

JOURNAL
OF SANDPLAY
THERAPY
Volume V
Number 2
1996

Silence and Sandplay

Karen A. Signell

Karen A. Signell is a member of Sandplay Therapists of America and the International Society for Sandplay Therapy. She is a psychologist and teaching member of the C.G. Jung Institute of San Francisco.

This paper was a co-keynote address, along with Allan Chinen's paper on fairy tales, at Sandplay Therapists of America's 1995 conference
Sandplay: The Silent Voice of the Soul.



Author's note: The initial ideas presented here about different kinds of silence were joint discoveries which emerged from talks with Allan Chinen.

When I was asked to open this conference entitled "Sandplay: The Silent Voice of the Soul," by speaking on silence, I knew it would be a daunting topic. I didn't want to talk about silence just as the absence of sound. And I knew silence was more than a void, death, the infinite. And I wanted to relate it to sandplay.

Early on, I found it useful to distinguish three kinds of silence. The first is "ego silence," a conscious silence, the kind you experience stepping into a library. Your ego knows that you should follow the rules and customs of the library not to talk.

Another is "natural silence," a fairly unconscious or instinctive silence, which you may experience walking in the forest. There may be sounds, but they're hushed, and you naturally quiet down inside.

A third is “deep silence,” a more profound state of silence when you enter the deeper layers of the unconscious, the kind of silence you may experience when you reach the sacred recesses of an old church and are very moved. You find a more profound and ineffable place within you.

Each kind of silence has a shadow side, and each has a potential to help. All three have a part to play in the sandplay process.

As I thought about silence and sandplay, the words and image came to me of the “first stirrings of silence”—the quickening in the egg. This touches upon the essence of silence. It is not just emptiness. It is also pregnant. Pregnant with energy and meaning that is beyond you. Silence is a *process* that helps you touch the source: the creative force, the transcendent.

As the months went by, I grew more concerned. I sensed that silence, especially deeper silence, was an archetype—an archetypal space—and I was worried that I wouldn’t do it justice. And I was afraid of silence and the void. I busily pursued what little literature I could find on silence and began an intellectual discourse, until I realized that all these words were keeping me from the essence of silence.

The image of the Buddha came to me, and I knew that I needed a quieter, humbler energy. I had to sit with silence, like we sit with someone as they do sandplay. I couldn’t hold my breath and reach up consciously to find it. I had to plumb silence itself in the soft times of dawn and dusk, and count on whatever images happened to come to me.

At the beginning, some images and memories came to me from my personal history, which I would like to relate to you since they have shaped the way I look at silence and sandplay.

NATURAL SILENCE

I remembered growing up in the Maryland woods where I could be alone in nature and be myself. The paths I went down were old rabbit paths. And I was part of a wider nature with its natural sounds and rhythms. When exploring, I knew where I was by the slope of the land, the sound of the creek, the places where the birds “hang out.” I’d stop

by the marshy spring to see how much the ferns had uncurled, and I'd see how close I could approach animals without startling them. I learned how to do this instinctively, slipping into a different kind of state, as in Tai Chi, slow-motion, breathing calmly, my body soft and fluid. I'd watch close-up, in wonder, humbly—in a state of consciousness something like the one in which we often watch someone doing sandplay, in a natural silence.

Immersed in this non-verbal way of knowing, one can register the smallest detail without words, and at the same time be aware of the broader lay of the land, all without reference to street signs or maps. And through the years, from time to time, up to the present, I've kept up some immersion in different kinds of movement therapy and bodywork. As a consequence, I tend to be attuned to my silent body presence in sandplay, and attentive to the other person's movements. On a symbolic level, I also notice the fundamental physical changes made in mother earth in the sandtray—the molding of the sand, the terrain, the hills and rivers, cliffs, and ocean.

Think a moment of *your* ways of cultivating this inner space—meditation, gardening, a spiritual practice, a time when you feel more whole and very much yourself—and perhaps touch something beyond you.

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF SILENCE

Let's turn a moment to the negative side of silence: inhibiting or destructive silence, where you lose your sense of autonomy, perhaps can't even think. Let me give you an example of "dead silence" that has multiple layers of negative silence in it.

