



# **Healing and Transformation in Sandplay**

**Creative Processes Become Visible**

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**Foreword by Donald Sandner**

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## Preface to the 1993 Printing

Sandplay as a therapeutic method was developed by Dora M. Kalff from Margareth Löwenfeld's "World Technique," as was Charlotte Bühler's "World Test" or the so-called "Erica Method" which has been used in Sweden for over 40 years as a diagnostic tool in child psychiatry. Dora Kalff, with her background training in the psychology of C.G. Jung, recognized that a series of sand pictures created by either children or adults actually represents an ongoing practical confrontation with the unconscious and is comparable to a series of dreams occurring during the analytical process. Working at the sand tray initiates a psychic process which is holistic and can lead to healing and the development of the personality.

Sandplay is a method of psychotherapy based on practical, creative work in the sand tray. Whether adult or child, the person at the sand tray—the person creating various three-dimensional pictures in the sand—is involved with body, soul, and spirit in this process. Thanks to the "hands-on" method of sandplay, both the spiritual and psychological dimensions are not merely constellated in the person, but they are, at the same time, given physical form and made visible by the person's hands. In human development, one first experiences life by touching and concretely grasping things and then later passes over to abstract understanding and grasping. Also, by working with the hands in sandplay a person's creative energies are mobilized. This then initiates a holistic process of healing and transformation of the personality.

I was attracted to the sandplay method from the moment I first encountered it. One reason for this attraction lies surely in my love of images and three-dimensional forms. This has always been close to my heart, especially since I like to use my hands. Another reason for my preference may lie in the fact that I experienced early in life the way in which one can use one's senses in a differentiated way without words. As a young child I observed my grandfather in his medical practice behave in just this way. For instance, I was deeply struck by the following experience. My grandfather, who was a pediatrician, had also set up a room for consultations in his home and would occasionally see patients there. As a small girl I once observed through the keyhole how he examined an infant. He inspected the child from all sides, touching, listening, and probing everywhere. He

then, to my great surprise, used his nose to smell the child. Sometime later I asked him what he had been doing. He answered that "little children cannot tell us in words where they hurt. So I must use all my senses to find out what has made the child sick."

This small episode carried a fundamentally important message for me, and often during my studies of psychology I have thought of my grandfather. I had experienced in him not only a person capable of careful observation but also a person who had enormous respect for nature and a deep and religiously grounded trust in both nature within us and nature around us.

During psychotherapy, both adults and children often discover the 'small child' in them who cannot say 'where it hurts.' In that instance we must use our powers of observation and figuratively use all of our senses to discover the hidden suffering of the person.

A third reason why I have been extraordinarily impressed by the method of sandplay is that it can provide the basis for the interaction of body and psyche, matter and spirit. Sandplay creates a common field within which spirit and body can mutually influence each other. Such direct interplay between psyche and matter is not known, at least in this form, in classical Jungian dream analysis. But as sandplay is an imaginative method it is closely related to the method of active imagination which is well known and used in Jungian psychology. For me, as a Jungian analyst, therefore, classical verbal dream analysis and sandplay are like two different paths to the same goal. The contents of our backpacks for this therapeutic journey are in both cases the same: the theory of Jungian psychology.

The basic difference between active imagination and sandplay is that active imagination is practiced alone, whereas sandplay is practiced in the presence of the analyst. This means not only that body and spirit, and the conscious and unconscious, of the analysand become interwoven, but also that the personality of the analyst influences the play of the transforming energies. The sand tray becomes the interactive field between analysand and analyst, and the sand picture is the visible and tangible form given by the analysand to this special interaction.

In the beginning of my career as a sandplay therapist I was not much aware of how deeply the analysts influence the creation of the sand pictures and therefore also the analysands' inner worlds of imagination. The analysts do this not so much by what they say, but in a subtle, very powerful way by what they represent by virtue of their personalities, especially their own creativity.

Through seeing and supervising many different sandplay-processes done in other sandplay therapists' practices, I learned that in a series of sand pictures not only is the individual touch of each



analysand visible but also the influence of the analyst. This fact made me more and more thoughtful and concerned about the training of sandplay therapists. In my opinion a sandplay therapist needs the same training as, for instance, a Jungian analyst. Especially important are profound knowledge of and experience in the dynamics of psychic processes and symbolism. Also important is some knowledge of the body and somatic illnesses, because on the one hand, the body expresses itself often in sand pictures and on the other hand, every work of imagination strongly influences both the psyche *and* the body of a person.

In order to experience this extraordinary effect of the sandplay on body and psyche, it is absolutely necessary that every sandplay trainee personally undergo the sandplay process. Who would teach cooking without ever having cooked? Nobody! Therefore, using sandplay in one's practice without having personally experienced its effect is irresponsible.

Last but not least I want to emphasize another important but rarely mentioned fact. An analyst enters the therapeutic process of the analysand through countertransference or, in a more holistic way, by resonance. According to the principle of resonance, qualities of the analyst get activated and come alive in the analysand. The most important qualities an analyst needs to have in order to facilitate the analysand's transformation and healing are, besides theoretical and clinical experience, psychic stability, centeredness, and creativity. Creativity has to do with death and rebirth, with the capacity to let go of old psychic structures and create new ones. In other words: we need to let go of an old, life-hindering soul house and create a new, life-furthering home. Transformation must be possible without anxiety from *within* the analyst's psyche and from *without* through the setting of the sandplay room that allows creative work. Little sandplay figures are necessary, but far more important is the sand itself and a variety of materials that can be shaped and transformed individually by the analysand. The little figures, ready for use, are much nearer to consciousness than the sand and other unformed materials, such as clay, blocks, paper, and so on. The real encounter with the unknown happens through giving form to the unformed matter. This means to give form to what the alchemists called "massa confusa."

