

Estelle L. Weinrib

IMAGES OF THE SELF
The Sandplay Therapy Process

Foreword by Dora M. Kalf

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

After many years of a fruitful and rewarding Jungian analysis, I had occasion to spend a summer in the environs of Zurich doing intensive sandplay therapy with Dora M. Kalff. In a short time, a matter of weeks, I reached a previously unexperienced level of my being that moved and astonished me. At first I attributed this to my previous analytical process and development, and to the prodigious personal gifts of Mrs. Kalff. Although intrigued, I was not convinced that sandplay alone could have added such a new dimension. Later, however, after years of study with Kalff, I incorporated sandplay into my analytical practice and found that in itself it accelerates and deepens the therapeutic process. It has proved to be an invaluable therapeutic approach about which not enough is known. This book is an effort to remedy that situation.

I express my profound gratitude to Dora Kalff for her patient teaching and generosity in sharing her thoughts and experiences with me through unnumbered hours. I have the deepest admiration for her creativity and pioneering spirit.

FOREWORD:

Estelle Weinrib has written a very valuable study on sandplay therapy that helps to understand many important ideas that underlie its practice. She has aptly commented on the practical and theoretical aspects of sandplay and illustrated her experiences with a case. This case shows that sandplay can serve as a powerful medium to reach strong, transformative, inner experiences. From her description one gets the feeling that as a therapist she is able to truly participate in these happenings and to create a favorable space for their arising and transformation. At the same time she is able to offer a consistent and convincing interpretation of the material without ever becoming dogmatic about her views. According to my own experience it is very important when we offer our own interpretation that we leave enough space for the possibility of further suggestions and insights. Because in sandplay we are dealing with a living experience it would be presumptuous to think that it is possible to exhaustively describe it on a conceptual level.

Estelle Weinrib has rightly emphasized the nonverbal character of the process that is occurring through sandplay. It is perhaps possible to say that the healing occurs on what Neumann calls the matriarchal level of consciousness. Although this level of consciousness may be termed matriarchal it does not mean that there is a preponderance of feminine symbolism. The symbolic union of opposites, be it on the abstract level of principles such as sky and earth or be it on a human level of man and woman, is an important feature of the process also on this preverbal level.

I agree with Estelle Weinrib that initially we can talk about a creative regression towards an instinctual level of being. It is also true that the developments occurring after the Self-constellation which lead to a new ego structure are progressive in nature. We have been able to observe that in a nonverbal phase of the process when analytical interpretation is still withheld a positive shift in attitude to the external world and other people can take place. This is the case even when I abstain from a simultaneous analytical discussion of dreams and general behavior patterns. Especially in the beginning phase I prefer to create an open space for the unconscious inner impulses to manifest without the interference of premature conceptualization. When the process has proceeded to a point well after the constellation of the Self, the verbal and analytical work becomes more important. It is at this stage that the unconscious process which has expressed itself in sandplay can be integrated into a conscious appreciation of the changes that have occurred. As I understand it, this phase of elucidation is an integral part of sandplay therapy.

In some cases, people do not wish to talk immediately after the last sandplay picture has been created because of the very depths of the experience they have gone through. They may come back at a later time to look at the pictures and do more analytical work on them.

I have been very impressed by the work of some of my Japanese students which shows very positive nonverbal communication through sandplay resulting in an impressive change in the client. Professor Kawai talks in this context of a transference on the Hara level—a direct communication from one center of a person to the center of the other person. We have to take into account, however, that there exists a considerable difference in the mentality between most of the Western world and the Japanese culture. It is therefore conceivable that a conceptual integration of the experience is more important in our culture than in theirs.

D. M. Kalf

1. INTRODUCTION

Sandplay is a nonverbal, nonrational form of therapy that reaches a profound preverbal level of the psyche. In this psychotherapeutic modality patients create three-dimensional scenes, pictures or abstract designs in a tray of specific size, using sand, water and a large number of miniature realistic figures.

Unlike the customary practice in verbal dream analysis, interpretations are not offered at the time the pictures are created. Although the patient may associate to the sand pictures as he or she would to a dream, the therapist is receptive but makes minimal comment. Interpretation is delayed until a certain degree of ego stability has been reached. The rationale for this unusual practice and other points made here will be discussed later.

A basic postulate of sandplay therapy is that deep in the unconscious there is an autonomous tendency, given the proper conditions, for the psyche to heal itself.

As a verbal analysis of dreams, personality and life problems is progressing in the direction of enlarged consciousness, the sandplay process encourages a creative *regression* that enables healing. In short, two separate but related processes are occurring, and the interaction between them seems to hasten and enrich the therapeutic endeavor.¹

Sandplay enables three-dimensional tangible expression of inchoate, unconscious contents. Sand pictures represent figures and landscapes of the inner and outer world, and they appear to mediate between these two worlds and connect them.

Sandplay therapy provides the conditions for a womb-like incubatory period that makes possible the repair of a damaged mother-image which, in turn, enables *constellation* and activation of the *Self*,² the subsequent healing of the wounded *ego*, and the recovery of the inner child with all that implies in terms of psychological renewal (see Chapter 5).

¹At a certain point the sandplay process becomes progressive. This development will be discussed later.

²See Glossary for definition of italicized terms.

