

# Images of coniunctio in sandplay: when Eros and Psyche play in the sand

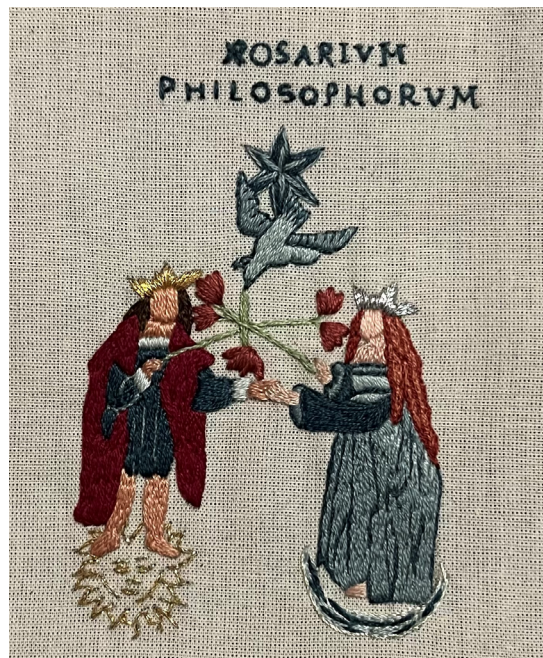
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## Abstract

The alchemical image of coniunctio – the union between opposites – is what inspires this reflection. The alchemical treatise *Rosarium Philosophorum* is a sequence of images in which the theme of coniunctio is central and was an important spark for Jung when he investigated the issue of transference in the analytical process. As a way of immersion in the theme of coniunctio and the transference relationship, images embroidered by the author illustrate the present work, together with sandplay images that have the theme of coniunctio as inspiration. The theme of encounter is central to the story of Eros and Psyche by Apuleius. It is also present in dreams and in many images created in the sandplay sands. Through the journey of the psyche/Psyche described in the story, the images in the sand and the embroidered alchemical rep-

resentations, we seek a more sensitive language to delve deeper into the transference issue in the analysis processes with sandplay. ■

**Keywords**  
analytical  
psychology,  
coniunctio,  
transfer,  
sandplay, Eros  
and Psyche.



**Figure 1.** Embroidery based on the second engraving of *Rosarium Philosophorum* (king and queen). See Jung, 1986, fig. 2.

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## Images of coniunctio in sandplay: when Eros and Psyche play in the sand

### My proposal

The alchemical image of *coniunctio* as a union or encounter between polarities will be my inspiration in this article. My proposal is to reflect on the theme of the eternal search for balance between the feminine and masculine poles in us, through us, and how this search is reflected in the images created in the sand in psychotherapy processes with sandplay.

Images in the sand, poetic writing and alchemical images will guide us on this path. Through them, I seek a more sensitive language.

Another experiment I proposed in this process of delving into the theme of *coniunctio* was to embroider a few images from the alchemical

treatise *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Figure 1 and others) so that, through embroidery, I could probe into these inspiring images of encounter and transformation. Elena Bernabè, an Italian writer and psychologist, poetically describes this ancient activity:

By embroidering you connect to that fine thread that belongs to all humanity and its mysteries. By sewing you turn into a spider that weaves its web, silently telling the world all the secrets of life. Interweaving the threads, interweave your thoughts, your emotions. And you will connect to the divine that is within you and that holds the beginning of the thread. (Bernabè, n.d., our translation)

Embroidery, to me, is an activity full of Eros, carried out from the soul; it is an experience of encounter between threads, fabrics, drawn images that are gradually transformed through the colors and stitches of free embroidery (Figure 2). In the act of embroidery, we dive deeply into the image, since it is a time-consuming activity, matured over time, an alchemical process: the soul projected onto the image embroidered onto the fabric. Sandplay can also be a tool in this sense. Embroidery and sandplay are creation and cocreation experiences. In the *Rosarium*, the image of the alchemical phase was my foundation, my *prima materia*, and I allowed myself to cocreate images using inspiring colors and stitches. I refer to the notion of cocreation because the intuitive creation process was based on an image that already exists. This can also be our quest in sandplay while creating a scene/image from the available material: miniatures and tables with sand. Our objective



**Figure 2.** Embroidery based on the fifth engraving of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* (*coniunctio*). See Jung, 1986, fig. 5.

is also cocreation in the sense of collaboration, working together: the three-dimensional image created in the sand is a collaboration between unconscious and conscious.