I remember sitting down to a holiday dinner where my mother must have been hurt to the quick, and the atmosphere was thick with her woundedness and anger. No one could "break" the silence and it hung heavy in the air for the first half of dinner. This was silencing. It was a rare occurrence in my family, but some clients have been subjected to a lot of this deadly kind of silence. It's important to keep this in mind, because these people might find utter silence in sandplay

manipulative, stifling or frightening, depending on how severe and unconscious their early experience was. I would like to point out three layers of silence in the example above. There is a *controlling* component, whereby the authority consciously imposes silence to teach others a lesson—a component which others resent. This might be considered ego silence. Another layer of silence contains *genuine* feelings of hurt and anger, which are unconscious enough to remain unspoken. Yet these feelings are somehow understood, in the silence, and may strike some chord of empathy or silent respect. This might be considered a more instinctive and natural silence. The third layer underneath may feel like a *deadening* silence, very unconscious, perhaps dissociated. It may stop the flow of life-force, as well as halt the progression of emotional or meaningful relatedness to death itself. Under the spell of deadening silence, other people may lose their orientation and their center. This could be deep silence in a negative form.

EGO SILENCE

As we can see, “ego silence” in one of its negative forms is silence knowingly imposed by harsh outer authority. This silencing can be used by an individual authority to show disdain or contempt, and likewise by groups and institutions as a means of control, intimidation, or torture. We all know it. It’s called “the silent treatment.”

There can also be silence initiated by the ego—ego silencing—which can be *helpful*. This can take the form of an invitation or a discipline to learn the way of silence. In this case, the ego is silencing the ego, silencing itself, to be open to something greater.

I think of the silence in Quaker meetings, where people are quiet until someone is moved to speak, usually briefly. Then silence resumes, the person’s pebble or jewel sinking into the pool, until after a while out of the pool of silence may come something else. It’s disappointing when this somehow doesn’t happen, and what occurs instead is a “popcorn” meeting in which one person speaks and others pop up to respond one after another—pop-pop-pop like bursts of popcorn.

In contrast, and very special, is a “gathered” meeting. I remember one vividly from 40 years ago when I was visiting a meetinghouse in

Washington, D. C. It was a plain, white, sunlit room. One or two people spoke, and then there was a long, profound silence. The atmosphere in the room was special, electric, palpable, and I noticed afterward that others had felt it too—a numinous presence among us while we were “gathered together.”

Think of the ways you have had of practicing silence, and what you have experienced, either gathered together with others or in silent retreat alone. Of course, sandplay is one place where it is possible to practice the way of silence.

DEEP SILENCE

This brings us to “deep silence.” An image that came to me was the deep silence I found in the depths of a Romanesque church in Europe. Very dark, with stained glass windows. Hushed. A dark enclosed place of mystery, of the spirit. The memory of it still moves me after decades.

Let’s consider for a moment deep silence experienced in the company of other people, since sandplay occurs in shared silence. Think of the silent vigil of relatives after some mass destruction. Those who are left are silent before the unspeakable. Their silence is beyond words (which are only communication). Their silence is *communion*. We would not intrude on that kind of silence, but would instinctively respect it.

There is the deep silence of great feeling. Perhaps you may remember the first time someone looked you in the eyes and would not let you talk or look away. Or, you may remember the first great love of your life—and hearing the first words of love—being moved beyond words, perhaps moved to tears.

Then there is the deep silence of symbolic healing. Let me tell you a story. When my dog Bonny died, when I was a child, I was grief-stricken. So much so that I locked myself in the bedroom and wouldn’t go to her burial under the pines. I was afraid my older brothers might make fun of me crying, and I couldn’t bear the thought of that.

One day, months later, my father came over to me and wordlessly took my hand—my little hand in that big hand of his—and led me to

the spot where Bonny had been buried. He silently pointed out a small, white flower that had grown up there, somehow, in that bed of thick pine needles. We stood together—my very introverted Swedish father and I. It was a healing moment for me. All without a word. The grace of it. Like sandplay.

