong teacher at heart, well understood the value of such humble toys to demonstrate, in his words: “the principles of mass and gravity, friction, sound, centrifugal force and simple mechanics that could even replace some of the expensive scientific equipment.”

Our ITRA family came to look forward to Sudarshan’s toy shenanigans at every ITRA conference from the first meeting in Halmstad, Sweden



in 1996. He served as a member of the Board from 1996 until 2008, with a stint as both president of the Board and vice president. One ITRA colleague, Cleo Gougoulis, remembered how Sudarshan enchanted his audiences with his playful workshops. Reflecting on their first meeting, Cleo added: “I met Sudarshan in Halmstad back in 1996, when he suddenly appeared with an unfolding paper snake which dashed right into a ‘toyful’ conversation I was having during the 1st ITRA conference. We have been friends ever since and colleagues for some years at the ITRA Board.”

Although Sudarshan’s failing health prevented him from attending the Braga conference in 2014, it was there he was awarded the prestigious BRIO prize for his lifelong achievement in research on traditional toymaking in India and on toy design.

Neither Sudarshan nor I could remember exactly when we first met, but we speculated that it might have been as far back as 1979 when I was in India as a 23-year-old Thomas Watson Fellow on a world-wide quest to document the dynamic festival toymakers of Mexico, India, and Japan. It was the International Year of the Child. Sudarshan had just published his first book and was giving demonstrations in New Delhi at several international toy workshops and museum exhibits related to the Year. We both shared a lifelong passion for documenting the rich culture of traditional festival toymaking around the world. He was fascinated with my research on festival toymakers in Mexico and Japan, and it was his pioneering work on the folk toymakers of India that formed the basis of my own study in India during my Watson year.

Once I joined ITRA, as a graduate student studying folklore at The University of Texas at Austin, Sudarshan and I – along with four or five other ITRA members who shared our passion for handmade toymakers – organized panel presentations at each conference focused on the politics and poetics of toy making in

particular historical and cultural contexts. We served on the ITRA Board together for many years, and always found time to steal away and talk about the latest toymakers we had met, and our dream of curating an international exhibition on the art of the festival toy.

Through his long-lasting professional friendships with ITRA members, Sudarshan was invited to participate in a number of international projects and educational programs on the art and culture of handmade toys. These took him to South America, Europe and Scandinavia. One fellow board member, Gilles Brougere, invited Sudarshan to France on several occasions and remembers “the magical workshops he led, and the toy presentations that enchanted everyone in the audience.”

Cleo Gougoulis also reflected on the time she invited Sudarshan to Nafplion, Greece, at the Peloponnesian Folklore Foundation, “where he held a series of unforgettable and enchanting toymaking workshops with local children for an entire month.” Another longtime ITRA member, Siegfried Zoels, recalled with delight the many UNESCO workshops Sudarshan participated in. In his words, His unique approach to children’s workshops combined toy making with storytelling, particularly enchanting children with physical and intellectual disabilities with the sounds, magical movements and elaborate stories of his charming handmade toys.

One ITRA member, Siegfried Zoels, fondly recalls the special relationship he had with Sudarshan, beginning over 30 years ago when they first met when Sudarshan came to Postdam, Germany for the 2nd UNESCO Creativity Workshop. “He came with 2 very big suitcases full of simple toys to show to the other participants and to the children with special needs – and enchant all of us.” In recent years, Sudarshan and his wife moved to New Delhi where he, along with his

daughter, Surabhi Khanna, continued to conduct toy design and education workshops for teachers, trainers and students. As one Indian colleague, Pradyumna Vyas President-Elect, World Design Organisation, wrote, “A pioneer ahead of his time, Prof. Khanna’s contributions to traditional toy design and his global connections brought immense recognition to India. His published books and meticulous documentation will remain invaluable resources for future researchers.” In 1995 the Government of India honored Sudarshan with the National Award for Lifetime Work in promoting design science among children.