### Eros & Psyche

The theme of encounter or *coniunctio* is present in the wonderful poem by Fernando Pessoa:

#### Eros & Psyche

Legend has it that  
An enchanted princess slept  
To be awoken only  
By a noble youth who would come  
From beyond the road wall.

He had attempted  
To overcome evil and good  
Before, already freed,  
He left the wrong path  
For the one the Princess follows.

The Sleeping Princess,  
If she waits, sleeping waits,  
Dreams of her life in death,  
And adorns her forgotten forehead,  
Green, an ivy wreath.

Far away is the struggling noble youth,  
Unknowing his own purpose,  
Breaks the fated path,  
By her he is ignored,  
To him she is nobody.

But each one fulfills their Destiny  
She, enchanted sleeping  
He, in search of her, clueless  
By divine process  
That causes the road to exist.

And although it's dark  
All along the road,  
And false, he comes safe,

And overcoming road and wall,  
Arrives where in sleep she lives,

And, still dizzy from what had happened,  
At the head, in sea air,  
Raises his hand, and finds ivy,  
And sees that he himself was  
The Sleeping Princess.

(Pessoa, 1983, p.175-176, our translation)

This latest stanza has always moved me: the one who seeks and the one who waits as the same person (Figure 3). Two polarities in our souls in endless search: the balance between polarities as an *opus alquimica*, this eternal, constant and cyclical search in each of us, as individuals or as a society.

Fernando Pessoa's poem brings a beautiful image of encounter/*coniunctio*! The plot refers to *Little Rose of Thorns*, the Brothers Grimm's tale, better known as *Sleeping Beauty*, but the poet named it *Eros and Psyche*! The same divine/mortal couple that inspired so many Jungian authors –Erich Neumann, Marie-Louise Von Franz, James Hillman, Rafael López-Pedraza– titles this poem

In his work, Pessoa experienced different facets of his soul and identified them through heteronyms. This poem shows the prince's



Figure 3. *Coniunctio*-themed sandplay scene.

quest (the masculine aspect of our soul) and the princess waiting in sleep (the feminine aspect of our soul). In the tale/myth Eros and Psyche (Figure 4) described by Apuleius (2nd century AD) in the book *The Golden Ass*, this same theme crystallizes in an inverted way, and who undertakes the search is Psyche, the soul.

My quest in this text is to think and feel the theme of the eternal search for encounter through the soul (not the ego), also called psychic marriage, *hierosgamos* or *coniunctio*. The theme is present in many mythological images and sacred tales – Eros and Psyche. And it is also very constant in our dreams and in the images constellated on the sand.

In his book “On Eros and Psyche” (2010), Rafael López-Pedraza, a Cuban analyst, reports that the myth:

[...] is the only one in all mythological literature that tells us about the initiation of the soul through mythological imagery and folk or fairy tales. In the Greek legacy, there are many models of initiation that range from childhood to old age, models that can be considered as stages of the psyche, but only Apuleius’ tale gives us the initiation of the soul into the soul. Psyche’s initiation into the psyche through her pains, her suffering, her emotions: the psyche’s struggle.

The plot and action, the images and imagery of this tale must be attributed to the soul. And this requires an effort on the part of the reader because history has accustomed us to referring to the soul from the ego. But anything we think from the ego is not soul. (López-Pedraza, 2010, p. 25, our translation)

Still at the beginning of his book, López-Pedraza quotes James Hillman, who, in his text “On psychological creativity” also delved into the theme of Eros and Psyche:



**Figure 4.** Embroidery based on the sculpture Eros and Psyche by Antonio Canova (1793), Louvre.

[...] reveals that the dynamic of Eros and Psyche, being archetypal, applies to both men and women and that this happens in all of us: we all have the right to Eros and Psyche. No matter who we are, no matter what we do in life, despite our illnesses and miseries – and perhaps because of them – Eros and Psyche are within us. (Hillman cited in López-Pedraza, 2010, p. 34, our translation)

For López-Pedraza (2010), it is the analyst’s task to exercise “psyching”, which carries within itself the idea of generating psychic movement, imagining, moving psychic waters. I understand that “psyching” is a soulful way of expressing what we can experience through sandplay, expressive techniques, and embroidery – just as Jung experienced through the so-called active imagination. Setting an image in motion means allowing yourself to “play” with miniatures and sand.

## Sandplay

The most literal translation of sandplay into Portuguese means “playing in the sand”. This work is often also called “sandbox” or “game with sand” in Brazil. However, many of the analysts who work with sandplay in our country today prefer to call it sandplay, precisely because of the meaning of playing in the sand. It is important to convey the idea that, in our work as sandplay analysts, playing is essential and free, therefore without rules (as the term game with sand might suggest)!