Thus sandplay therapists should resist the temptation of collecting and providing too many already defined figures, and should remember that their analysands' transformation *within* begins with the creative transformation of their microcosms in the sandtray—from *without*. The "free and protected space" of the therapeutic setting must invite and stimulate the analysand to become creative.

Now we want to look at C.G. Jung's personal experience with sandplay. Even though the technique of sandplay is not explicitly mentioned in his *Collected Works*, he does describe his way of doing it at the lake shore near his home. In his chapter "Confrontation with the Unconscious" in *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* (pp. 173-75) he writes:

The dreams, however, could not help me over my feeling of disorientation. On the contrary, I lived as if under constant inner pressure. At times this became so strong that I suspected there was some psychic disturbance in myself. Therefore I twice went over all the details of my entire life, with particular attention to childhood memories; for I thought there might be something in my past which I could not see and which might possibly be the cause of the disturbance. But this retrospection led to nothing but a fresh acknowledgment of my own ignorance. Thereupon I said to myself, "Since I know nothing at all, I shall simply do whatever occurs to me." Thus I consciously submitted myself to the impulses of the unconscious.

The first thing that came to the surface was a childhood memory from perhaps my tenth or eleventh year. At that time I had a spell of playing passionately with building blocks. I distinctly recalled how I had built little houses and castles, using bottles to form the sides of gates and vaults. Somewhat later I had used ordinary stones, with mud for mortar. These structures had fascinated me for a long time. To my astonishment, this memory was accompanied by a good deal of emotion. "Aha," I said to myself, "there is still life in these things. The small boy is still around, and possesses a creative life which I lack. But how can I make my way to it?" For as a grown man it seemed impossible to me that I should be able to bridge the distance from the present back to my eleventh year. Yet if I wanted to re-establish contact with that period, I had no choice but to return to it and take up once more that child's life with his childish games. This moment was a turning point in my fate, but I gave in only after endless resistances and with a sense of resignation. For it was a painfully humiliating experience to realize that there was nothing to be done except play childish games. . . .

I went on with my building game after the noon meal every day, whenever the weather permitted. As soon as I was through eating, I began playing, and continued to do so until the patients arrived; and if I was finished with my work early enough in the evening, I went back to building. In the course of this activity my thoughts clarified, and I was able to grasp the fantasies whose presence in myself I dimly felt.

Naturally, I thought about the significance of what I was doing, and asked myself, "Now, really, what are you about? You are building a small town, and doing it as if it were a rite!" I had no answer to my question, only the inner certainty that I was on the

way to discovering my own myth. For the building game was only a beginning. It released a stream of fantasies which I later carefully wrote down.

This sort of thing has been consistent with me, and at any time in my later life when I came up against a blank wall, I painted a picture or hewed stone. Each such experience proved to be a *rite d'entrée* for the ideas and works that followed hard upon it.

In this excerpt, Jung brings up three points that are very important for sandplay. First, he says: "I consciously submitted myself to the impulses of the unconscious." In sandplay, the analysands are consciously and actively involved in the "healing-process" right from the beginning. This is of great value in psychotherapy because it helps them to overcome their feelings of inferiority and helplessness.

Second, he talks of the creativity he lacked but which "his inner boy still possessed." To re-establish one's creative life is the beginning of healing and this creative life can, as I have already mentioned, be activated in sandplay in a wonderful way. And if the analysands lack the humbleness to "play this childish game," the analyst can help through the example of his or her own creativity.

Last, Jung says: "In the course of this activity my thought clarified, and I was able to grasp the fantasies whose presence in myself I dimly felt." Again we see the value of this concrete, hands-on method. Fantasies, whether good or evil, vague presentiments, and floating anxieties that are torturing us, slowly become visible and graspable through work at the sand tray. The analysands can step back, look at it from a distance, and confront themselves with all that inner life, with what before they only dimly felt. What a relief for a suffering person! By telling us about this episode in his life, Jung gave us these most valuable indications for the method of sandplay.

In order to protect my clients and because it would be beyond the scope of the present book I cannot here present complete sandplay processes. Therefore, in the case studies I do present, I wish to concentrate chiefly on points which seem to me to be important and typical for an understanding of sandplay processes. It is a great advantage that sand pictures can be photographed. We can therefore document psychic processes in visual form for the reader. Yet, it is still a difficult undertaking to make psychic processes intelligible to the outsider, primarily because a truly sympathetic understanding of such processes may be possible only if the person has also undergone similar experiences.

I would like to point out that in analytical psychology, the psychological school founded by C.G. Jung, the persons who come to our offices are called 'analysands'. In the original sense of the term,

this meant that a verbal analysis would be conducted. However, I use this term for all adults who come to consult me. If in the course of this book I speak of the 'analysand', I mean to include both women and men, even if I do not always use both masculine and feminine pronouns.

The publisher and I have agreed that this book should also be intelligible to a reader who has no specialized knowledge of psychology. I have tried to write in a clear and straightforward style. Those specialized terms I could not avoid using are explained in the glossary.