RESPECTING THE UNCONSCIOUS—WITHOUT WORDS

Most of us therapists live in cities, with a busy pace, noise, and distraction. Everything is man-made so we tend to think “we make it happen.” The quiet of the wilderness or farm is now an exception. It now takes special circumstances for us to pause in silent reflection on what we know. This may be especially true early in our training when we have become accustomed to relying on experts and books rather than our own or our clients’ experience. For instance, upon seeing a fox in a sandtray, our first impulse may be to look up in books words to tell us “What does a fox *mean*,” before we’ve noticed what it’s *doing* in the sandtray. But we can also take this in with our own eyes and register it inside. *Ah, maybe Mr. Fox is circling around to go somewhere. Ah-ha, he knows how to get around!* This is the metaphoric action.

In our early professional training in psychology and verbal therapy, many therapists are taught in the academic tradition—to rely on the “almighty intellect” in the form of words and books. And early clinical training as therapists may lead us to think that what we think and say, our interpretations, are what is important. And we should make the unconscious conscious. I think this is the arrogance of the ego. And I think we need beware an imperialistic attitude toward the unconscious, as if it’s a resource to be exploited and explained with our complex concepts, rather than listened to for its wisdom.

As the years go by, I have come to rely more on the unconscious itself in therapy—the images that come out of the blue. And I have come to rely more on active imagination with clients—where conscious and unconscious work together—especially on the unconscious end of it. In visualization work, I’m less interested in dialogue and words, and more interested in the wordless, symbolic work of images and, especially, actions.

One pure place for symbolic movement is sandplay. Here, we therapists are in wordless space, and so are our clients. In this atmosphere, with this sense of sanctuary, they can have their own experience, at their own pace. They discover, through their brave movements in the sand, how to confront their world as it really seems deep inside to them, in its own language. They find how to change it or inwardly come to terms with it. They move their inner furniture—the objects. They shift the sand—their topography—the very basis of their being—to follow the deeper currents of their life.

SANDPLAY AS QUIETLY ATTENDING, NOT DIAGNOSING

Although some of you may be in settings where the sandtray is used—and rightly so—for various purposes, I want to talk here about the traditional use of sandplay as therapy. Even when we use sandplay traditionally for therapeutic work, we may sometimes feel a pull toward diagnosing—seeing what it shows. Lecturers and authors inevitably talk about the end product of sandplay: the final *sandtray*. It's unavoidable. But the sandtray with its accompanying picture—and whatever problems or resolutions we see by the end of sandplay—is no more the “it” of what happened than your snapshots of your trip through Africa are “it.” The “it” is the movement itself that takes place, the *process* of sandplay.

How can one tell the difference between a therapeutic and a diagnostic outlook regarding the sandplay process? Let me give you an example which Kay Bradway first told me. She said that when you have a cat with some milk in front of it in the sandtray, and you say that it shows that *the person is needy*, that's diagnosing. Although it may appear well-meaning, diagnosis seems to me like an arrogant ego pouncing on a label—about a client's deficiencies.

To be subject to being diagnosed like this during sandplay is not a safe position for clients. They need to be free from any judgment. Yet we therapists often have a habit of categorizing people, often in terms of their deficiencies. This often springs from a desire to understand, but in sandplay it is a misplaced use of the psychoanalytic and other traditions that emphasize diagnosis in terms of the past and pathology.

Diagnosis is static, which doesn't seem very interesting to me. Nothing's moving! Instead of saying "the person is needy," you might say that a cat is being fed, or their needy cat within *is getting nourished!* This is an important attitude in "attending": not judging the person but watching what's happening. It's Jungian to see where someone is going. The person is groping toward something. Growing and healing are actually taking place in the sand. How exciting to behold! It seems to me akin to watching the animals in the Maryland woods, with wonder and respect, to see how they know what to do.

Attending—just being with our clients in this process—we can perceive an unfolding over a series of sandplays as the clients undertake their own journey through the major developmental tasks in life and come to terms with life's tragedies and mysteries. For us to be present for them is to appreciate their struggle and let ourselves be moved by terrible things and touched by awe and beauty. That is enough. It is not necessary to have diagnostic words to name or categorize this kind of process. People naturally know how to forage, and we know how to be shepherds.

SILENCE IN SANDPLAY AND THE THERAPIST'S ROLE

What is our role as therapist, through the different stages of sandplay with our clients?