Sand is a wonderful and versatile material: when wet, it can be molded; when dry, it allows for many textures and designs too. Playing on beach or river sand is part of our life story in Brazil, as it is in many places around the world. As children, we were enchanted in the face of a large stretch of sand. And we can also be enchanted before the small sandy area of sandplay!

But why should one work with sand? Why should one consider it a potential *prima materia* in the analytical process?

Grains of sand, when magnified manyfold, reveal themselves as miniature minerals, shells, and salt crystals.

They are very old, ancient in fact and carry a lot of history within them, thousands of years of history. Apparently, all grains of sand are the same. But upon closer inspection, each one is unique – like the stars, like all of us. The particular and the universal are brought together in a grain of sand.

As William Blake said, as quoted by Greenberg in his amazing book of photographs of grains of sand (Figure 5):

To see a world in a grain of sand,  
And a heaven in a wildflower  
Hold the infinity in the palm of your hand,  
And eternity in an hour.  
(Greenberg, 2008)



**Figure 5.** Grain of sand magnified under a 3D microscope (Greenberg, 2008).

I experienced sandplay over ten years with dear Fatima Salomé Gambini, who, in turn, had experienced a long process with Dora Kalff, the Swiss Jungian analyst who created sandplay. In the only book she ever published, *Sandplay: a psychotherapeutic approach to the psyche* (1980), which has not yet been translated into Portuguese, Kalff describes sandplay in a sensitive way. For her, the construction of a free and protected space through the transferential and counter-transferential relationship is very important in working with sandplay, and I intend to delve deeper into this theme in this reflection.

Roberto Gambini, in the preface to my book *Adolescence and Choice: a ritual space for professional choice through sandplay and dreams*, reveals:

[...] I knew, and I was very proud and happy that Frau Kalff had detected in Fátima

rare and necessary qualities to continue the work she had begun: a sensitive, intuitive, profound look, more than a theoretical and intellectual discourse, on this fascinating technique of representing images of the unconscious, symbols, potentialities, scenes and inner conflicts, arranging on a surface of sand, miniatures that give visibility and concreteness to everything that, in the dialogical analysis, can only be transmitted through words and the contribution of the imagination.

Further on, Gambini describes: “It was Fátima who introduced sandplay to Brazil, bringing it not from books, but from its living source.” (Gambini cited in Gimenez, 2009, p.14).

It is unfortunate that Fátima did not leave behind any publications. But she was able to share her experience with Kalff and her profound knowledge of sandplay and Brazilian culture with everyone who worked with her in her small room filled with miniatures and her wonderful sands. In the last years of her life, she shared her vast knowledge of sandplay with larger groups, in meetings that a few professionals organized, inviting people from various parts of the country to exchange knowledge about sandplay or to learn about this rich material. These meetings were the so-called sandplay Cooperatives.

My reflection in this article has deep roots in my experience with Fátima, to whom I will always be grateful. However, over the last 20 years since she passed away, I have been creating and expanding my own ways of working with sandplay.

When I propose work with sandplay, I first ask the client to choose which sand they want to work with: wet or dry. They see themselves in front of the shelves of miniatures and begin to observe internally and externally which miniatures catch their attention (Figure 6). It’s an ex-

ercise in collecting images. By noticing and welcoming the miniatures that want to “play with them”, they allow themselves to welcome images that connect them with the unconscious.

After collecting the sand and miniatures, we sit down face to face, and an image can be created during the session. Children create dynamically, standing or walking around the sand table, assembling, and dismantling their scene while often giving a report of what they are creating. Teenagers and adults generally accept the invitation to create sitting face to face, with the sand occupying the space between client and psychologist. The whole activity may or may not take place in silence.

At the end of the session, as a closing point, I invite the client to photograph their scene, freely. They will be able to observe and photograph the scene from different angles, circulating around the sand table.

In my understanding, we do not need to comment on or interpret the scene at the end. The essential thing is to welcome the image that has just been born, with respect and kindness. At another point in the analysis process, the image created can be contemplated by observing the sequence of scenes that have been photographed over a period.



**Figure 6.** Sand tables and shelves with sandplay miniatures.

### When Eros and Psyche play in the sand: the transferential relationship

As analysts, our search in an analytical process with sandplay is to enable this encounter/*coniunctio* that will initially be constellated in the transferential relationship with the analyst, so that the “free and protected space” can be constructed and experienced in the relationship, in the way the analyst accepts the images that are created and the emotions experienced. This will gradually enable this encounter with the images created in the sand in an increasingly autonomous way, the perception of this “free and protected space” as internal, the reception of the images by the clients, and the feeling of security in this encounter with themselves.