## An Introduction to Sandplay as Therapy

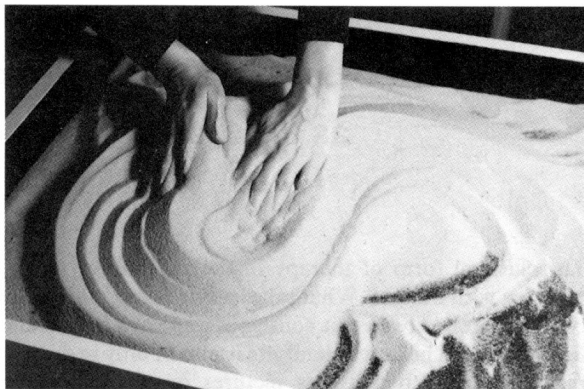
The classical form of therapy in the psychology of C.G. Jung is working with dreams. What takes place during such an analysis is a confrontation between the conscious mind of a person and his or her unconscious. The latter manifests itself not only in dreams and body reactions, but also in visions, pictures, or various other imaginative activities. In dialogue with the analysand, the analyst tries to clarify and interpret such expressions of the unconscious. In this way, the analyst offers the analysand access to hitherto unconscious and unknown aspects of his personality as well as to the contents of the collective unconscious which go beyond the individual situation. Both analyst and analysand also work on the phenomena of the 'transference' and 'countertransference' which arise from the unique context of their close co-operation. A Jungian analysis is a process which affects and challenges both analyst and analysand.

The analytic process, however, because it is a *verbal* form of therapy, occurs primarily in dialogue between the analyst and the analysand. It must be understood that the personality of the analyst can influence the course of the analysis in a very specific way by virtue of the strength and power of the word. The analysand can use his verbal abilities to good effect or he can misuse them in order to hide his real being behind them. Language is *one* possibility of human expression and is primarily connected with the rational side of consciousness.

The way a person speaks to us gives us insight into his mental attitudes, the way he thinks. For most people, however, to express their feelings in words is difficult unless they happen to be especially gifted in this way.

Sometimes, feelings of pleasure and pain as well as rage or love grip the entire person, including the body. But just as often the body reacts some time before we become conscious of an emotion having taken hold of us, let alone knowing what our emotion is and what caused it. For example, a person can become paralyzed with fear, the body appearing rigid, hard, cold, and lifeless. To every outside observer it is clear: that person is experiencing fear. But the person

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**Illustration 1**

*The Hands as Mediator between Spirit and Matter*

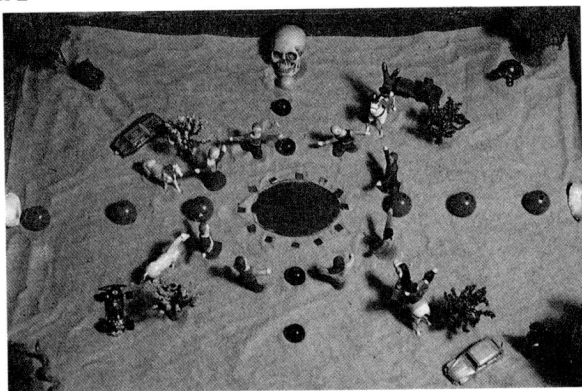
concerned may lack the words to express verbally what triggered his fear because he is unconscious of what caused it. Perhaps his hands can give form and shape to what is 'unconscious' thereby making it visible and even recognizable in a picture, sandplay, or some other creative medium.

The deeper the emotions and feelings are covered up, the more distanced from consciousness memories and a part of our personality have become, the less likely it is that we can find the words to express them.

We are speechless, but we still have other means of expression. Through dancing, singing, painting, or forming some medium with our hands, we can give expression to what is stirring in us. We can find a connection to our fellow human beings not only through language but also with the body, especially through our hands. The hands can build the bridge between our inner world and the external world. We can pet and caress or hit with our hands, we can do work with them, rework something, transform and give creative expression through them. The hands are the mediators between spirit and matter, between an inner image and an actual creation. By handling, the existing energies become visible.

The fact that the hands can give shape to the powers active in the unconscious, that they can connect the inner and the outer, spirit and matter, is the reason for using sandplay as therapy. In sandplay one is actively engaged, one does not talk much. There is no immediate and rational interpretation of the sand pictures. In the protected frame of the sand tray which holds the unfolding events, a frame

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**Illustration 2**


*Microcosm: Sand Picture by a 42-year-old Woman*

which has the dimension of approximately  $50 \times 70$  cm ( $19.6 \times 27.5$  inches), the analysand shapes with dry or moistened sand and many available small figures his personal world as it is constellated at that time. He models his personal microcosm (see Illustration 2). The miniature figures represent the powers active in him at the time of making the sand picture.

The analyst's role during the production of a sand picture is primarily that of an observer. He sketches and photographs the sand picture. He lets the analysand tell him what comes to mind about the picture and what moved or even shook him while making it. Both analyst and analysand study the sand picture most carefully. The analyst points out what he *sees* in it, *but for the most part does not interpret it at this point*. What is most important is that after the hour is over, the analysand takes the picture of his microcosm, *his world*, inwardly with him. There, it will produce an emotional after-effect which lasts till the next hour, when he may form a new picture. The sand picture should be cleared away by the analyst after the hour. It should not remain in the outer world because it is the energy of the inner image which is important. The Navajo sand paintings used for healing are also taken apart at sunset.