2. THE EVOLUTION OF SANDPLAY

MAGIC CIRCLES AND FANTASIES

The earliest precursors of sandplay therapy practitioners might be said to be those most primitive tribes who first drew protective magic circles in the earth.

The nearest cultural parallel to sandplay therapy seems to be the sand painting of the Navajo religion wherein ritual sand pictures are used extensively in ceremonies of healing, as well as for divination, exorcism and other purposes.

Pictures are made by chanters or medicine men and initiated assistants who mold and paint symbolic figures of sand on the ground, in prescribed arrangements, enclosed by "guardian" boundaries marked in the sand. The figures represent mythic deities in human or animal form plus natural or geometric symbols, all of which are usually arranged in quadrants around a center, strongly suggesting a *mandala* form, except that the outer boundary (circular, square or rectangular) has an opening to allow evil to get out and good to get in.

These sand paintings can be quite simple or as much as 20 feet in diameter and very elaborate, requiring as many as forty assistants and eight to ten hours to complete. When the painting is finished, the patient or seeker sits on it, while the chanter applies sand from the various figures of the painting to specified parts of the patient's body. All this is to identify the patient with deities represented in the painting. In addition, the sand itself is felt to have healing properties: the patient is said to absorb good from the sand while the sand absorbs evil from him.

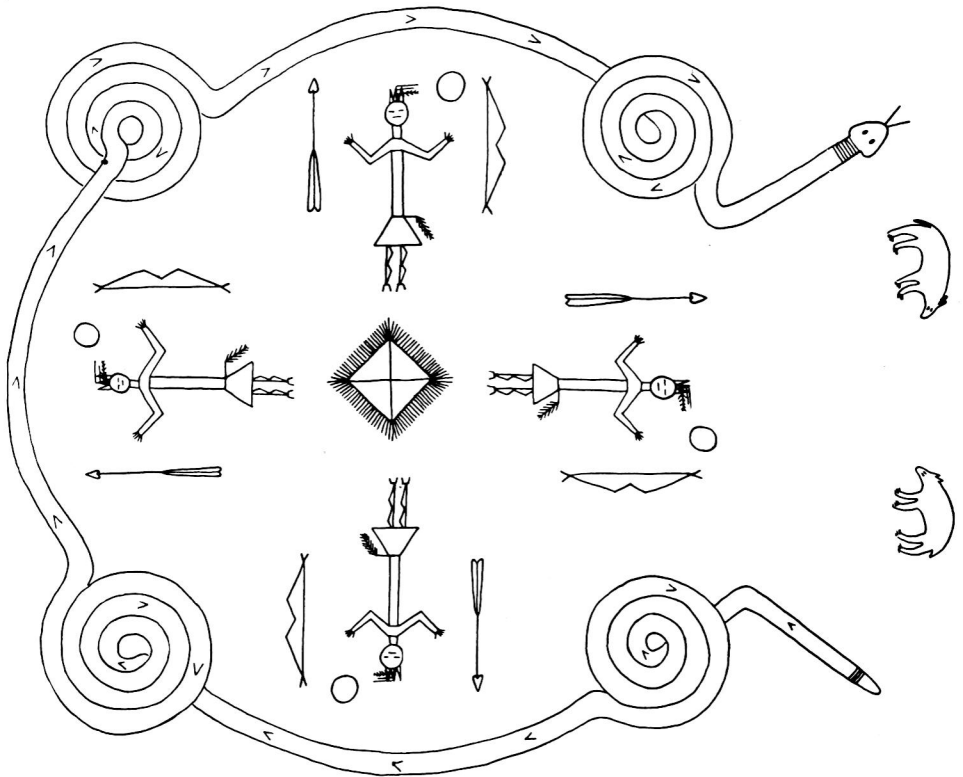
The pictures are believed to carry mana and are held sacred:

To witness the laying of a sand painting may be dangerous for the uninitiated . . . There is, however, a time when even the initiated must not witness the completion of the sand painting preparation, the moment of sanctification when the painting becomes sacred, the instant when the encircling guardian [boundary] of the sand picture is started (Reichard, 1974, p. 160).

The pictures represent blessings only and attract good and repel evil. They are believed to be particularly efficacious in the treatment of trauma, when the patient has been shocked or frightened into unconsciousness (Reichard, p. 681). The sand paintings also "correct symptoms due to contemplation of supernatural things too strong for the patient" (Reichard, p. 717).

The first Jungian to be involved with sandplay therapy might be said to be Jung himself, who described in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, how in 1912 he happened upon a healing form of play (Stewart, 1977, pp. 9–11).

After his break with Freud, Jung wrote that he found himself in a painfully confused inner state that yielded neither to analysis of his dreams nor to reexamination of his life. He decided to submit himself to impulses of the unconscious, to do whatever occurred to him. He remembered that as a small boy he had built castles and buildings of stone and mortar made of



1. Never-ending snake sandpainting.
A Navaho healing rite.

earth and water. In *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1962, p. 174), he writes:

“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 life with its 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.