Sandplay can be experienced as an encounter with the soul, in that it is an invitation to play: when our psyche allows itself to play and dance and surrender to Eros. But as in the myth, this encounter requires a deep dive, a surrender. It's not immediate. Perhaps as in the myth, our soul experiences this surrender to Eros as a sacrifice. In the story, Psyche is given by her parents in sacrifice, after they consulted the Oracle of Delphi. Humans were worshiping Psyche, a mortal, as if she were a goddess of beauty. This created competition that Aphrodite deeply disliked and demanded this sacrifice.

Psyche is then condemned to be thrown from the top of the abyss to be devoured by a monster “that belongs to the sphere of the serpent” (López-Pedraza, 2010, p. 42). Aphrodite, with refined cruelty, orders her son Eros to shoot her, so that she falls in love with the monster that would devour her. But the one who ends up being injured by the arrow is Eros himself, who falls in love with Psyche and orders Zephyrus, the west wind, to lead her to his castle, below the cliff from which she had been thrown.

Eros appears in the tale as the monster/serpent that must kidnap Psyche: it is a procre-

ative demonic image (*daimon*) that arises from primordial Chaos. At this point, López-Pedraza (2010) quotes Hillman: “He (Eros) represents an intermediate experience, connects the personal with something that is beyond, and brings that which is beyond to the personal experience [...] makes communication possible between a you and an I.”

In this part of the story, Eros/monster/serpent are one and the abduction begins the process: the male/female opposition is clearly seen. For the masculine Eros/monster, the wedding is characterized by abduction, action/aggression/triumph, procreative force, and satisfaction of a desire. For the feminine in Psyche, it is destiny, transformation, and mystery. For the feminine, this act of defloration represents a true mysterious connection between an ending and a beginning, between ceasing to be and entering true life (López-Pedraza, 2010, p. 40). This encounter (Figure 7) reveals the painful initiation of Eros into Psyche and of Psyche into Eros:

Psyche as the soul that waits, that suffers in waiting. But she is not fit for conventional living, she was not made for mediocrity. At this moment, she hopes and needs to expel what could distort her true vocation (her inner calling). There is the possibility of deviating, moving towards



**Figure 7.** Sandplay scene (encounter male/female).

the collective. To avoid this, she needs to say no to nonidentity and connect with her path.

In this excerpt, something touches me personally: when López-Pedraza mentions the need to live expecting for the cultivation of the soul, just like Psyche, he establishes that the soul of the analyst who works with images must be forged, and this requires waiting, the attentive patience of alchemists in the *opus alquimica*. We must be careful not to fall into the trap of mediocrity and “exclude what could distort true initiation” (López-Pedraza, 2010, p.38.) Here, he highlights that not paying attention to the true wait, in psychotherapy we can experience what he calls ‘psychopathic mimicry’, which happens when we mediocly follow slogans and recipes for living.

Oftentimes, this is how our psyche/Psyche reaches the analytical process: being thrown towards the abyss. It is a sacrifice in the sense of a *sacro oficio* (Latin for holy work), but we did not willingly give ourselves up at the beginning. We feel “forced” by what led us to the analytical process, thrown into the precipice like our beloved Psyche. The exercise of playing with images in sandplay (Figure 8) may not be fun at first, when we disconnect from the *Puer* in us, which would let us freely play with the images, without judgment. Our consciousness will need to learn to experience surrender when we arrive at the analyti-



**Figure 8.** Sandplay scene (child playing in the sand).

cal process. The process of bringing unconscious images into consciousness requires surrender, whether reporting dreams or creating through sandplay. And it's not easy, early in a process.

In our story, Psyche, in the beautiful castle of Eros, remains unconscious for a long time: she meets her lover in the dark of night when he comes to visit her, and passively accepts these encounters. She unconsciously trusts, allows herself to be guided in these early times in the paradisiacal experience of passion.

At the beginning of an analytical process, there must be trust for delivery to occur, and I think this is the time to be careful not to “shed too much light”. Frédéric Leboyer, a French obstetrician, taught the world that the moment of birth, of giving birth, must be careful: no direct light, little noise, a welcoming space! Sometimes I find myself reflecting on the tenderness of this delivery and on the responsibility we have, as analysts, at this early phase of the analysis: a time to build the bond of trust initially projected on the analyst and which will allow the client to build the bond of trust with the unconscious itself. The healer is initially projected onto the analyst through the transference relationship, and later, during the process, is recognized as an internal possibility: a wounded healer as an archetype/power that we all have within us and that can act through us!