It would not be correct to interpret the sand picture immediately after its creation. The danger lies in fixing the picture's interpretation intellectually, which interrupts the flow of emotions and feelings attending and following its creation. The analysand might say, 'Oh yes, that's it; that's my situation!' But that's *not it*, yet, it is still *becoming* something new. The individual sand pictures only repre-

sent the stages in a long, psychic process of transformation which should in no case be disturbed or blocked by interpretations. During this phase of therapy the task of the analyst consists in recognizing what is going on in the analysand, in protecting and supporting this process, in intervening in an emergency, but first and foremost, his task is just to add only so much commentary that the process in the analysand is kept going. To speak in an image: the flames on which the vessel containing the psychic process of the analysand is cooking must be carefully tended by the analyst. The fire mustn't go out. But neither should the flames flare too vigorously lest the contents of the pot boil over or be ruined in some other way.

I would like to add, however, that a similar careful attitude in the analyst also has its place during a verbal analysis. There too, one should only interpret to the degree that the analysand does not feel himself run over but rather feels supported and promoted in his process.

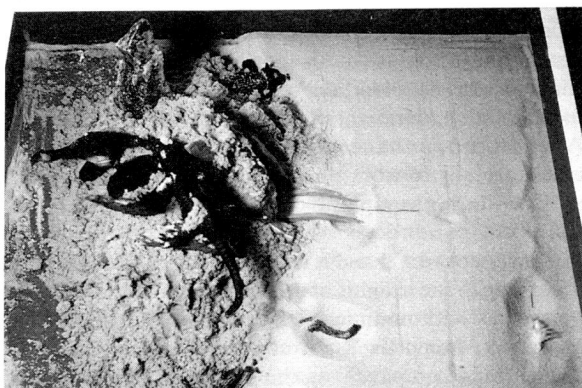
The interpretation of sand pictures can be treated in different ways. This depends on the ongoing therapeutic process in the analysand. In my experience I have found that there are two fundamentally different kinds of process: The *healing process* and the *process of transformation* of the personal worldview.

The *healing process* in sandplay can occur in persons who suffer from psychic disturbances or injuries originating before birth or in early childhood. These people suffer from a so-called disturbance of the primary relationship with the mother or mother-figure which makes it impossible for them to grow up with a healthy trust in the world or in their own life process. In such cases the therapeutic process leads into the deep-seated layers of experience of early childhood. These layers are beyond consciousness and verbalization. Psychic energy then flows back until it reaches the healthy core of the psyche. The pictures and powers of undisturbed wholeness are animated and become effective through sandplay and a healthy foundation is formed on which the new structure of the personality is built (see Chapter 7).<sup>5</sup>

During the healing process, the analysand experiences very strongly these transformations in his being. An immediate interpretation or even one which follows at a later point would be superfluous or disturbing. This is especially the case for children and those adults who cannot or do not want to achieve a rational consciousness of their psychic process. With others, but especially with students who are undergoing a training analysis, it is important, after the process of transformation has run its course (for example, when a new level of development has been reached), to look at, work through and interpret the series of sand pictures, just as we would do with a dream series. And indeed, I have had the impressive experience with



### Illustration 3



*Sand Picture by a 40-year-old Woman. To the right is the light, smooth, intellectual world. The thread of life leads to the left across the bridge to the upturned world of the Shadow which contains dark monsters.*

many analysands that after the process has run its course—which can, however, take months—they themselves are capable of interpreting their sand pictures meaningfully. They have experienced the healing powers which have resulted from their creative activity and this experience has effected inner growth and maturation.

The *process of transformation* runs a different course. Here we are dealing with persons who have a fundamentally healthy foundation in life and a stable ego, but whose worldview is too narrow, one-sided, or disturbing. They sense that something is wrong with them, they are restless or distressed, perhaps even depressed or downright sick. Some sense very clearly (perhaps even from their dreams) that a transformation is being prepared within or that an expansion of consciousness is necessary, and enter the process consciously, not simply driven by their unconscious suffering.

The process of transformation includes, for example, fundamental confrontations with the Shadow (see Illustration 3), transformation of the feminine (see Chapter 8), encounter with the Self as an image of God, and so forth. Such psychic transformations which change the basic worldview of a person presuppose a healthy ego consciousness and feelings of self-worth. They represent steps in the process of individuation.

In such cases the analysand will try to come to understand each of his sand pictures, and work out and make conscious their meaning. The analyst can then introduce his own view of a sand picture and

cautiously try to formulate an interpretation. But here, too, reticence is in order because we cannot forget that the superseded worldview must be dissolved and left behind before a new one can form. The analyst may, because of his long experience, have an inkling of the shape of the new worldview, but he should never, by incautious interpretation, hinder the emergence of an unforeseen solution. After the process has ended it seems to me to be important in these cases carefully to work through the slides.

Thus, during sandplay by using one's hands creatively, the holistic transformative process which includes both psyche and body is primarily nonverbal and is interpreted verbally only at a later phase according to the insights of analytical psychology. During the initial nonverbal and noninterpretive phase, the analyst maintains a protective, supportive, nonverbal and understanding attitude. He concentrates completely on the process of his analysand and transmits to him his confidence in the self-healing process of the psyche by virtue of what he, as an analyst, is, and not by virtue of what he says.<sup>6</sup> These quiet periods during the therapeutic hour where nothing is spoken are extraordinarily meaningful and valuable. It is not a silence of embarrassment but a conscious silence. Both analyst and analysand direct their attention to the inner world of the analysand leading to a greater understanding.