He reports then (*Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 174–175) that he played regularly and seriously day after day with the earth and stones on the edge of the Lake of Zurich:

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

The building game, which he continued for some time and then extended into painting and stone-cutting, released a flow of fantasies which eventually led to his appreciation of *fantasy* as “the mother of all possibilities, where, like all psychological opposites, the inner and outer worlds are joined together in living union” (*Collected Works* [hereafter cited as *CW*], Vol. 6, p. 52).

Giving concrete form to his own fantasies and his later observation of his patients led him to his discovery of the process of *individuation*, the *transcendent function*, and the technique of *active imagination*.

PIONEERS IN SANDPLAY THERAPY

Sandplay itself was originated in England by Margaret Lowenfeld who in 1935 published a book about it called *World Techniques: Play in Childhood*. She attributed the inspiration for the method to H. G. Wells’ book *Floor Games*, published in 1911.

The method, soon called World Techniques, was used by Dr. Lowenfeld, a Freudian psychiatrist at the Institute of Child

Psychology in London, and subsequently by clinics in other countries.

In 1956, after attending the Jung Institute for six years, Dora M. Kalff went to a psychiatric conference in Zurich where she was impressed by an exhibition by Dr. Lowenfeld of her World Techniques.¹ Encouraged by Jung, who was her mentor and friend, Kalff left for London to study and work with Lowenfeld and others, including Michael Fordham and D. W. Winnicott. Kalff's experience in London helped clarify for her the direction of her future work.

Returning to Switzerland, she began her practice with children, using Jungian symbology and developing her own version of sandplay therapy. She started with the basic hypothesis postulated by Jung, that there is a fundamental drive toward wholeness and healing in the human psyche. To allow for the healing she decided to give the patient "a free space," to accept him unconditionally, to observe without making judgments and to be guided only by her own observations (Kalff, *Sandplay: A Psychotherapeutic Approach to the Psyche*, 1980). Since she was the only Jungian analyst doing therapy with children in Zurich at that time, there was no one to talk to save Jung himself, who gave her encouragement, advice and such psychological aid and comfort as time allowed.

She used a nonverbal approach, doing nothing to intrude upon the child's process but simply observing and accepting what happened in the hour. She prepared herself for the next hour with the child by trying to assimilate what had happened in the previous one.

The approach here was not unlike Jung's, who in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (p. 170) recounts the beginning of his method of dream interpretation:

I felt a necessity to develop a new attitude toward my patients.

¹The biographical information that follows comes from a personal conversation with Kalff in 1972.

I resolved for the present not to bring any theoretical premises to bear on them, but to wait to see what they would tell me of their own accord. My aim became to leave things to chance.

When the patients spontaneously reported dreams and fantasies, interpretations seemed to follow of their own accord from the patients' replies and associations. I avoided all theoretical points of view and simply helped the patients to understand the dream-images by themselves, without application of rules or theories.

From the beginning, Kalff's patients made rapid and exciting progress. It soon became apparent that an autonomous process was occurring with little or no verbal comment or explanation being given to the child.

Kalff began to recognize stages of development in the sand pictures (to be described later) that were clearly expressions of a psychological maturation occurring within the child. But she had no conceptual frame of reference to explain the phenomena.

After she heard a lecture by Erich Neumann, an eminent Jungian analyst, on his ideas about psychological development in early childhood, Kalff and Neumann had discussions that convinced both of them that her practice was confirming and illustrating some of his theoretical formulations. Neumann, never having practiced therapy with children, had evolved concepts in a purely theoretical way. They planned to do some research together, but Neumann unfortunately died shortly after their meeting.

Kalff then began doing sandplay therapy with adults and discovered that the *same* developmental process occurred as in children, indicating that sandplay operated on a quite primitive level of the unconscious.

Later she met the renowned Zen scholar D. Z. Suzuki and exchanged ideas with him. In Kalff's practice of delaying interpretation, Suzuki saw a parallel with Zen practice, wherein the pupil/seeker-after-wisdom is *not* given a direct answer to

his question, but is rather thrown back on his own imagination and inner resources. The meeting with Suzuki reinforced her feeling that her approach was right.

4. EIGHT BASIC CONCEPTS

Sandplay therapy as developed by Kalff rests, to a large extent, on the theoretical constructs of C. G. Jung and Erich Neumann. Eight concepts relevant to this method will be discussed in this chapter: others are described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. I also venture ideas of my own.

1. Psychological development of the individual is archetypally determined and under normal circumstances is similar for everyone (Neumann, 1954).

2. The psyche consists of consciousness and the unconscious and the interaction between them, and is a teleologically oriented self-regulatory system. It contains a drive toward wholeness and has a tendency to balance itself through the compensatory function of the unconscious.¹ The drive to reali-

¹Compensation implies here that there is a relationship between the unconscious and the conscious mind wherein a content missing from consciousness and required for wholeness of the personality will appear in accentuated form in the unconscious, making itself known through a dream or powerful affect deriving from an activated complex.

zation and wholeness (the Self) suggests that the psyche, like the body, under adequate circumstances has a tendency to heal itself (Jung, "On the Nature of the Psyche," *CW*, Vol. 8, pp. 159–234).

3. The Self is the totality (conscious and unconscious) of the personality and its directing center. It is the central organizing factor of the psyche out of which the ego, which is only the center of consciousness, evolves. Jung states: "The ego stands to the Self as the moved to the mover, or as object to subject . . . The Self, like the unconscious, is an a priori existent out of which the ego evolves. It is, so to speak, an unconscious prefiguration of the ego" (*CW*, Vol. 11, p. 259 par. 391).