But this twilight period of trust and surrender must end at some point. In the tale, it ends when the sisters come to visit Psyche and envy her fate, living happily in her beautiful unconscious palace. The sisters' envy provokes a necessary movement in the process: it instigates fear and curiosity in Psyche. After all, who does she sleep with every night? Why can't she see his face? Was he really a demon, as the oracle predicted? And with this, Psyche leaves passivity and breaks the agreement with Eros: she brings light to her bed of love. When lighting it with a candle, she is frightened by such beauty and spills a few drops of wax, burning her lover and causing a wound. He wakes up scared, gets angry at the breach of



the agreement and runs away to the palace of his mother, Aphrodite.

This is an opportunity in the analytical process, a crisis that can generate new awareness. Psyche is alone, abandoned by her lover. It is a moment of *separatio*, which I see as necessary for the analytical process. I think again about the transference and countertransference relationship, when the need for disengagement arises after a period of delivery and extreme trust between client and analyst: by becoming more aware of the polarities, I place myself in the condition of a client and see me apart from the analyst. I am more aware of my projections about him, and perhaps even of the analyst's projections about me. I may even feel the need to oppose him.

I experienced a very interesting situation in an analysis process with a young client, also a psychologist. When creating a scene on the sand, sitting in front of me, she very intently built a trench with several soldiers aiming their weapons in my direction. I literally felt "under the gun" of those soldiers. At a certain point in the session, I invited her to change places and tell me how she felt. That was when she realized the situation of "being under the gun" (Figure 9). Very interestingly, we managed to understand and evolve after that scene: she managed to share her yen to meet other analysts, from other



Figure 9. Sandplay scene (client's scene).

therapeutic lines, as I had been the only one up until that moment. From then on, we worked on closing her analysis process with me, with care and respect. After a few years, she asked me to come back, and was able to tell me about her discoveries and learnings and delve deeper into her analysis process.

We could say that the *coniunctio* needs to initially constellate itself in consciousness, little by little fit to become more permeable to images coming from the unconscious. It is necessary to begin by creating a safe alchemical vessel, a *temenos*, a "free and protected space" that needs to be felt/experienced in the transference and counter-transference relationship between analyst/client/sandplay, so that these images and the emotions awakened throughout the analytical process can be shaped in the sand and welcomed in the process. But the crisis, the moment of *separatio* in the story and in the analytic process can take us to a different level of *coniunctio*: no longer from ego to soul, but from soul to ego. Not only a consciousness that is permeable to soul images, although this is a great initial achievement, but a consciousness that submits to the greater process of creation, that co-creates from the soul to the ego, that trusts the psyche's own self-regulating capacity.

López-Pedraza uses the term "unconscious conspiracy" to define this moment in our history. He reveals: Eros and Psyche are the true authors of the unconscious conspiracy, "but the plot provides the theme and energy for a new level of consciousness and a new vital vision to emerge" (López-Pedraza, 2010, p. 47).

Psyche is alone, abandoned by her injured lover (Figure 10). Suffering from loneliness, she no longer sees meaning in her life and tries to kill herself: she jumps into the river, but the river returns her safe and sound to the land because it is not the sacrifice of her own life that must be made on this initiatory journey. Rather, it is the submission of our egoic consciousness to what is greater than human: the ego needs to understand the need to submit



**Figure 10.** Sandplay scene (encounter with oneself).

to the divine. Indeed, something must die, be sacrificed, not the body.

This sacrifice enables the emergence of a new, more comprehensive consciousness, not limited to the illusory certainties to which we cling so much. Pan – the god of wisdom of instinctive nature – is the one who welcomes and guides her at this moment in the tale, accompanied by the nymph Eco. He tells her to submit to the divine, for which she needs introspection. (I find this moment in the story very beautiful, when I think about clinical care for young people, a moment in which consciousness needs to expand and make bridges, new connections, and synapses with the broad universe that we can access through feelings, dreams and symptoms, so typical of this age). A time of death and rebirth so intense that it can generate panic and anxiety when consciousness becomes powerless in the face of something bigger, much bigger than itself, and doubts its ability to deal with this dimension. Many times, you need to strengthen yourself, to better structure yourself to handle this task.

Psyche must submit to the archetypal.