In the subsequent interpretative discussion of the slides, the analyst becomes more a partner in helping the analysand to understand and find meaning in them so that the pictures in the sand are connected to the experience of the analysand.

One could call these two distinct therapeutic attitudes of the analyst maternal or paternal, or matriarchal or patriarchal. Kathrin Asper differentiates between a mother-specific and a father-specific therapeutic attitude.<sup>7</sup> I prefer not to use these distinctions because they invariable evoke gender-specific roles. As an analyst I feel myself to be neither motherly nor fatherly, but my attitude toward the analysand depends on what seems needed in his process. During the creative formative phase what become active in me are the more instinctual, physical reactions. These depend on subtle sensory perceptions, body feelings, and intuition and on an empathic, emotional relationship with the analysand. This does not happen unconsciously but rather from a conscious turning toward this more receptive attitude which can grip the whole person. When we subsequently enter the more interpretive-analytical process, we call on the more clearly discerning and ordering faculties, such as reason as well as feeling in its subjective valuing function.

Perhaps these two distinctive attitudes can best be elucidated by drawing attention to the various functions of the two cerebral

hemispheres.<sup>8</sup> The right hemisphere (which affects the left side of the body), works with holistic, nonverbal images and plays a large role in the processing of emotional information. It seems to me to be significant that the body image is located in the right hemisphere.

The left hemisphere (which affects the right side of the body) is language-oriented and connected with logical and goal-oriented thinking. This hemisphere works rationally and analytically.

The two therapeutic attitudes I have described involve the two hemispheres of the brain alternately, at times drawing more on the functions of the left side, at times more on those of the right side. Use of either one or the other is not better or worse, but depends on the particular requirements of the therapeutic process. During the processes in which we strive for a transformation of the worldview, both attitudes are used more or less simultaneously and in balance.

The balanced use of both hemispheres of the brain has not only a positive effect on the analysand but is essential for the spiritual, psychological, and physical health of the analyst as well. It has been my experience that on days where I use both sandplay therapy and classical dream analysis alternately, I am less tired than on days where one verbal analysis follows another. This is one of the reasons why I should like to see more attention given to the method of sandplay among Jungian analysts. Then not only painted pictures would come into use during a verbal analysis, but an actual method would be available for processes which demand treatment on the nonverbal and emotional level where the formation of images is most appropriate.

If we sketch these two approaches to the therapeutic process and their results briefly from the point of view of the analysand, we can note the following: During the initial formative phase the analysand is led away from critical, rational consciousness. Habitual abstract intellectual thinking which is not related to reality but which has been fostered in most people is purposely avoided by the method itself. What is activated, rather, is the power of the imagination and the sensation function, that is the senses and especially the sense of touch. The power of the imagination and its connection to reality unite while activating the emotions and feelings and form the image of the sand picture. Later I will treat in greater detail this subtle coordination of the imagination, the body, matter, and the emotions (see Chapter 4).

In the second phase which follows and during which we work analytically on the sand pictures, we activate the faculty of observation in the analysand. He must fix all the figures in their positions and mutual relatedness and then evaluate this information with both his feelings and his thoughts. This kind of thinking is now not

alienated from reality or influenced by the opinions of others, but it is particularly directed toward what is present in the picture and what the analysand has actually experienced through it.

Various levels of being are activated in an analysand during sandplay because it shows the way toward development by either enhancing or retarding certain possibilities and abilities in confronting conscious and unconscious images.

The analysand should approach sandplay with his entire being, both psychically and physically, with total devotion to what he is doing and to what is happening to him. For sandplay is both serious and meaningful. In a limited space, the client presents his world. The term 'world technique' for this method of therapy would also be correct. Yet 'sandplay' denotes the idea of 'playing' with the sand and thus expresses beautifully the connection to the psyche, in that the sand in its dry form has the flowing, rippling properties of water, but in its moist form it is firm and can be molded like earth.

Like psychic life itself, the sand is both energy while moving and energy at rest. There are times during which we are restless and searching, when the stones which build up the structure of our personality are not as well-fitting as they once might have been, when our ideas and values are on shaky ground and are changing. In such times we are 'homeless'; everything is in flux and we really are 'on the road'. After such phases of unrest we begin once again to put things in order. Our house of the soul is being built anew, perhaps with new building blocks or perhaps with the old, newly placed and fitted. We have found a new life form which will give us a sense of peace and balance for some time to come—until such time that from the depth of the soul the archetype of the Self once again constellates a change and introduces a new process of transformation.

Sand and psyche have much in common. No other material I know of represents psychic energy so well: flowing, moving, it searches for form. It finds a new form—and from there it begins to flow again.

The person who stands at the sand tray and creatively forms the sand is totally immersed in what he is doing. This direct interplay of body and psyche is not generally attained during classical dream analysis. With both methods, it is of decisive importance that the insights from the analysis will be translated into the reality of everyday life. But besides working through the phenomenon of transference and countertransference which might arise, the analyst has relatively little observational knowledge of his client's outer reality. The analyst is dependent on the client's description of his everyday life as well as on his honesty.

In classical dream analysis the analyst is also dependent on his client's ability to remember when he tells his dreams. It happens time

and again that important dreams are 'forgotten' or censored during narration. Moreover, it is nearly an art in itself for a client to tell a dream in such a way that the analyst can truly *feel* his way into it without interjecting his own fantasies. There is yet another danger in retelling a dream: we may miss the color and the feeling-tone of the dream experience when an interpretation of the dream message is desired too quickly.

