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ORIGINS, EVOLUTION, ESSENTIALS THE ISST CONGRESS

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Images: Bollingen.
Photo: Laura Soble

The 21st International Congress for Sandplay Therapy was set in Switzerland, the home country of both Dora Kalff and C.G. Jung. With the unmistakable ringing of a cowbell an international group of over 120 individuals representing over 21 countries gathered in the pastoral, verdant setting of the Kartause Ittingen, a restored monastery. Participants were welcomed with bars of Swiss chocolate. The Congress theme: *Origins, Evolution, Essentials*, focused presentations on the creation of sandplay and the International Society for Sandplay Therapy (ISST), as well as present and future directions.

The Congress, organized by Ruth Ammann and Maria Kendler of the Swiss Sandplay Society (SGSST), also included optional excursions to St. Gallen (including Kesswill, the birth place of Jung) as well as a rare visit to Jung's Tower in Bollingen, where sandplayers were treated to a personal tour led by Jung's grandson, Jost Hoerni.



Founding ISST member Andreina Navone of Italy presented an opening talk, *ISST: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow. Memory and Identity of an Association*. Through words and photographs she reflected on the origins of Sandplay, from Dora Kalff meeting Jung in the mountains of Parpan in 1945 through the 1982 formation of the International Society of Sandplay Therapy. In addition, she highlighted the analytic components of the method, quoting from Francesco Montecchi the importance of keeping an open, non-dogmatic attitude towards sandplay therapy.

Outgoing ISST president, Ruth Ammann, followed with a talk entitled, *Kalffian Sandplay? Jungian Sandplay? Differences and Similarities*. Ammann posed that “Kalffians need a Jungian way, and Jungians need a Kalffian way,” as both provide important foundational legs for the sandplay therapist. She reminded listeners that it takes life experience, time and seasoning for clinicians to grow as sandplay therapists. “Build your house, your Self, with many pillars,” she said, sharing that the personality of the therapist--citing authenticity, integrity, and devotion to the work--is the most important aspect to doing good therapeutic work.

On Saturday, Rosa Napoliello of Italy spoke on the theme *Sandplay Therapy: From Alchemy to Neuroscience*. Covering material regarding memory, mirror neurons and the embodied self, Napoliello spoke of the power of the therapeutic relationship to stimulate synaptic remodeling, and activate bridges and webs of connections in the brain. She mirrored what Ammann said in her previous talk, quoting Jung that the ability of the therapist depends on his personality-- that through the analytical process, the therapists have enriched and remolded connections between the right and left hemispheres of their own brain, between conscious and unconscious, which activates their own transcendent function. The ultimate goal, she stated, is for patients to have the same experience through the therapy process: for the transcendent function to be activated, to connect conscious with unconscious, and to connect the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Sandplay therapy can facilitate these connections through the experience of play. “We offer patients the



possibility to reactivate the symbolic levels that our hypermodern society is trying to take away from us.”

Margareth Lury Yoshikawa of Brazil presented a keynote talk about a case focused on psychosomatic symptoms, noting that the sandplay process provided transference--to shift beyond a state or level; transformation--to go beyond form; and transcendence--to go beyond immanence.

Liza Ravitz of the United States spoke on *The Therapist as Witness*. In a presentation highlighted with images, she spoke about the safe and protected therapy space, which interweaves into an alchemical mix: the inner space of the therapist and the patient, as well as a third space in which they co-mingle. In addition she posited on what the sandplay therapist does to witness a client, and amplified other aspects of what she termed multidimensional space: sacred-archetypal space, mother-infant space, and co-transference space. In conclusion she noted that awareness of witnessing these aspects allows for deeper connection to the Self, greater wholeness and inner order.

Alexander Ezterhuyzen, of the United Kingdom, spoke on *Essentials of ISST Sandplay*. He

began his talk discussing globalization, its challenges and opportunities for sandplay therapy. Globalization, with the rise of the world wide web, virtual reality, fiber optics, and the digital highway, “dissolves areas of time and space, leading to closer integration of the world, and increased permeability of boundaries.” He brought up the conflict between the “drive for instantaneous, measurable results without waiting, and taking the time to develop.” An issue with the speed of the world is that people lose the capacity to wait, and stay with what is unknown, which is central to sandplay therapy. He reminded us that “a symbolic approach is essential to the way in which we work as Jungians and sandplay therapists.”

Saturday and Sunday afternoons, and Monday morning were devoted to breakout sessions. Each session had a chairperson and a presenter. After the seminars were completed, the entire community gathered to hear each chairperson present a summary of each session. Topics were wide-ranging, including, sandplay research, the dream in the sandtray, creating a free and protected space, transference and countertransference and resonance in sandplay, and sandplay with different ages and populations, including using sandplay in response to a natural disaster, etc. There was then time for comments and group discussion. Discussion time was quite rich, as a time for integration of material presented, as well as a time to bring up related topics to the larger group for discussion and reflection.

Friday evening, the ISST General Assembly was convened. The membership voted in two new co-presidents: Rie Rogers Mitchell of the United States of America, and Alexander Esterhuyzen, of the United Kingdom. Out-going president Ruth Ammann was presented with a plaque in honor of her many years of dedicated and passionate service to ISST.

Swiss hospitality was warm, and most thoughtful throughout the Congress. As a farewell, participants each received a small cowbell as a souvenir for their sandplay collections. It was announced that the 2013 ISST Congress will be hosted by the Italian Sandplay Society and held in Venice, Italy.