As modern consciousness evolved, the ego gained preponderance over the Self, particularly in Western intellectual development. The primacy of the intellect has resulted in an unbalanced, overly rational personality that is peculiarly subject to neuroses. The autonomy of the ego is limited since the ego's roots are in the unconscious. The ego is vulnerable to influence by emotionally charged *complexes* acting in a compensatory way. The more the ego tries to suppress or ignore an activated complex, the more the complex will rob the ego of control. (Despite assertion of conscious will, who among us has not overreacted to a situation in which a complex has been stirred?) A primary aim of Jungian analysis and sandplay therapy is "to relativize the ego"—that is, for the ego to relinquish its illusory dominance and to reestablish a connection and continuing relationship between consciousness and the unconscious.

4. Jung's reinterpretation of the incest theory suggests that: as the mother is the source of physical life, so the unconscious is the source of psychological life. The mother and the unconscious, therefore, can be seen as symbolic feminine equivalents. The drive to return to the mother can be seen as a drive to return to the unconscious. Under certain circumstances, this may be regressive, leading to neurosis and psychosis; psycho-

logical illness or death. In other circumstances, that is, in the individuation process, the regression may be temporary and in service of psychological renewal and symbolic rebirth (*CW*, Vol. 5, Part II, p. 235).

After a degree of maturity (i.e., ego development and separation from the personal mother) has been achieved, Jung sees the drive to reconnect with the symbolic mother (the unconscious) as necessary in the individuation process. Indeed, separation from the unconscious and reconnection and continuing relationship to it are aims of Jungian analysis and are the essence of the individuation process. During the psychotherapeutic process, separation and reconnection may, and do, go on simultaneously.

5. In my view, psychological healing and expansion of consciousness, though related, are *not* identical.² Healing implies first that there has been a wounding and possible impairment of natural organic function, and second, that the wound has then been remedied and natural functioning has been restored. Consciousness implies awareness of what one is feeling, thinking and doing and the capacity to make choices in one's action and communications that are relatively free of control by complexes.

In short, psychological healing involves restoration of the capacity to function normally, while ego-consciousness has to do with awareness and choice of what we are doing while we function. Expanded consciousness, while it may contribute to healing, does not ensure it. On the other hand, healing, by restoring the psyche to its natural functioning, creates a condition out of which the insight and consciousness that are natural

²Kalff suggested that there was a difference between consciousness and healing when she said in a conversation in 1972: "Rational consciousness in the process is not necessary. It is similar to the idea in the East that all is consciousness. There is a content that is simply not verbalized or conceptualized. Somewhere a person knows. We don't necessarily have to make something conscious that is unconscious in order to heal."

to the human personality will evolve organically (Weinrib, 1983).

6. Psychological healing, in this context, is an emotional, nonrational phenomenon that takes place on the matriarchal level of consciousness hypothesized by Erich Neumann (see later in this chapter) and which Kalff calls the preverbal level. Healing at this level enables renewal of the personality and expansion of consciousness.

7. Both healing *and* the expansion of consciousness are desirable ends in psychotherapy. I believe that the use of sandplay deepens and accelerates the therapeutic endeavor because two processes are occurring, the processes being intimately related yet separate. During the same period that a verbal analysis of complexes, dreams, personality and life problems is progressing in a thrust toward consciousness, sandplay encourages a creative regression³ that enables healing precisely because of delayed interpretation and the deliberate discouragement of directed thinking.

In practice, the two processes appear to interrelate and complement each other. Although patients may depict dream images in the sand tray, very often certain images or themes appear in the sand tray *before* they appear in dreams. Perhaps this is so because the making of a sand picture is an enactment in sensate reality, a concrete action that stimulates archetypal activity, which then manifests in dreams (or perhaps directly into changing attitudes and behavior) (Weinrib, 1983).

For example, if the image of a bridge connecting two entities appears in a dream, the bridge is a symbol of connection. However, in sandplay, the patient has actually placed a bridge that in fact connects two separate parts. And that physical fact *may*

³After the constellation of the Self and the emergence of a renewed and strengthened ego, the sandplay process takes on a more verbal and progressive character. The patient is then more capable of relating independently to the inner being and the outer world.

have an effect on the unconscious, whatever the dynamics may be.

8. The natural healing process can be effectively activated by therapeutic play and stimulation of creative impulses via conditions provided by the “free and protected space” as propounded by Kalf. The Jungian view of the function of the symbol is that it is a healing agent that acts as a reconciling bridge between opposites; that it “can be regarded as an attempt of the unconscious to lead regressive *libido* into a creative act, thus pointing the way to a resolution of the conflict” (Harding, 1961, p. 8).

I believe that the making of a sand picture is in itself a symbolic and creative act. Provided it is happening within the free and protected space (see Chapter 5), symbolic active fantasizing by the patient stimulates the imagination, freeing neurotically fixated energy and moving it into creative channels, which in itself can be healing.

