Before being invited to write a reflection, I watched this film free from any expectation or need to engage the analytic part of my brain. To put my initial response in context, I rarely watch anything on a computer screen and never for more than a few moments – if I have to. I was hooked from the beginning, compelled to watch the entire 30 minutes, just the way I was hooked so many years ago by my first experience in the sand.

I emerged from this first viewing with a deeply felt experience of the free and protected space which Dora Kalff identified as key to the transformative healing potential of a Sandplay process. The peaceful tone and aesthetic beauty of the film, the consistently modulated, patient, voices of those interviewed, and the subtlety of the music all served to underscore this impression. As is true for me in reflecting on an individual sandtray or Sandplay process over time, multiple viewings have elicited an ever deeper appreciation for the richness of the film.
On a second pass, with notepad in hand, I heard the subtly different ways in which a wide variety of sandplay teachers articulate their understanding of a therapy which is hard to pin down in words. What comes across is the rich vein of theoretical knowledge and practical experience represented by these thoughtful individuals. We are encouraged by their suggestions about the multiple meanings of individual figures to look beyond the obvious, to the roots of where healing happens. Nothing is all dark, or all light; we are complex creatures containing everything of universal experience within us.

Guided by answers to the questions posed by a young psychology student, we hear from many voices how this therapy introduced in the 1950s to treat individual children has broadened to serve adults, groups in disaster situations, those in a creative process, the elderly suffering from brain syndrome, individuals with brain injury, post-traumatic stress, and early childhood trauma. We learn about the origins and theoretical foundations of Sandplay, the many opportunities for training, the primacy of a personal Sandplay process as prerequisite for offering this therapy to others, and how this non-verbal method works to effect deep healing.

Lorraine Freedle connects what we know experientially as Sandplay therapists with emerging findings in neurobiology, articulating how Sandplay fosters multilevel neural integration, actually changing the brain through the touching, seeing and doing that happens in making a tray. Freedle’s 2007 article, Sandplay Therapy with Traumatic Brain Injured Adults: An Exploratory Qualitative Study, in the Journal of Sandplay Therapy is an excellent example of the research being done to further our knowledge base about how Sandplay heals.

I’m not sure what prompted my third viewing of the film with muted sound, but on reflection it makes perfect sense that I would have the most profound experience of a film about non-verbal therapy while viewing it in silence. Without the distraction of word and sound, I slowed down and became receptive at a new level to the wide variety of trays and images shown, pausing the film often to linger on scenes with particular resonance. I felt a range of responses to the trays and noticed how many different kinds there were: beautiful, stark, simple, chaotic. I saw that there is no right way to do a tray, only the way the psyche guides us in the moment to choose a figure and place it in the sand.
I was reminded of Martin Kalff’s 2013 article, Experience Related Case Study: Like a Masked Ball in the *Journal of Sandplay Therapy* in which he encourages us to bring our whole being – and in particular our sensations and feelings in the moment – to an understanding of scenes in the sand. He makes a distinction between “a one sided emphasis on rational explanation” and what Carl Jung speaks of in the Red Book as “knowledge of the heart.” This deeper knowledge, Kalff states, “arises from introspection and silence.”

Looked at in this way, one tray caught at my heart with unexpected poignancy. At 22 minutes into the film, a tray is shown in which the dominant color is gray, the sand dry and unsettled. As much as I wanted to move on, I could not take my eyes away from the images. Looking and looking again, I allowed myself to inhabit the feelings of unease and deep sadness evoked in me. Only then did I register the figures and their significance. I saw the Twin Towers, a jet airplane, the Eiffel Tower, some people attacking, others fallen to the ground, and still others with suitcases walking away from several houses toward an inflatable rubber raft in the front of the tray.

As I witnessed the history of our current international political crisis documented from 9/11 up to the present day in this tray made in the
summer of 2012 by anonymous hands, I was struck by the realization that just as the shameless cruelty and suffering of the world resides in each one of us, so too does the potential for healing that world. I could ask for no more visceral confirmation of the deep wisdom our psyches hold, and that we are given the opportunity to express and integrate through Sandplay therapy.

Carl Jung spoke of this level of attunement as the collective unconscious. In his pioneering work demonstrating the natural healing power of the unconscious as it expresses through dream symbolism, he set the stage for what would later become the three dimensional interactive dream-like process which is Sandplay therapy. His psyche too foretold a cataclysmic world situation through a dream he describes in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. In this dream, which disturbed him for many months leading up to WWI, he saw the European continent bathed in rivers of blood. It was this experience which led to his first recorded mention of the collective unconscious as a means of describing how human psyches can hold a shared body of knowledge transcending time and place.

Rich at so many levels, this film is an excellent vehicle for informing the general public, students, and practicing therapists about a therapeutic modality that deserves wider recognition. Whether viewed for factual information, a felt experience of the free and protected space which skilled Sandplay therapists offer their clients, or to invite a response to the trays and images through the lens of an open heart, the film is an invaluable teaching tool with surprises and insight for seasoned Sandplay therapists as well as those just beginning their practice.

REFERENCES


LAURA BACHMAN, MA, CKT, SP is a Sandplay Practitioner, member of Sandplay Therapists of America (STA), and Membership Chair of the Northern California Regional Sandplay Society (NCRSS). After receiving her Masters in Clinical Psychology and Public Practice and working for several years in a psychiatric emergency room, Laura Bachman was drawn to explore somatic treatment methods. She was introduced to Sandplay at the same time she began training in Kairos therapy, a method of hands-on energy work aimed at releasing emotions trapped in the physical body. Her current practice with adults combines these two modalities in a primarily nonverbal approach to healing. Laura Bachman has particular interest in supporting women who are themselves in the healing professions. CORRESPONDENCE: lbachman@post.harvard.edu  WEBSITE: www.laurabachman.net

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WHAT IS SANDPLAY THERAPY?  
A Reflection by Laura Bachman  
San Anselmo, California, USA


ABSTRACT: In a beautiful 30 minute video directed by Gita Morena, Sandplay Therapy is defined through interviews with certified teaching members of Sandplay Therapists of America. A wide range of trays and figures are shown as examples. The film offers a felt experience of the safe and protected space, information about the origins, application and training available in Sandplay, and a neurobiological explanation for how sandplay heals. The reviewer suggests watching the film at least once with the audio muted to fully appreciate the depth of what is expressed nonverbally in even a single sandplay.

Above: Details from Into The Deep by Margaret Humphris © 2014.