Eros also needs to change, leaving the maternal dimension: this will be his initiatory journey through the encounter with Psyche.

She will face several sacrifices and encounters on her journey, even before the four famous

tasks. She will need to learn to deal with her sisters' envy, discriminating between what is hers and what belongs to others, learning the hard way not to accept or act according to other people's projections.

She will meet Demeter, the goddess of nature. Upon entering her temple, she will show respect for the work of cultivating the land, submitting herself to this archetypal reality.

She will meet Hera, who sympathizes with her, but cannot help her directly, as she will need to submit to Aphrodite herself, who seeks her out with the aim of punishing her. When she finally goes to meet Aphrodite, she will meet Costume, slave of the goddess, who can paralyze our psyche/Psyche if we lose spontaneity on this journey.

She will also encounter Sadness and Anxiety, Aphrodite's bodyguards capable of destroying her, but who will be unable to do so.

Lastly, she will encounter Guilt, and the perpetual risk of psychic inflation when dealing with this powerful emotion if, by identifying with impersonal forces, we take the blame for something that is much bigger than ourselves. As a consequence, we find ourselves overwhelmed and paralyzed.

### **The four tasks/challenges**

Psyche then finds herself faced with the four tasks/challenges imposed by Aphrodite. I like the etymology of the word *desafio* (challenge) in Portuguese: *des* (removal) and *fides* (faith, in the sense of trust in a tradition); I believe the four tasks require Psyche to sacrifice herself in moving away from ready-made certainties and venturing into the newness, into what she must build through her own experience, no longer based on what she received as tradition.

**The first task** requires her to sort thousands of seeds and grains (wheat, barley, poppy, chickpeas, lentils, and broad beans) until nightfall. She must bring order to the chaos in nature's elements, organizing and classifying them. I can't help but relate this to the experience of seeing

ourselves in the miniature world of sandplay. For many, the first impression of miniatures on the shelves is very similar to being faced with chaos. Lots of mixed seeds. So many possibilities. The client must trust that they will find an inner order as they undertake the task of collecting the miniatures and creating a three-dimensional image in the sand. This task for Psyche allows her to discriminate between completely mixed contents. It requires an egoic attitude combined with will, leading to reconnect what is dissociated. Ants are evoked in this task: Psyche's connection with the emotional, with the instinctive, allows her to accomplish this task that seemed impossible at first, on time and successfully.

**The second task** requires her to deal with the solar power, with the destructive power of consciousness: she must collect the golden wool from the sheep, which in sunlight are very aggressive and destructive. López-Pedraza understands that Aphrodite tries to expose Psyche to this destructive power of male solar consciousness. If she tried to pick up the wool in the brightest sun, she would be destroyed. He also points out the risk of, when connecting with gold, be possessed by this power like the colonizers of America who, in their search for gold, destroyed everything between them and the final object: fool's gold. It is like a government that validates the destruction of a forest to obtain the same fool's gold.

Once again, she despairs and contemplates death. This depressive moment allows her to hear an inner voice, a melodious voice coming from the nymph Cana: to collect the golden wool, she will have to cultivate patient waiting again (Figure 11). She will have to wait for the sun to go down. At the end of the day, there will be a lot of wool in the bushes and she will manage to collect it without risk. López-Pedraza uses an interesting term: *temple* (temperament, in Spanish) to designate "the disposition of the psyche to enter into connection and harmony with its internal movement" (2010, p.92). Again, we can think about the disposition of consciousness

necessary for analyst and client to connect with the image created in the sand: in excessive light (of solar consciousness), we destroy the possibility of connection with the psychic image. We paralyze, and creation does not happen. In excessive light, we cannot hear this inner voice. We can be calcined by excessive reason, by impulsiveness that prevents us from remaining in waiting until we create the appropriate psychic state to welcome the gold/image. It's like the healing processes in Antiquity when slow incubation methods allowed a self-healing process.

**The third challenge** is very interesting: to bring a small bottle of water from Lake Styx. Styx, according to Kerényi, was associated with hatred (López-Pedraza, 2010, p.100). Psyche needs to put the hatred in a container, a safe vessel. This task requires us to connect with the divine and the one who serves the divine: Zeus' eagle intervenes and manages to reach the waters of hate without being paralyzed by them: it is the hate contained in a flask as a driving force for action (López-Pedraza, 2010, p.100). But first of all, it means learning to deal with hate. Hard homework for all of us, in times when hatred is cultivated through social media, dividing families, and preventing dialogue. I find it interesting to relate this task that requires a flask to contain such a destructive emotion, and think of the sand, the table, the box, as the flask itself. We often realize



Figure 11. Sandplay scene (Waiting).

that powerful emotions can be contained in the alchemical vessel of the sandplay process.