The making of sand pictures by the patient is voluntary. Pictures are not necessarily made at every meeting. Sometimes weeks, more rarely even months, go by between the making of sand pictures because the image, coming out of the depths of the psyche and concretized in a creative act, needs to develop and move on in its own time. When no pictures are made, a regular Jungian verbal analysis proceeds, including the interpretation of dreams, work on *typological* problems, interpersonal relations, and other issues. In the verbal analytical process, etiological and teleological insight and the expansion of consciousness are the goals. Symbolic material emerging from the unconscious and the stuff of everyday life is integrated into consciousness as soon as possible. In sandplay—a ruminative, contemplative process—understanding is less important than the healing process itself.

With regard to healing, Jung likened the compensatory healing tendency of the psyche to that of the body as early as 1920, when he said: “Just as the body reacts in a purposeful manner

to injuries, infections or abnormal ways of life, so do the psychic functions react with purposeful defense mechanisms to unnatural or dangerous disturbances" ("General Aspects of the Psychology of the Dream," *Spring*, 1956, p. 4).

The natures of psychological healing and consciousness remain at heart mysteries. We can only conjecture about them and recognize that healing is not identical with consciousness as we tend to think of consciousness: that is, as an accretion of ego awareness. If ego-consciousness were all, insight and awareness could be relied upon to change our emotional responses and behavior, but all too often they do not.

It seems to me that, to a large extent, the function of expanded ego-consciousness is to offer us choices of attitudinal or behavioral response to our autonomous instinct-based emotional states, which in spite of our best efforts remain quite independent of our will: nor would we wish to rid ourselves of feeling and emotional reactions because they lend depth, color and intensity to existence. They are the very stuff of life.

Neumann offers a plausible hypothesis for nonverbal, non-rational psychological healing, postulating two kinds of consciousness. He defines ego-consciousness (with which we are all familiar) as relatively autonomous, characterized by reason, judgment and order. He suggests that ego-consciousness, as we know it, evolved from a layer of the psyche he calls patriarchal, which was a late development in all mankind and which exists in women as well as men. He suggests that a second consciousness, called *matriarchal consciousness*, is rooted in a much deeper, earlier and more archaic level of the psyche and that it too exists in all of us, male or female (Neumann, 1954).

Neumann describes this matriarchal mode of consciousness as a half-conscious process in which there is no willed ego-intention. It is subject to the unconscious and reflects unconscious processes, yet carries qualities of awareness, nonverbal comprehension, contemplation, conception, circumambulation, realization and bringing forth: a kind of psychological

state of incubation or pregnancy. I believe all of the above are precisely the qualities of experience in sandplay, which tends to support the notion that sandplay does indeed operate at the matriarchal level and that healing occurs there.

Neumann goes on to describe matriarchal consciousness as an observing awareness and attentiveness, rather than directed thought or judgment, and notes that it is affected by feeling and *intuition*. Its function with regard to patriarchal consciousness is to focus libido on a particular psychic event, intensifying its effect until it reaches consciousness. The patriarchal head-ego then uses the experience as a basis for action, or the formulation of abstract conclusions and the expansion of consciousness.

Neumann (1954a, pp. 91–92) also suggests that on the matriarchal level of consciousness lies healing:

It is the regenerating power . . . that, in nocturnal darkness or by the light of the moon, performs its task, a mysterium in a mysterium, from out of itself, out of nature, with no aid from the head ego.

. . . it is (in) the *darkness* where recovery takes place, and also those events in the soul which in obscurity, by processes only the heart can know, allow men to “outgrow” their insoluble crises.

Also particularly relevant to sandplay therapy and its healing properties is Neumann’s formulation regarding ego-development: The early constellation and activation of the Self between birth and the third year of life is a prerequisite for the development of a healthy ego (Neumann, 1966, pp. 81–106; 1973, p. 13ff.) Although the Self is present at birth, its evolution as a positive force is dependent on an uninterrupted emotional and physical closeness between mother (or mother surrogate) and child, which he calls the mother-child unity. This undisturbed mother-child bonding is particularly crucial during the first year of life while the child is in what Neumann calls a post-uterine *uroboric* state, in which the Self of the child

is still symbiotically contained in the mother. Any disruption in the mother-child unity disturbs the normal and timely separation of the Self of the child from that of the mother and results in the development of a wounded, dependent, needy ego between the ages of one and four; this impaired ego condition can persist for a lifetime.

The needy ego with insufficient inner support from the organizing and regulating force of the Self is prey to narcissism, neurosis and psychosis. Only with a positively activated Self can there be sufficient inner support to enable development of an authentic ego capable of psychological separation from the mother (and also the father), and the establishment of an adequate and individual relationship to both the inner and outer worlds.

The needy ego feels overwhelmed by environmental pressures and may react in any of several ways. It may take an overly introverted route, withdrawing into fantasy and in danger of being overwhelmed by the unconscious. Or, it may lose any sense of inner self by making an excessively extraverted adjustment, by acceding to pressures to perform, to be good, etc. I am reminded of one patient who referred to herself as "a dancing bear" and another who called himself "a song and dance kid." In some cases, the primary adaptive *function* is grossly overdeveloped at the expense of the other functions, or the weak ego may make a totally false adjustment by adopting any function that lends itself to environmental acceptance. This often occurs with *feeling* types who adopt *thinking* as their primary function.