Learning of Sudarshan’s untimely death, several ITRA colleagues responded with similar sentiments about his wit and whimsy:

Sudarshan was such an inspiring, warm and supporting person. I learned so much from him and with him. ... One occasion I remember was at the ITRA conference in Halmstad where we had a trip to the coast, making a fire and eating. Sudarshan started a kind of Yoga session. People were gathering full of expectations to get ‘the real thing’ now. He went into the first position and stayed there till people started to doubt the show – I still remember that I could not stop laughing. May he rest in play.” Lieselotte Von Leeuwen, ITRA member

“May he rest in play and peace. The world of toys and traditional toymakers is poorer without him.” Cleo Gougoulis, ITRA board member

“Sudarshan will always be in my memory as a very kind heart, an inspiring person and a good friend. May he rest playfully.” Luisa Magalhaes, ITRA editor and board member

**Sudarshan Khanna, recipient of BRIO AWARD 2013 at ITRA, Portugal 2014:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UEBxzt2WIM&t=9s>

## 10th ITRA WORLD CONFERENCE CALL FOR PROPOSALS

**Submission Deadline: December 31, 2025**

ITRA Conference Proposal Submission via Oxford Abstracts

**The overarching theme for the 10th ITRA World Conference is The Zeitgeist in Toys & Games.**

Throughout recorded history, toys and games have shaped and reflected who we are. They inspire our play and fuel our development, both as individuals and members of society, ready to face the unique demands of our time. As the world has changed, so too have our toys and games. We can observe them evolving, progressing, adapting, seemingly disappearing, and surprisingly reappearing over time. Yet they are more than mere reflections. Just as play creates and shapes culture, as Huizinga noted in *Homo Ludens*, toys and games create and shape our realities as well as our understandings of them. As both carriers and changemakers of culture, they represent and influence the collective spirit of their times – the Zeitgeist.

As a community of toy researchers, archivists, curators, professionals, practitioners, and designers, we not only try to decipher and understand this constantly changing zeitgeist, but also to help shape it. We know just how important that task is. Through play with toys and games, players gain understanding for the worlds in which they live and can make it their own. They can learn and practice essential skills, and they can be introduced to and confronted with the great challenges of their time - all in the creative, inspiring, and open sphere of play. Looking at the past, present, and future of playthings, the question is not so much what the zeitgeist in toys and games can be – but rather how and what they contribute to the multiple and potentially conflicting constellations of ideas, values and norms that come to characterize particular epochs. Given the importance of play, toys and games for us individually and collectively, we have a deep and far-reaching responsibility in trying to answer these questions. The 10th ITRA World Conference provides opportunities to exchange, reflect on, and discuss the zeitgeist in toys and games. We invite proposals from many different disciplines and professions. We also want to include all kinds of toys, games, playthings—physical, digital or hybrid – in our discussions.





The scientific committee welcomes abstracts of completed research, case studies, design studies, educational and development projects, including those in process or development, as well as ideas for future research in order to generate discussion and feedback. Submissions related to the main conference theme are invited, as well as from a broad range of topics on toys, games, and play, including but not limited to:

- Art and Artistry
- AI, Metaverse, Internet of Things and other [New] Technologies
- Availability, Accessibility, and Affordability
- Collecting, Collections, and Preservation
- Cultures, Communities, and Societies
- Gamification
- History and Historical Analysis
- Indigenous, Folk, and Ancient Toys & Games
- Innovations, Transitions, and Subversions
- Intersectionality, Inclusivity, and Intergenerationality
- Lifelong Playing and Learning
- Playgrounds, Parks, and Other Playspaces
- Play Therapy and Therapeutic Toys
- Promotions, Markets, and Trends
- Playthings in, of, and for Times of War and Peace
- Social Justice and Representation
- Socialization, Identity, and Development
- Sustainability, Safety, and Design
- Teaching, and Learning