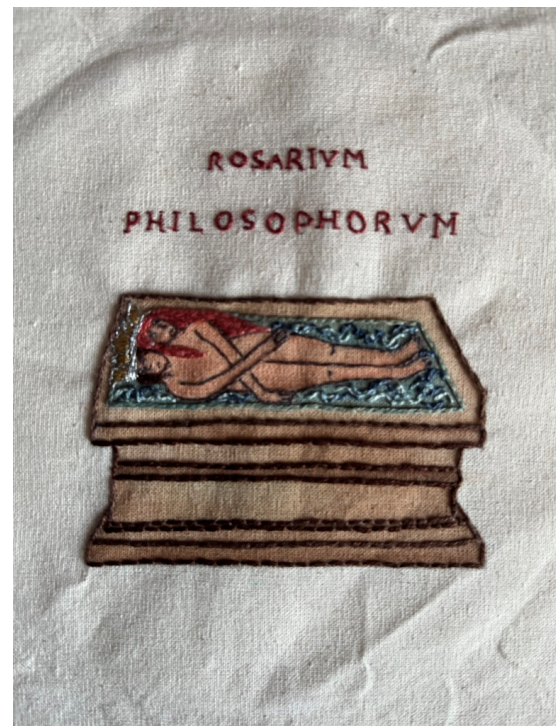
I accompanied a young woman who, after several years of analysis with me, and particularly after a sequence of scenes in the sand, managed to bring to light a terrible life experience that had been completely erased from her memory. She had been sexually abused as a child by an older man, whom her family trusted. And she had buried those terrible memories deep inside her. One day, they surfaced as soon as she left my office, at the end of a session in which she had worked in the sand. Memories came flooding back with force, then she wrote down everything she remembered and left it in my care. It was a painful and difficult process: facing the memories, understanding what had really happened, telling her family. And I believe that, without the intermediary of sand, it would have been much more difficult to manage these strong emotions aroused: anger, shame, fear...

**The fourth and final challenge** requires Psyche to go down to Hades, the Kingdom of the Dead with Persephone, to get a box with her powder of immortal beauty. In this task, according to López-Pedraza (2010, p. 103), Psyche will need to encounter death and depression to transform physical beauty into psychic beauty. She again contemplates suicide and climbs a tower in order to jump off. The tower, capable of seeing beyond, above things to have a greater range of vision, gives her very clear and precise instructions on how to enter and exit Hades. Fascinating instructions: resist the requests for help that will be made and that would divert you from your path; take coins to pay the boatman Charonte on the way there and back; take two cakes of honey and barley to calm Cerberus, the three-headed dog, both on the way and on the way back; and refuse Persephone's banquet, exchanging it for just bread and water. She shouldn't become intimate with the place, just focus on what she must rescue, and come back.

I always thought of this description of the Tower as perfect instructions for an active

imagination, conditions for a safe dive into the unconscious. Here I think about how the ritualistic experience allows this psychic experience, and I believe that this is the main objective in sandplay: to ritually enable this opening-and-closing of a portal that allows us to get in touch with psychic reality in a protected and safe environment.

Psyche follows all the instructions correctly, but when she receives the box, she succumbs to curiosity, opens it and faints. I admit that I always found this final moment of the story paradoxical: why would she give in to the curiosity of spying on this powder of immortal beauty? Would it be the attachment to the beauty of youth or the need to dive into death? (Figure 12) I understand that through each task, our psyche/Psyche can develop a psychic ability that enables the union of conscious/unconscious, feminine/masculine polarities.



**Figure 12.** Embroidery based on the sixth engraving of *Rosarium Philosophorum* (The death). See Jung, 1986, fig. 6.

Now, faced with the Chaos of potential seeds, she needs to connect to nature through ants to organize them (feminine/seeds, nutrition, and masculine/organization). Afterwards, she listens to her intuition to avoid the intense sun and the fury of the sheep, and to wait for the right moment to access the wool/gold (intuition/waiting/feminine; aggressiveness/intense sun/masculine). In the third task, she needs the skill and precision of the eagle which, carrying a safe vessel, contains the hatred/water of the Styx (eagle/focus/ precision/masculine, vessel/intense emotions/feminine). The fourth task closes the cycle: she literally needs to die and be reborn. Immortal beauty as death and the encounter with Eros as rebirth.