In sandplay things are slightly different. The danger of biased evaluation is small because the analysand usually does not know what a 'good' or a 'bad' sand picture might look like. Also, because he is present at the very time of the sandplay, the analyst can concentrate on every detail in the sand tray and observe every movement of the analysand during the entire hour. This presupposes, of course, that the analyst is able—objectively and precisely—to listen, feel, and observe. In this way he can get exact information concerning the condition of his analysand. It should be recalled that the analysand more or less unconsciously forms his pictures in the sand tray and therefore is often not conscious of which figure he used where. If the analyst knows which unconscious condition is expressed in the picture of the analysand, he can effect much by merely calling attention to the individual figures and their position. In my opinion it is most important that analyst and analysand view the completed picture together and in detail. The analysand becomes accountable for what he has put in his picture and learns to see the individual elements of his sand picture in their mutual relatedness. He attempts to orient himself in his own 'world picture', not, at first, through interpretation, but rather by careful observation.

The subtle use of one's senses and precise observation of reality is an indispensable precondition for securely anchoring oneself in this world; for outer, concrete reality has an enormous impact on the inner, psychic world. We are quite used to the thought that the inner, psychic-spiritual world expresses itself—perhaps even 'incarnates' itself—in outer reality, but the reverse is equally true. Nature and the environment man has created also affect the psyche. There is a constant exchange between inner and outer, between psyche and environment.<sup>10</sup>

For example, having a deep and instinctual knowledge of the course of the seasons and the dying blossoming of nature gives us an understanding of order and regularity. This in turn offers us a sense of security and orientation. One becomes more conscious of the fact that natural cycles foster the process of becoming. Those familiar with the nature of growth understand that there can be no impatience or hurrying it along. This holds true whether we mean the growth of a creative work or the renewal of a worldview, perhaps even an

analysis or a pregnancy. Those who are more conscious will tend that which is newly emerging with more patience and attention. But in today's society, isn't it exactly the opposite? We have lost our relationship to nature. How many pregnant women cannot or will not—psychically and physically—give the unborn child the peaceful and healthy space which it needs for its development?

I have mentioned that many persons who come for help suffer from a disturbance of the primary relationship to the mother. Often this begins at a very early stage—even during the mother's pregnancy. During early childhood the mother or person with whom a primary relationship can be formed represents the most important contact with the world; as a matter of fact, that person *is* the world for the child. How can the child receive a sense of security and trust in the world and in his own life, if that person does not have a good or trusting relationship to his or her own nature?

Not knowing or being indifferent to certain processes of nature—and I would include in these, for example, knowledge of the orbits of the sun and the moon, the position of the stars—has, it seems to me, a negative effect on the sense of the person's primal trust in his own life in this world. Does it not seem natural that a young person should observe and get to know the own foundation of his life, namely his own body and its immediate environment as well as the plant and animal world of his larger environment, his ecosystem, before he would turn to abstract knowledge and technology? I feel strongly that it isn't enough to love one's child, to feed it and protect it. A good mother or father must introduce the child to the essentials of 'Mother Nature's nature', both inwardly and outwardly. A child can never learn in school how to trust in his own soul and body, or gain knowledge concerning health and disease, or his own sexuality; this knowledge must be mediated by the parents through their example in everyday life.

This disregard or even disdain of the seemingly self-evident, unspectacular natural processes also spills over—harmfully, I should say—to the human body. The body becomes the less-regarded sister of the mind, which is clearly privileged. Here I don't mean the body in the sense of its being an object of exhibition for fitness and beauty; rather I mean the body as a part of our wholeness and as it relates to the other concrete things of this world, subject to its laws of growth and decay.

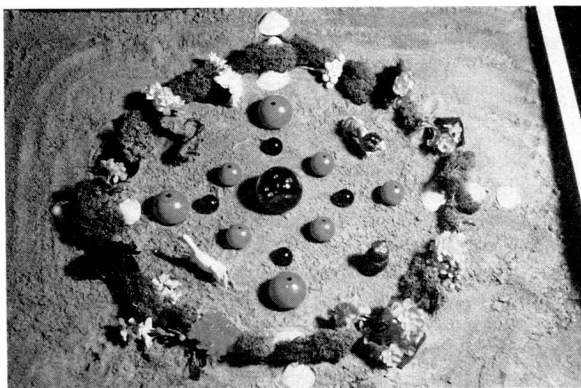
One could say that the body is held in lesser esteem. Or, to state this even more strongly: there is a disastrous severance of the mind from its earthly, human conditionality. One can observe this severance in fantasies as well as in different forms of behavior: for example in drug- or alcohol-induced intoxication, or in habitual endless talk

or daydreaming, or in certain psychological practices which only result in an inflated personality structure. One can assume that such persons wish to escape from their unsatisfactory lives. It is for such reasons that during therapy we must neither neglect the concrete environment nor the body as the carrier of the material part of the wholeness of our personality. Otherwise we run the risk of a split between the abstract, the spiritual and the concrete, material world. There is, as I have stated, a constant exchange and reciprocal action between the spiritual and the material world. To neglect the one results in a deficit in the other. When we carefully pay attention to one of the two aspects we thereby enhance the other as well.