**ITRA 2026**  
WORLD  
CONFERENCE

**The Zeitgeist in  
Toys & Games**

**Conference Logo:** Tanya Marriott from New Zealand lent her design talents and imagination to create our 2026 World Conference logo. Her logo idea combines the meaning of Zeitgeist as the “spirit of our times” with emerging issues and the significant challenges facing us globally of climate crisis and the shifting dynamics between natural and technological influences (e.g., Artificial Intelligence, Digital/Virtual games and toys, Internet of Things) as the toy industry as it seeks to find more sustainable and ethical methods of manufacture and distribution, while creating toys that are simultaneously lasting and innovative. In her logo design, Tanya seeks to represent the spirit of the toy zeitgeist via a small, bird sprite tasked with bridging the divide between nature and technology. The color palette for the logo draws from the city of Augsburg’s flag and football team. Thank you Tanya!!



## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

To submit a paper, poster, flashtalk, or to organize a symposium/panel please submit a complete abstract with all requested information as described below by

December 31, 2025 through our online portal at:

<https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/36478/submitter>

The first time you access the submission portal you will be asked to register as a user. Please note that the contact information entered in the registration process will only be used by ITRA for the purposes of managing your submission and contacting you about its status. Only complete submissions will be considered for acceptance to the conference. Questions or issues regarding the submission process should be directed to the conference chair, Volker Mehringer at [volker.mehringer@phil.uni-augsburg.de](mailto:volker.mehringer@phil.uni-augsburg.de)

All submissions must be in English and include: (a) the title, (b) names, affiliations, and contact information for each presenter, (c) an abstract (400 word limit), and (d) up to 3 keywords. Keywords are used to organize presentations into appropriate sessions, so please choose words that clearly describe the focus of your work. In addition, please note the following guidelines and requirements for each submission type.

**Papers** are intended for individual papers that are being submitted independently by its author(s). Papers that are part of a panel/symposium should be submitted as a package by the session organizer (see below). The abstract must include a brief introduction or purpose statement, a concise description of the methodology/inquiry approach, data/results, discussion, and conclusion (400 word limit). Please note that in the case of projects still in progress, tentative or anticipated findings should be described. Paper presentations are limited to 20 minutes, with an additional 10 minutes for questions and comments.

**Symposia/Panels** are designed to address an important topic, issue and/or to highlight new advances, methods/approaches, or emerging areas of interest. Symposia generally feature 3-4 presentations by people from different institutions, perspectives, and/or traditions in toy research, design and/or industry. Sessions will be limited to 2 hours and must include dedicated time for question/answer and discussion. Submissions should include an overall title for the symposium. The abstract should clearly communicate the importance of the main topics addressed, overall goals for the session, and a brief description including each participant's contribution to the symposium and individual titles if appropriate (400 word limit).

**Posters** are 2-dimensional displays with a high level of visual interest presented during a 90-minute, regular session. Poster presenters are expected to be at their poster throughout the session to interact with and address questions from interested conference attendees on a 1:1 basis. As with submissions of papers, the abstract must include a brief introduction or purpose statement, and a concise description of the methodology/inquiry approach, data/results, discussion, and conclusion (400 word limit).





## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES - continued

**Flash Talks** are no longer than 5-minutes and are intended to spark conversation and interaction with other scholars interested in a particular theoretical, substantive, or methodological issue. Akin to a round table format the primary focus and goal is the exchange of ideas. This session type is ideal for presenters seeking feedback on work in progress, exploring new research directions, or discussing current challenges and tensions within toy and game research. All flash talk submissions must include: an abstract that describes the content and goal/anticipated outcome of the talk (400 word limit).

**Special Session** is a submission category intended to allow for other presentation formats including Author-Meets-Curious-Readers (AMCR), workshops, or other innovative approaches.