Through its noninterpretive, nonverbal technique sandplay encourages the reconstitution of a psychological mother-child unity, enabling the constellation of the Self and leading to the development of a stronger ego. It encourages a therapeutic regression to the matriarchal level, to what Goethe characterized as the "realm of the Mothers," where psychological healing and renewal can take place.

5. A FREE AND PROTECTED SPACE

The free and protected space is the necessary security space. Like mountain climbing, where one doesn't leave one foothold or take another step until one has a clear idea of where to take the next step and has secured oneself with rope or hand before taking the next step. In this case, the guide or rope is the therapist.—Dora Kalff (conversation, August 1973)

Central to Kalff's sandplay therapy is the concept of the "free and protected space" which has both physical and psychological dimensions.

The physical element of the free and protected space is, of course, the concrete nature of sandplay. The idea of protection implies the limitation of freedom. The nature of sandplay in itself offers freedom and protection (limitation). While one is free to create whatever one wishes, the number of figures, though extensive, is still finite, so that the fantasy of the patient is held within safe bounds. Since the physical dimensions of the sand tray are limited and containing, in that the entire area can be seen at a glance without moving the eyes or head, the

tray has the effect of focusing and then reflecting back the inner vision. The three-dimensional, realistic figures give form to still inchoate inner images. If we assume that archetypes are the forming forces in the background of the phenomenal world, then behind every miniature figure lies an archetype. The figures, then, serve to incarnate archetypal images in a manageable size and shape in a protected environment.

Psychological shelter is provided by the protected atmosphere of the therapeutic situation. The patient is given *really* unconditional acceptance in that there is no confrontation, no intellectualization or interpretation.

The aim is to provide a maternal space or psychological womb, an emotional metaphor for the uroboric mother-child unit. In this safe "space," healing of the inner psychological wound can occur, the Self can be constellated and the inner child rediscovered, with all of its potentiality for creativity and renewal.

Any introduction of thinking into this womb-like space would disturb if not destroy the process, as would the premature breaching of the vessel in an alchemical process. Therefore, it is best to avoid interpreting sand pictures at least until after the Self has been constellated and the renewed ego, now relating to and in turn supported by the Self, emerges.

Interpretations offered *after* such a development can be heard and absorbed in a different way because an inner sense of security has coalesced. Then one can relate from one's inner self to what is heard from outside. Then, there is less chance of being unduly influenced by the therapist and less need for defensive rejection of new insights.

In general, the role of the sandplay therapist is to listen, observe and participate empathically. However, it should be emphasized that the success of the endeavor depends not only on the therapist's cognitive understanding of the symbolic meaning of the picture, but his familiarity with the developmental stages in the process reflected in the pictures. These

stages include: At least partial resolution of key complexes; a manifestation of totality and with it an experience or intimation of suprapersonal numinosity that usually accompanies a constellation of the Self, the emergence of a differentiated contrasexual element (*animus/anima*); and a new ego attitude with regard to the transpersonal and to daily life. Kalff calls this the emergence of a "relativized ego" capable of relating productively to both the inner and outer worlds.

Experience has shown that without understanding on the part of the therapist of these stages and their symbolic representations, the process is only minimally effective. This understanding enables an unspoken rapport between therapist and patient, a mother-child bond, for through the concrete images in the pictures, the therapist knows consciously what the patient knows unconsciously.

Essentially, the emotional and psychological free and protected space is provided by the personality of the therapist as the psychological container and protector of the process.

To forgo any immediate knowledge of the meaning of the pictures or any insight into what is happening to him, the patient must trust the therapist, who must be worthy of that trust in every way. He should have had a deep analysis himself and adequate clinical training, including extensive knowledge of archetypal symbolism. He should have had a meaningful personal experience doing sandplay as a patient himself. He should be familiar with the stages of development as they manifest in the process, and he should have studied and compared many sand pictures, which is the only way to learn to read them. As the carrier of the process, he should have achieved rootedness in himself.

It would be an unfortunate misunderstanding to believe all one needs is a tray with some sand, a collection of small objects and a dictionary of symbols. Just companionship of a patient while he makes pictures will not accomplish much, nor will interpreting pictures as though they were dreams.

One can, of course, do either or both, but the effects will not be the same.

Critical is the ability of the therapist to assimilate the feeling and atmosphere of the process and the individual pictures. In an emotional sense the therapist "enters" the sand tray with the patient and participates empathically in the act of creation, thus establishing a profound and wordless rapport. The silent capacity to enter into the creation of his world with the patient can, in itself, help repair the feeling of isolation with which so many people are afflicted.

Since the empathic participation of the therapist is so important, I reiterate that the therapist should have had a deep personal encounter with sandplay so that he can have some personal feeling for the nature of the process. This therapeutic mode produces a different kind of experience than a verbal analysis. Therefore, it should have been lived by the therapist if the hoped-for bonding is to occur.

Perhaps some comments of one cerebral patient who had difficulty gaining access to his feelings, and who was particularly drawn to sandplay, may give some further indication of the sensitivity required by the sandplay therapist:

When you're talking in a session, you can lie to yourself without even knowing it. You forget part of a dream or leave out important things, sometimes consciously.

