Sandplay Therapists of America held their 2014 National Conference, “The Spirit of Story in Sandplay” in Seattle Washington, June 4-8, 2014. Gathering together with sandplayers from all around the world, hearing about exciting work happening in consultation rooms and clinics, and being in community with like-minded souls is, indeed, quite regenerative.

Maggie Baron, from England, opened the conference with a talk entitled “Maypoles: Narratives of Transformation.” Her talk focused on the play of images and narrative, how stories are held together by expressional links of different forms. She described sandplay as an improvisation of images, dreams, spoken comments and personal accounts. I had the image of everyone at the conference gathering, searching for a tree, erecting our own maypole, decorating it, and dancing around it together, synthesizing our sandplay stories, and transforming both individually and as a community as a result.
I attended a presentation called “Turtle Stories of Creation” by Valeria Grishko from London by way of Russia and New York City. Her own story of being a migrant, added a depth and poignancy to the talk. Her teaching about turtles and tortoises, and their resilience and sense of place was timely as sand players gathered from around the world in Seattle to tell their stories. Grishko ended her talk with a very moving tribute to STA and ISST founding member Kay Bradway, who had a deep relationship to the symbol of the turtle. In Hebrew there is a phrase, *L’dor v’dor* which means “from generation to generation.” Valeria Grishko's talk embodied for me, what that means. There are many of us who did not have the opportunity to study with Dora Kalff or Kay Bradway, but the essence of their teaching is transmitted from one generation of sandplayers to the next through teaching, consultation, and holding the space for personal process work. When Grishko spoke about Kay Bradway with such respect and appreciation having not met her, I was moved to tears, because by exploring the symbol of the turtle and making her own meaning of it, Valeria Grishko was embodying how sandplay will continue to grow and thrive.
In another different yet equally moving vein, Bert Meltzer came from Israel to share sandplay work at a school in the Bedouin village of Laqya, done in collaboration with an Arab therapist and Bedouin school principal. Working in a place with many complicated longstanding cultural issues and finding common ground in the sand with the people of the desert, personified the depth, integrity and hope inherent in person to person connections. While generations of trauma and conflict cannot be erased, the resilience of the human spirit of connection was palpable and moving. Bert Meltzer’s deep humanity, passion and respect for the people and the power of the work were inspirational. This international exchange increases the collective container, allowing us all to help hold such difficult work and support one another.

On Saturday morning historian Sonu Shamdasani gave a keynote entitled “Jung’s Practice of the Image.” In this talk he highlighted the history of Jung’s thinking and practice of active imagination. Jung’s "lived through symbolic process" of the Red Book was also shared. Shamdasani stated: “According to Jung, without active imagination, there is no analysis, or individuation.” He then went on to share that the spirit of engagement with image and figures in the practice of Sandplay is more alive and developed with STA than other Jungian conclaves. Beyond being electrifying to hear, it was validating to the work so many of us are engaged in to connect to something larger than ourselves through the history and practice of working with image.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

LAURA SOBLE, MA, MFT, REAT, CST-T is a teaching member of Sandplay Therapists of America (STA) and of the International Society of Sandplay Therapy (ISST), and an Analytical Candidate at the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco. She has published in the Arts in Psychotherapy Journal and the Journal of Sandplay Therapy and is a founding member and former board officer of the Northern California Regional Sandplay Society (NCRSS). Laura Soble presents and consults nationally and internationally on sandplay therapy and the integration of the arts in psychotherapy. She has a depth psychotherapy practice in Oakland, California, USA. CORRESPONDENCE: laura@laurasoble.net

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHERS:

LESLIE JOHANNES, Med, LMFT, CST is a certified member of STA & ISST and a founding member of the Northwest Sandplay Therapists. She is a Clinical Member of the Jungian Psychotherapists Association, Northwest Alliance for Psychoanalytic Study, as well as AAMFT & WAMFT, and is a Washington State Supervisor and an AAMFT Supervisor in Mentorship. Leslie Johannes has also completed the North Pacific Institute of Analytical Psychology two year program, seminars for professionals and a two year PACT training. Maintaining a private practice in Bellevue, Washington for twenty years, Leslie Johannes sees adults, couples & children for personal, depth and relational psychotherapy. She also facilitates psychotherapy groups for professional women and helps divorced parents with co-parenting issues. CORRESPONDENCE: leslie@lesliejohannes.com

RYAN JOHANNES is a photographer in Kirkland, Washington.

REFLECTIONS FROM SEATTLE: TRANSMISSIONS AND TRANSCENDENCE by Laura Soble (Oakland, California, USA)


ABSTRACT: The author reflects on The Spirit of Story in Sandplay, the 2014 STA National Conference in Seattle, Washington, USA.