AMCR sessions spotlight books that are of broad interest to ITRA members. AMCRs may be self-nominated and should include three to four potential 'curious readers' who will serve as critics and discussion facilitators. The organizing committee also invites proposals for workshops. Workshops are highly interactive sessions focused around an activity or problem-based discussion that provides useful and/or tangible takeaways for participants with a maximum time limit of 2-hours. Submitted abstracts for workshops must describe the workshop's importance/relevance, outline its overall structure, learning objectives/goals, and intended audience and key takeaways (400 word limit). In addition to the abstract, a list of expendable materials and/or any special requirements (e.g., space or equipment) is also required. Workshop leaders should plan on providing all materials needed for the workshop.

Proposals for AMCRs, workshops or other special sessions should be sent directly to the program chair, Dr. Volker Mehringer, at [volker.mehringer@phil.uni-augsburg.de](mailto:volker.mehringer@phil.uni-augsburg.de) for consideration by **December 31, 2025**. Please note that acceptance for special sessions is quite limited.



**To submit a paper, poster, flashtalk, or to organize a symposium/panel**

use our online portal at:

**<https://app.oxfordabstracts.com/stages/36478/submitter>**

Please include all requested information as described above with your submission.

**Submission Deadline: December 31, 2025**

## 10th ITRA World Conference Committees

### *Scientific Committee*

**Vincent Berry**, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, France

**Harshul Brahmbhatt**, Children's Research University, India

**Barbara Carè**, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

**Paul Darvasi**, Gold Bug Interactive & University of Toronto, Canada

**Jeffrey H. Goldstein**, University of Utrecht, The Netherlands

**Karen Feder**, Design School Kolding, Kolding, Denmark

**Gundolf Freyermuth**, Cologne Game Lab & Internationale Filmschule Köln, Germany

**Cleo Gougoulis**, University of Patras, Greece

**Salim Hashmi**, King's College London

**Katriina Heljakka**, University of Turku Finland

**Volker Mehringer**, University of Augsburg, Germany

**Greta Pennell**, University of Indianapolis, USA

**Miriam Morante Bonet**, Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain

**Luisa Magalhães**, Catholic University, Portugal

**Christine Spiller**, Deutsches Spielzeug Museum, Germany

**Sabrina Thomas**, Duke University, USA

**Jeffrey Trawick-Smith**, Eastern Connecticut State University, USA

**Lieselotte van Leeuwen**, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

**Wiebke Waburg**, University of Koblenz, Germany

### *Organizing Committee*

**Volker Mehringer**, University of Augsburg, Germany  
ITRA Conference Committee Chair & Board Member

**Greta Pennell**, ITRA President, ex officio, University of Indianapolis, USA

**Gilles Brougère**, ITRA Treasurer, University Sorbonne Paris Nord, France

**Ozlem Cankaya**, MacEwan University, Canada

**Brian McCarty**, War Toys, USA

**Markus Weimker**, Hochschule Fresenius, University of Applied Science, Germany

**Artemis Yagou**, Deutsches Museum, Germany



### **Contact us**

For ITRA 2026 Conference Questions:  
[volker.mehringer@phil.uni-augsburg.de](mailto:volker.mehringer@phil.uni-augsburg.de)

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



ITRA 2026  
WORLD  
CONFERENCE

The Zeitgeist in  
Toys & Games





## 2026 ITRA Prize for Outstanding Toy Research Call for Nominations

**Deadline: 31 December, 2025**

The ITRA Prize has been established with generous support from the British Toy and Hobby Association (BTHA; [www.btha.co.uk](http://www.btha.co.uk)). The first prizes were awarded in July 2008 during the 5th ITRA World Conference in Nafplion, Greece.

At each ITRA World Conference two prizes are awarded. The junior prize of 700 USD is awarded for the best student research on toys. The senior prize of 1,400 USD is awarded to a senior scholar or practitioner on the uses, design and effects of toys.