You do the same at the beginning of sandplay because you want to make an impression. But because you are actually doing something physically—reaching out voluntarily with your hands—somehow you know when you are fooling someone. You know when it's phony, when you are cheating. Sometimes you have to cheat because you're not ready, even if you don't know why.

You choose an object, you put it back. You become more aware of a feeling. The tray becomes an extension of yourself. I know what feels right to put into it. If it doesn't feel right,

I take it out. It makes my feelings accessible to me, helps me to distinguish them.

It tells me I have a feeling—whether I'm celebrating a something or a nothing.

I know how I feel when I make a picture. It tells me.

It's like an unspoken dialogue between me and myself. Sometimes I'd just as soon no one else was present. There are things I'm not ready to share.

8. SANDPLAY AS A WAY TO TRANSFORMATION

Precisely because the collective unconscious is so vast, there is a need for sensation reality, three-dimensions, and the confinement of the box. It provides containment and security. It contains the fantasies. The energies, contained, yet able to move, are more readily transformed (Kalff, conversation, June 1972).

One of the most frequently used words in the Jungian lexicon is transformation. According to *Webster's New International Dictionary*, to transform "implies a thorough and radical change whether in appearance or nature." Psychological transformation would include, I suspect, subjective and objective changes in a person: apperceptions, attitudes, value systems, behavior, self-image, perception of the inner and outer worlds; who one is in relation to oneself, others, society and the transpersonal; a feeling of rebirth. These and other definitions notwithstanding, it seems to me that the process of psychological transformation remains a mystery.

All we can do is describe the phenomena we see clinically and the circumstances under which they occur. How psychological transformation happens remains a mystery because it is an unconscious process that is experienced as life-giving, numinous, miraculous.

In *Symbols of Transformation* (CW, Vol. 5, p. 432), Jung suggests that sacrifice of consciousness is a necessary element in psychological transformation:

In the act of sacrifice, consciousness gives up its power and possession in the interest of the unconscious. This makes possible a union of opposites resulting in a release of energy.

Jung characterizes the unconscious nature of transformation when he says (*ibid.*, p. 429),

The essence and motive force of the sacrificial drama consist in an unconscious transformation of energy of which the ego becomes aware in much the same way as sailors are made aware of a volcanic upheaval under the sea.

His study of alchemy with its hermetically sealed vessel also indicates the unconscious nature of transformation. The themes of the fall of the dominant, of the death of the old king and rebirth of the new, and others, suggest the necessity of the sacrifice of a prevailing conscious attitude in the interest of wholeness (CW, Vol. 12, pp. 327–356). In this case, the symbolic “king,” i.e., the dominant attitude that must be sacrificed, would be the conscious attitude that cognitive intellectual power alone can provide wholeness of personality; that ego-consciousness without relation to the unconscious or transpersonal can provide meaning.

The willingness of the patient to forgo interpretation of the sand pictures, and to keep the inner alchemical process sealed is just such a sacrifice.

The very act of playing is a submission of the autonomous ego to the service of creative imagination, the freeing and

forming power of the Self. Playing requires an attitude or a condition of relatedness to the inner nonrational playful impulse and a willingness to give it concrete expression.

Sandplay also appears to provide a containing vessel that can transform boundless fantasy into focused and creative energy. The making of a picture is in itself a forming and creative act. The transposition of psychological complexes or conflicts from the inner, nonmaterial world to the concrete outer world seems to bring about a change in the dynamics of the unconscious. When an inner archetypal content takes an outer concrete form, it becomes symbolically objectified; this seems to cause a change in the inner dynamics, as if something moves and loosens the psychological logjam.

An instance of this phenomenon occurred with a patient who came into therapy with a long history of psychiatric care. There were frequent periods of anxiety, depression and dissociation that required antipsychotic medication, which kept him marginally functional.

He came to see me because he was depressed, extremely anxious and he felt himself sliding toward a psychotic episode. He was hoping he could avert it without medication. His psychiatrist was supportive and agreed that he might try. One day, shortly after we began seeing each other, he came in despair because he felt himself becoming nonfunctional, totally helpless.

Ordinarily, one does not use the sand tray for the first time under these circumstances because it can overstimulate the already overactive unconscious. However, I felt there was not much to lose and suggested he might like to try making his first sand picture. He said he was willing to try anything.

He stood staring at the tray for a while and then ran his hands into the sand. He caressed it, felt it, ran his hands through it as though discovering the texture of sand for the first time in his life. Just having his hands in it seemed to satisfy some hunger.

His pleasure was obvious as he kept finding new ways to experiment and feel the sand texture. Finally, he began pushing it and molding it in a very energetic way that astonished me, since just moments before he had been so listless.

He made the following picture:



3. It's a female. It's a goddess.

After staring at it for a while, he finally said very quietly, "It's a female." Silence. Then, "It's a goddess, like I've seen in pictures of cave drawings. I wonder why I did that." Then, with some affect and a smile, he said, "My God, I made some-

thing! It pulled me out of myself! Maybe it's not so bad as I thought."

This was a beginning. It was as though the unconscious had found a concrete representative and had, at least for now, lost its threatening aspect.