I spoke earlier of the course of the sun and the position of the stars. In certain fairy tales, the hero or heroine seeks help through orientation with the sun or moon or stars. Let me illustrate the importance of such facts in our daily lives with a small example. A nine-year-old boy came for therapy because he suffered from deep anxieties. He feared, among other things, that he would get lost in the big city where I have my practice and be unable to find his way home again. Of course, his anxieties were also, but not only, an expression of his sense of being lost inwardly. I drew an approximate plan of the city in the sand. We then laid a cross with the four cardinal points marked on the sand. He understood that his home was somewhat east of my office, but how could he know which way was East? We observed and talked about the properties of the four seasons and the

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#### Illustration 4



*Garden of the Soul: Sand Picture by a 42-year-old Woman*

path of the sun in the course of the day and related this to the changing seasons. Very quickly, the boy discovered how to locate the southerly direction and, to derive from this, where East must be. And at night, when the sun did not shine? He observed—something he learned with his father—that there is a certain star which always shows where North is. Such experiences with the sun and stars came as a great relief to the boy. They gave his young personality—in such a big world—a growing sense of security.

This example may seem insignificant but how many adults know in which direction the window of the living-room faces? Which plants, birds, and insects live in their garden? And how many know the garden of their soul?

A sand picture can also be seen as the garden of one's soul where the inner and the outer come together. Here, in protected space, a person can learn to watch and recognize the reciprocal action between the inner and the outer world.

In order to underscore the extraordinary importance of the role nature plays in the human soul, I should like to cite Laurens van der Post, the great author and expert on both inner and outer nature:

If we were to investigate the history of Europe, the civilization in which are rooted most of our values, we would find that over time a disastrous split has occurred in human culture. The more rational we became, the more we have lost contact with a primordial trust, 'to be known', and a feeling of belonging. This split has brought on the loss of meaning in our hearts and in our minds.

And then he continues:

One cause of great misunderstanding in our modern world is the notion that everything in us is subjective and the truly objective world lies outside of us. This is as absurd as it is wrong. We have an immeasurably objective world in us. This is the world with which psychologists today are increasingly preoccupied. They have already discovered that the split, this quasi-schizophrenic psychic condition of today's society is a result of the denial, neglect and exploitation of this inner world, a world which is as extraordinary, objective, and natural as a wilderness can be, the garden of our own soul.

Perhaps the only great man whom I have known, Carl Gustav Jung, told me once how he as a child discovered to his great lament that there are two states of consciousness in the world: one, which he called the natural or country-consciousness and the other which he called the city-consciousness. This second one appeared to him, as it increasingly does to me, to get more unreal, frightening and nightmarish as time goes on. It occasioned in him a longing for a return to the natural or country-consciousness which became ever



greater and more urgent. "The more I became familiar with the frightful life of the city, the stronger became my conviction that what I was getting to know as reality wasn't reality at all, but rather a distortion and degeneration of the human spirit which now claimed to be 'the reality'. I longed for the other reality which appeared to me to be lacking or to having been lost. I had a vision of the world as a country between rivers and forests, with humans and animals, small villages on which the sun shone and clouds moved and which had clear, dark nights—a world, in short, in which splendidly uncertain and unpredictable things could happen. And the world of nature which surrounded us would then be an open landscape, not simply a place on the map but rather God's world which was ordered by him and was filled with secret meaning.<sup>11</sup>

This is how Laurens van der Post writes concerning the effects on the soul when we neglect both our outer and inner nature. Jung's reflections cited by van der Post also speak of the longing for a natural consciousness and the importance which Jung assigned to a free nature filled with meaning and ordered by God.

This introduction to sandplay would, in my opinion, be incomplete without mentioning the conspicuous parallels that exist between sandplay and alchemy. For some time now I have been struck by the importance both methods place on combining the material and concrete operation with the theoretical and psychological elaboration of the process. In alchemy the name given to the concrete operation was the 'operatio' and the theoretical elaboration was called 'theoria'. Together they formed the 'opus', or the *alchemical work*. The imagination plays a large role both in alchemy and in sandplay, and in both methods the imaginative activity follows from the interplay of the material and physical with the psychic components.

In his *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*,<sup>12</sup> Jung, when describing his work on alchemical texts, mentions how quickly he saw the remarkable correspondence between analytical psychology and alchemy. He discovered that the experiences of the alchemists corresponded to his own experiences and that the world of the alchemists was, in a certain sense, his own world as well. He had found, as it were, the historical counterpart to his psychology of the Unconscious and he was able thereby to give his psychology a historical basis. The possibility of comparing analytical psychology with alchemy and seeing a continuity traceable as far back as the gnostic religions during the time of Christ gave his work substance. Jung's researches into these old texts helped him locate his own foundations. Now he was able to place the pictorial world of the

imagination and the clinical material which he had gathered from his practice in historical perspective and draw conclusions by ordering these elements in a meaningful way.

Elsewhere<sup>13</sup> Jung writes that alchemy had laid the most essential groundwork for the psychology of the Unconscious. First, because alchemy inadvertently left behind a treasure trove of pictorial material which is of the utmost importance for the modern interpretation of symbols, and second, because alchemy by virtue of its intentionally synthetic endeavors suggests symbolic procedures similar to the dreams of our analysands. Jung continues: the entire alchemical process of opposites can just as easily illustrate the way of individuation of an individual, with the difference that no single person will ever reach the wealth and volume of alchemical symbolism. The advantage of this is that this symbolism has grown through the centuries while the individual case with its short lifespan is subject to a limited experience and expressive ability.