Prize recipients are expected to present their award-winning work at the 2026 ITRA World Conference in Augsburg, Germany 5-7 August 2026. Conference registration fees are waived for prize recipients. The Junior Prize recipient may also receive a travel reimbursement stipend of up to 700 USD toward the costs of attending the 2026 ITRA World Conference.

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the ITRA Prize is to recognize outstanding research in the field of toy research.

### **Eligibility:**

To qualify for the Prize, the work must have been completed or published between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2025. Nominations may be submitted by the researcher or by a member of ITRA.

Papers, either published or unpublished, in any area of toy research, are eligible. Thesis, dissertations, book chapters, monographs or books authored by one or more individuals are also eligible. In the case of multi-authored works, the prize award is split equally between authors. Edited volumes are *not* eligible.

Submissions must be in English (original or translation). Research on the uses, design, meanings, and effects of toys in child development, education, social and human sciences, and medicine will be considered for the awards. Submissions of theoretical and historical texts will also be considered as long as these are linked to potential research. Book nominations should be accompanied by a summary of 2500-3000 words with complete copies (either hard copy or electronic) should be provided to each prize committee member upon request.

### **Submissions:**

ITRA Prize nominations are to be submitted directly to the prize committee chair, Greta Pennell ([gpennell@uindy.edu](mailto:gpennell@uindy.edu)) as a PDF attachment by 31 December 2025.

### **Awards Committee:**

The Awards Committee consists of Greta Pennell, Chair (USA), Gilles Brougère (France), Mathieu Gielen (Netherlands), Suzanne Seriff (USA), and Jeremy Saucier (USA).

### **Evaluation:**

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

**The 2026 ITRA prizes will be awarded at the 10th ITRA World Conference in Augsburg, Germany 5-7 August 2026.**



## Introducing Augsburg, Germany: Location for our 2026 ITRA World Conference

The charming and family-friendly city of Augsburg is one of the oldest cities in Germany and the third largest in Bavaria. Founded by the Romans in 15 BC, Augsburg is known for its magnificent fountains, natural beauty, grand architecture, and exquisite churches. Its cathedral, the Dom Mariä Heimsuchung built around 1000 CE, contains the oldest figurative stained-glass windows in the world. Augsburg is also home to the famous Fuggerei, the world's oldest social housing complex, and the famous Augsburg Puppenkiste (puppet theater and museum) founded in 1948.

With so much to see and do within the city and its surrounds why not consider coming early and/or staying a few days after the conference. For more info see: <https://www.augsburg-tourismus.de/de/>



The University of Augsburg was founded in 1970 as a "Reformuniversität" (Reform University). It now serves more than 20,000 Bachelor and Master degree students in the fields of humanities and social sciences, law and economics, natural sciences, technological and computer sciences. Since the founding of its medicine faculty in 2016 the University of Augsburg considers itself as a full university. The University is a campus university surrounded by a beautiful park-like landscape, which is particularly beautiful in spring and summer. For more info see: <https://www.uni-augsburg.de/en/ueber-uns/>



## Calls for Papers

*30 May, 2025 Submission Deadline*

Eureka! The national children's museum

Theme: Making a Difference: Raising Aspirations | Exceeding Expectations

Conference Date: 25-28 November, 2025

Liverpool, UK

<https://handson.eureka.org.uk/call-for-proposals/>

*2 July, 2025 Submission Deadline*

14th Games and Learning Alliance Conference

(GALA Conference 2025) organized by the Serious Games Society in collaboration with Utrecht University.

Conference Dates: 19-21 November, 2025

<https://conf.seriousgamesociety.org>



## Upcoming Conferences

**12-16 June, 2025** International Communication Association 75th Anniversary Conference: Disrupting and Consolidating Communication Research  
Denver, Colorado USA

<https://www.icahdq.org/page/annual-conference>

## Upcoming Conferences - continued

**14-16 May, 2025** Albuquerque, New Mexico USA  
Interactivity 2025: Uplifting the Community Reaching New Heights

Association of Children's Museums in partnership with ¡Explora!