Jung offered an explanation of this phenomenon when he wrote of using painting as a way of distancing psychotic patients in relapse from the overwhelming power of the unconscious (*CW*, Vol. 3, p. 260, par. 562):

In this way the apparently incomprehensible and unmanageable chaos of his total situation is visualized and objectified. . . . The effect of this method is evidently due to the fact that the originally chaotic or frightening impression is replaced by the picture, which, as it were, covers it up. The tremendum is spellbound by it, made harmless and familiar, and whenever the patient is reminded of this original experience by its menacing emotional effects, the picture he has made interposes itself between him and the experience and keeps his terror at bay.

14. OVERVIEW

Precisely because they evolve out of a nonverbal, nonrational autonomous process with little possibility of undue influence on the part of the therapist, the stages of development, as they appear in sandplay therapy, lend credence to Neumann's theories regarding the critical importance of the mother-child unity, the constellation of the Self as the prerequisite of the emergence of the true ego, and the development of the ego from the uroboric-matriarchal to the patriarchal levels of the psyche. Sandplay also offers corroborative evidence that early development of the personality is an essentially unconscious, archetypally determined process.

The appearance of a centering phenomenon in the sand pictures supports Neumann's theory of centroversion, which was, in turn, based on Jung's postulate of an innate ordering process within the human personality.

Sand pictures created in the autonomous externally unguided sandplay process indicate penetration into a transpersonal level of the personality, with a concomitant numinous experi-

ence by the patient (not unlike that described by those who feel they have received divine grace). This phenomenon presents tangible evidence of the validity of Jung's assertion of an innate religious impulse in the human psyche.

Sandplay therapy is an efficient modality that provides:

- Direct access to the personal inner world of impulse and feeling. It provides access to the creative playworld of childhood as well as reasonably safe entry into the deeper archetypal realm, since it concretizes and delimits the archetypal language of images. It also acts as a mediator or bridge to the outer world.
- An instrumentality for the recovery of the specifically feminine dimension of the psyche.
- A means of repairing damage to the mother-image that would otherwise impair fulfillment of the potentiality of the whole personality. It does this by reconstituting the mother-child unity that enables the constellation of the Self which is the forerunner of the development of a healthy ego.
- Activation of a natural, self-healing capacity of the psyche.
- A means of reaching and experiencing the transpersonal realm of the psyche. This produces "relativization of the ego" and a more naturally balanced relationship between the ego and the Self.
- An opportunity for inarticulate patients to emerge from inner isolation through the unspoken communication made possible via sand pictures. It is especially helpful when the intuitive or empathic capacities of the analyst are not highly developed, since sand pictures offer *concrete* expression of the patient's situation.
- A rechanneling and/or transformation of blocked energy.
- A means of self-discovery and awakening of creative capacities with minimal influence by the therapist: A rite

of passage such as Jung himself described in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* when painting a picture or carving in stone: “each such experience proved to be a rite d’entree for the ideas and works that followed hard upon it.”

- At the very least, opportunity for creative nonrational experience as a counterweight to collective overemphasis on the ego-oriented intellect.

Sandplay therapy accelerates the individuation process since it appears to bypass—at least to some extent—resolution of complexes, integration of the shadow, and the differentiation of the negative and positive aspects of the animus/anima. It seems to move in a more direct line toward the constellation of the Self and the renewal of the ego.

Sandplay therapy is essentially an unconscious, or at some stages, a semiconscious process. It has an almost magical attraction for children and a powerful efficacy. In childhood, the ego is naturally still largely contained in the unconscious out of which it slowly evolves. In children, the preponderance of the unconscious and the slow emergence of the ego is a normal, natural, autonomous development. For children, therefore, healing and the constellation and positive activation of the Self appears to provide a sound basis out of which a healthy ego and mature consciousness will emerge naturally.

With some adults sandplay therapy, in a relatively short time, enables a person to go on with his life with a new trust in his own potentialities and a new sense of inner support. In these circumstances, it would be well to remember the necessity of finding a creative gradient or outlet for the energy released in the sandplay process. Otherwise, it may be dissipated in meaningless activity. It may be appropriated by an unresolved complex or by the ego which then becomes unrealistically inflated.

I have noticed a phenomenon in my practice that seems to support the idea of sandplay as a healing modality. I have found that some adult patients who engage in sandplay suc-

cessfully tend to lose intensity of interest in making sand pictures soon after a constellation of the Self and the emergence of a more stable ego. Except for moments of great emotional intensity or periods of transition, when they turn back to the sand trays, they become much more interested in analyzing their dreams, expanding and strengthening ego-consciousness and cognitive understanding, and in making concrete choices and decisions in their everyday lives. The process now moves progressively towards concrete reality and everyday life as the patient strives to integrate his therapeutic experience into his life. It is as though the wounded child within has been healed and the patient now wishes to take up adult life in a more conscious way. It appears that the individuation process had begun via sandplay on the nonverbal, matriarchal level and that it now wants to continue in the more cerebral and sensate way that is characteristic of the patriarchal level of consciousness hypothesized by Neumann—one more corroboration of his concepts.

Sandplay heals wounds that have blocked normal development. It enables the constellation and positive activation of the Self and the emergence of a stable ego capable of relating equally to the outer material and inner spiritual worlds—to life in the here and now, and to the transpersonal dimension. At its best, sandplay therapy is a prime facilitator of the individuation process. At its least, it is an invaluable adjunctive modality.