And he rescues her after freeing himself from his mother's dominion. The fruit of this union, enshrined on Olympus, is a daughter. Mortal mother, divine daughter: Voluptas, pleasure. The fruit of this *coniunctio*, according to López-Pedraza (2010, p. 114), is an erotic psychic life. And our search in the analytical process focuses on the discovery of pleasure as a result of this alchemical encounter. Pleasure and play can be the fruits of this process.

### Conclusion

Dora Kalff understood that sandplay could become a free and protected space for images of the Self to be constellated in creation in the sand and then the process of self-regulation of the psyche could occur.

I have learned that when put into motion, the water from a lake, like a fountain, allows the oxygenation of this water through contact with the air in a dynamic and natural process of purification. I see sandplay like this: we allow our images to flow like water; thus, self-regulation takes place. The first image of the *Rosarium Philosophorum* in "Psychology of Transference" presents the mercury fountain (Figure 13), which contains the *prima materia*. When commenting on it, Jung imagines this source continually feed-

ing back, as in the process previously described (Jung, 1986, § 409).

Together we experienced Psyche and Eros' quest described by Rafael López-Pedraza, and my intention was to associate this poetic description with our clinical practice with sandplay. Through the analytical encounter, we can initially experience the *coniunctio* in the transference and counter-transference relationship, as the ability to accept the images and the trust in the process strengthens. In this circular and continuous process, we need to strengthen our egoic ability to embrace this reality of the soul that is constellated through images. But I see this as a first achievement in this long process. In a second moment, our psyche/Psyche sets out on a solitary and unique search, experiences challenges, sacrifices, and encounters and, as analysts, we are partners in the search, eyewitnesses of the process. Many *coniunctio* images can be constellated in the sand during an analytical process. But they are not perceived this way at first. Recognizing them and connecting deeply



Figure 13. Embroidery based on the first engraving of *Rosarium Philosophorum* (The mercury fountain). See Jung, 1986, fig.1.

with them from the soul (not just from the ego) is our eternal, continuous and circular quest, as clients and analysts. It is our goal, as an *opus alquimica* (Figure 14). ■

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**Figure 14.** Embroidery based on the tenth engraving of *Rosarium Philosophorum* (The new birth). Ver Jung, 1986, fig.10.

## Resumo

### *Imagens de coniunctio no sandplay: quando Eros e Psiquê brincam na areia*

A imagem alquímica da coniunctio – a união entre opostos – é o que inspira esta reflexão. O tratado alquímico *Rosarium Philosophorum* é uma sequência de imagens em que o tema da coniunctio é central e foi uma centelha importante para Jung quando se debruçou sobre a questão da transferência no processo analítico. Como forma de imersão no tema da coniunctio e da relação transferencial, imagens bordadas pela autora ilustram o trabalho, somadas a imagens de sand-

play que têm o tema da coniunctio como inspiração. O motivo do encontro é central no conto de Eros e Psiquê, de Apuleio. Ele está presente também nos sonhos e em muitas imagens plasmadas nas areias de sandplay. Por meio da jornada da psique/Psiquê descrita no conto, das imagens na areia e das representações alquímicas bordadas, busca-se uma linguagem mais sensível para se aprofundar na questão transferencial nos processos de análise com sandplay. ■

Palavras-chave: psicologia analítica, coniunctio, transferência, sandplay, Eros e Psiquê.

## Resumen

### *Imágenes de coniunctio en sandplay: cuando Eros y Psique juegan en la arena*

La imagen alquímica de la coniunctio – la unión entre opuestos – es la que inspira esta reflexión. El tratado alquímico *Rosarium Philosophorum* es una secuencia de imágenes donde el tema de la coniunctio es central y fue una chispa importante para Jung cuando investigó la cuestión de la transferencia en el proceso analítico. Como una forma de inmersión en el tema de la coniunctio y la relación de transferencia, imágenes de bordaduras hechas por la autora ilustran este trabajo, además de imágenes de sandplay

que tienen como inspiración el tema de la coniunctio. El motivo del encuentro es central en la historia de Eros y Psique de Apuleyo. También está presente en los sueños y en muchas imágenes creadas en las arenas de sandplay. Por medio del viaje de la psique/Psique descrito en el cuento, las imágenes en la arena y las representaciones alquímicas bordadas, se busca un lenguaje más sensible para profundizarse en la cuestión transferencial en los procesos de análisis con sandplay. ■

Palabras clave: psicología analítica, coniunctio, transfer, sandplay, Eros y Psique.

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