<https://childrensmuseums.org/interactivity/registration/>

**23-26 June, 2025**

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

Location: Reykjavik, Iceland

<https://idc.acm.org>

**25-27 June, 2025**

IPA Asia Pacific Play Conference

Melbourne, Australia

Theme: Play: Protecting, Preserving, Promoting

<https://nscevents.com.au/ipa-asia-pacific-play-conference-2025>



**25-27 June, 2025**

Association for Consumer Research (ACR) Latin America

Theme: The Human Touch: Nurturing Consumer and Societal Well-Being

São Paulo, Brazil

[https://acr.insper.edu.br/?](https://acr.insper.edu.br/?utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANgtz--lqna87ygEQWb7MrXkB745--CLYdJMtrKsFt31pFt_mekNOj_g2k5yLyaZTWfU_db9IEYyAD-8ZevbLfn9qoBChC6dVw&hsmi=326586039&utm_content=326586039&utm_source=hs_email)

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[9IEYyAD-](https://acr.insper.edu.br/?utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANgtz--lqna87ygEQWb7MrXkB745--CLYdJMtrKsFt31pFt_mekNOj_g2k5yLyaZTWfU_db9IEYyAD-8ZevbLfn9qoBChC6dVw&hsmi=326586039&utm_content=326586039&utm_source=hs_email)

[8ZevbLfn9qoBChC6dVw&hsmi=326586039&utm](https://acr.insper.edu.br/?utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANgtz--lqna87ygEQWb7MrXkB745--CLYdJMtrKsFt31pFt_mekNOj_g2k5yLyaZTWfU_db9IEYyAD-8ZevbLfn9qoBChC6dVw&hsmi=326586039&utm_content=326586039&utm_source=hs_email)

[content=326586039&utm\\_source=hs\\_email](https://acr.insper.edu.br/?utm_medium=email&hsenc=p2ANgtz--lqna87ygEQWb7MrXkB745--CLYdJMtrKsFt31pFt_mekNOj_g2k5yLyaZTWfU_db9IEYyAD-8ZevbLfn9qoBChC6dVw&hsmi=326586039&utm_content=326586039&utm_source=hs_email)

**13 - 15 August 2025**

Serious Play Conference

Rochester, NY

<https://seriousplayconf.com/>

**26-28 September 2025**

Queerness and Games Conference (QGCon)

Montreal, Quebec Canada

<https://www.qgcon.org/cfg>

**9-11 October, 2025**

Association for Consumer Research

Washington, DC

Theme: Buying and Beyond

<https://acrwebsite.org/events/acr25/>

**22-25 October, 2025**

US IPA Conference

Location: Louisville, KY USA

<https://ipausa.org/events/2025-ipa-usa-conference/>

## Toy Fairs and Current Exhibitions

**22 February – 26 October, 2025**

Building Blocks- Creating Worlds Through

PlayBauklötze – spielend Welten erfinden

Spielzeug Welten Museum Basel. Basel, Switzerland

[https://www.spielzeug-welten-museum-](https://www.spielzeug-welten-museum-basel.ch/de/ausstellungen/2025/baukloetze-spielend-welten-erfinden.html)

[basel.ch/de/ausstellungen/2025/baukloetze-spielend-welten-erfinden.html](https://www.spielzeug-welten-museum-basel.ch/de/ausstellungen/2025/baukloetze-spielend-welten-erfinden.html)



## Members Forum

### BELGIUM

**Jean-Pierre Rossie** (Forthcoming, 2025). Percussion Instruments in North African and Saharan children's toy and play cultures. *TELESTES: An International Journal of Archaeomusicology and Archaeology of Sound*, Instituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, Fabrizio Serra Editore, Pisa – Roma, IV <https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5810078>. This article is the second of six articles that have been written for TELESTES (see the Winter 2024 newsletter for more information about the series).