Alchemical symbolism is not only extraordinarily valuable for amplification of dream material, but is most helpful in the interpretation of sand pictures. We can also see parallels between the individual steps in the alchemical process and the psychic processes of transformation, especially of individuation, for the work done in sand. Psychic processes progress in similar, generally valid, patterns. This accounts for the fact that we can find in the basic structures similarities in the way the processes run their course. We can see this not only in the processes and symbols occurring during dream analysis or during sandplay but also in alchemy. The only difference is that each method uses different means and forms.

It seems to me important to refer once again to the alchemical 'work', because we can find there the most important connection with sandplay. Jung in 'Psychology and Alchemy' writes the following concerning this 'work'.

The basis of alchemy is the work (opus). Part of this work is practical, the *operation* itself, which is to be thought of as a series of experiments with chemical substances. . . . The profound darkness that shrouds the alchemical procedure comes from the fact that although the alchemist was interested in the chemical part of the work he also used it to devise a nomenclature for the psychic transformation that really fascinated him. . . . The method of alchemy, psychologically speaking, is one of boundless amplification. The *amplificatio* is always appropriate when dealing with some obscure experience which is so vaguely adumbrated that it must be enlarged and expanded by being set in a psychological context in order to be understood at all. That is why, in analytical psychology, we resort to amplification in the interpretation of dreams,

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**Illustration 5**


*Historical Picture of the Alchemical Work. To the right is the practically acting person (operatio), to the left the conferring abbot, monk, and layman (theoria), and in the middle the alchemical vessel.*

for a dream is too slender a hint to be understood until it is enriched by the stuff of association and analogy and thus amplified to the point of intelligibility. This *amplificatio* forms the second part of the *opus*, and is understood by the alchemist as *theoria*.<sup>14</sup>

Illustration 5 graphically illustrates the two interacting sides during the alchemical 'work'. To the right is a man in his laboratory engaged in 'hands-on' labor. He represents the *operatio*, the practical activity or operational side of the work. To the left we see three men, an abbot, a monk and a layman conferring together. They represent the *theoria*, the theoretical side of the work. In the middle, on top of the furnace, stands the tripod with the round alchemical vessel, the actual center of action, for in it the slow transformation of the substance occurs.

Text and picture seem to me to express clearly the relationship between alchemy and sandplay. For sandplay too joins the *operatio*, the practical work at the sand tray, and *theoria*, the theoretical elaboration of the action. We can think of the sand tray, figuratively, as the alchemical vessel in which the transformation of the psychic substance occurs. Here is the protected space, a kind of uterus or maternal womb in which a holistic renewal and rebirth is made possible. This renewal takes shape through the healing and transforming power of the imagination.



## Conclusion

The previous series of sand pictures has allowed us to cast a glance into the infinitely varied world of the psyche. Surely, we can never lay hold of this interstitial realm in its entirety, yet it is there where the spirit and body, the inner and the outer, the conscious and unconscious are woven together. Every person who makes sand pictures forms his worlds in the most personal of ways. Indeed, I have never seen two sand pictures which were alike, and yet sand pictures join the common and shared, archetypal patterns with individual development.

The precondition for the therapeutic method of sandplay, and incidentally for the verbal analytic method as well, is a knowledge of the individual and collective psyche, its structure and disturbances, its potential for healing and transformation. Both methods are rooted in the same depth-psychological training. The sandplay therapist, however, will need additional specific experience and training in the sandplay method.

During a verbal analysis, the analyst and analysand sit across from each other. In the classical Freudian setting, the analysand lies on the couch and the analyst sits behind him. Contrary to either of these methods, during sandplay the analysand is clearly in the center of the action. The heart of this action is clearly the holistic activity of the analysand. He is totally involved with his body, psyche, and spirit at the sand tray.

Sandplay heals not by being acted upon by another, but rather by the analysand's own action. Through the analysand's creations and attitude the energies at work within him are made externally visible. We can speak of each sand picture as being an actual act of birth. This is so because the analysand does indeed present that which is innermost to the outside. He cannot hide, he must take responsibility for that which he expresses. Obviously, this makes for a most intimate relationship between the analysand and the analyst which requires the utmost in trust and respect. Often a word spoken aloud may be incorrect since after a birth, such as the creative act, a person is quite vulnerable. Therefore, what is required of the analyst is restraint and a fine sensibility.

And yet creative expression is not associated only with vulnerability; there is also a great joy! In every sandplay therapy there comes a moment when the analysand looks proudly and happily upon his 'creation', often amazed at how fascinatingly different his newly created picture is, compared with those things in the world he had known previously. Joy in the face of creativity seems to be the attitude which we find repeatedly at the beginning of the healing process. I believe that this joyful acceptance of his own creation also marks the acceptance of his own creative potential, and most importantly himself.

Sandplay activates the deepest layers of the unconscious and, as we have seen in the case of Eva, months and years may go by until the developments foreshadowed in the sand pictures can be realized in conscious life. Yet this inherent diagnostic potential is extraordinarily valuable to the analyst. It helps him to have patience and confidence in the directions and goals of the inner process in the analysand, and to support it even when the analysand becomes impatient and demands immediate and visible changes in his life. All true transformations in a person take much time. It is possible, however, for the analysand to experience immediately at the sand tray the liberating effect and joy contained within his own creative actions.