### BRAZIL

**Janaïne dos Santos Rolim** is working on several projects along with her doctoral studies. *Playfulness and Dementia: A Handmade Board Game to Promote Cognitive Stimulation and Foster the Well-Being of Elderly People* is being conducted in collaboration with her advisor, professor Dr. Jan Edson Rodrigues Leite, and fellow doctoral student, Master Tatiana Ramalho Barbosa. Grounded in the principles of Cognitive Linguistics, they are designing a handmade board game – a multimodal text – to be used with 55 elderly residents of Lar da Providência, a charitable organization. Janaïne's doctoral thesis, *The Power of Play: A Systemic-Functional and Cognitive Analysis of Female Empowerment in Playing with Barbie*, will explore the intersection of play and empowerment from a linguistic and cognitive perspective.

### FINLAND

**Kati Heljakka** joined the Toy Business Forum at Nuremberg Toy Fair in January 2025. She gave a talk at the Toy Business Forum Spielwarenmesse 2025. Her presentation explored developments in contemporary toy design, particularly emphasizing sustainability in design, production, and play.

Between November 2024 and February 2025, Kati hosted and supervised Letícia Hara Takahama Tagliacollo from Unesp University, Brazil, at the University Consortium of Pori. Letícia studies psychology and her research focuses on adult toy collectors.

Heljakka, K. (2024). *Screens & Links: Playful Affordances of Future Friends*. In J. Banks (Ed.) *Android, Assembled: The Relational and Technical Anatomy of Social Robots*. Peter Lang Publishing. The chapter explores the potential of smart toy robots to be future friends by examining their screen-based and networked affordances through speculative toy fiction.

### GERMANY

**Volker Mehringer**. (2025). *Diversity und Inklusion bei Spielzeug und Spielen (Diversity and Inclusion in Toys and Games)*. Beltz/Juventa. ISBN-10: 3779983613; ISBN-13: 978-3779983613.

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

### GREECE

**Cleo Gougoulis** is supervising a Network of kindergarten and primary school teachers who participate in a series of seminars and hands-on activities on traditional toys and games.

The Network under the name "Traditional toys and games: Discovering, Playing, Creating" consists of 7 schools and 25 teachers in the regional unit of Achaia, NW. Peloponnese, Greece and is coordinated by the head of Cultural affairs of the Directorate of Primary Education of Western Greece, Vaso Matzouratou in collaboration with the Head Curator of the Science and Technology Museum, University of Patras, Peny Theologi-Gouti.

All teachers are currently in the process of organizing these intergenerational sessions, which will culminate in an exhibition of children's and



teacher's drawings and constructions inspired by hand-made toys of previous generations and a special event for the International Museum day 2025 at the Science and Technology Museum, University of Patras at the end of May 2025.



Photos: Workshops on kite and doll making with primary school and kindergarten teachers of Patras at the Science and Technology Museum, University of Patras, December 2024-January 2025.

## UK

**Seth Giddings** (2024). *Toy Theory: Technology and Imagination in Play*. MIT Press. ISBN: 9780262548212. \$US 50.00 (pb). 282 pp., 6 x 9 in., 61 b&w illus  
<https://direct.mit.edu/books/oa-monograph/5870/Toy-TheoryTechnology-and-Imagination-in-Play>

## USA

**Kathy Merlock Jackson & Mark West**

(Forthcoming July, 2025) (Eds).

*Once Upon a Toy:  
Essays on the Interplay  
Between Stories and  
Playthings*. McFarland.



**I choose LOVE.**

I choose Inclusion. I choose Empathy.  
Compassion. Equality. Dignity. Diversity.  
I choose Community. Kindness. Integrity.  
Honesty. Respect. I choose Justice.  
I choose Facts. Peace. The Planet.  
I choose Humanity.

**I choose LOVE.**

ENLIGHTENED CONSCIOUSNESS