First, as an analogy, let's imagine the progressive stages of our attunement at a performance of a symphony or opera, where there is a familiar tradition we all know. Before it begins, we're in ego/conscious space, talking. Then the lights dim, we settle in our seats, consciously silencing ourselves, relinquishing the last bits of conversation. The lights dim, there's coughing here and there. We slip into a more natural silence, waiting. The conductor taps the baton, raises it suspended in space for a moment, brings it down and the overture begins. The outer world dissolves to our quiet inner center, attuned to the sound, open to be deeply swept along into the music. And if the music is especially moving or exquisitely beautiful, we may be deeply moved inside, perhaps transported.

In sandplay, it is we therapists who must carry the tradition of bringing silence for inner attunement—to hear the voice of the soul. Our role is to accompany someone into the silence and *attend* the process. And yet our presence is subtle, and has many dimensions: mind, heart, body and soul. I'd like to highlight one dimension—our accompanying them in terms of our bodily presence. I chose this dimension partly because the body tends to be ignored in the Jungian world, and partly because it's so important. Our embodied presence can represent safety to someone. We are there, nearby. And we can tune into the person's inner states through our energy and body, since our bodies can be tuning forks registering emotions across the silent distance. (If the body feels too foreign or uncontrolled to you, then when I talk about the body, you can imagine the body as a metaphor for our stance, our *being with* a person.)

SANDPLAY: CROSSING THE DIFFERENT THRESHOLDS OF SILENCE

Ego Silence. By silencing the ego, we go from the conscious world of talk into the inner world. However, a fact of human nature that we must contend with is that in most settings we're reluctant to go into another state of consciousness. For example, for me it takes an effort to go to bed, just like it does to get up in the morning. In sandplay, it can be an awkward, self-conscious shift to get up from your chairs—leaving the world of talking and thinking, to settle down into that other space nearby. As a therapist (who watched animals in the Maryland woods) I notice the distance between myself and the other person at the tray, trusting my instincts whether to move forward a little or back.

For a while, butterflies of talk and ideas may still be flitting around in my head, and I'm often still in body-alert, perhaps holding my breath up in my chest. I need to consciously slow my pace, perhaps letting out a few silent breaths—knowing that quiet breathing and a quiet body can make a quiet mind. My breathing settles down in my belly. This brings relief and calm, stillness, with no expectations. I am attending them, waiting to see what happens at their pace. Then, being aware of the way they lean forward and their hands move the

sand, sensing a quickening in them, I may lean forward a fraction to note the first object. But I don't move more than a fraction. I don't want to intrude, even if I miss seeing something.

Natural Silence. As they go further into their natural work phase, I resonate with their moments of stuckness or sureness of movement. If I find myself leaning forward in anticipation or with inflated or too intense feeling, I shift back into the background so they remain in the foreground.

In this phase I'm not in a dead silence, bored or empty, nor am I suppressing my thoughts or feelings. It's a natural silence. I am contained, yet receptive, now and then resonating inside with their agitation, their encountering deep dark things, their moments of resolution.

Deep Silence. From time to time, they may touch deep silence, following the deeper currents of their ocean bottom with its great rivers, valleys and volcanic slopes, trusting their inner guide. They may be beyond feeling, beyond the personal, where only my unconscious may fathom where their unconscious is.

Ending Sandplay. Now to come back to practical reality. Most people finish their sandplay about the right time. But sometimes I have to break the silence. From time to time, I awaken to consciousness enough to send my periscope up above water to check on the remaining time. I keep in mind that I'm the guard at the end-threshold. I'm often torn between guarding their process and letting it come to a natural close. Gauging whether I'll have to stop them. It's hard to interrupt! I find myself shifting in my seat, and at that point they may sense the time. Eventually I may have to say, "Start to bring it to a close. About 5 minutes more...." Then, "Finish it up for now."

After the sandplay, we stay a while in that stillness to take it in. I may sit next to them to see it from their vantage point. It's like a special rite, to look at it together and simply value it, and what has happened. If they wish, they may remark a little about their experience, like, "It didn't feel quite finished." Or they might do some light amplification close to the raw material, like, "These are wild horses—with lots of energy—coming in from the left." Sometimes, depending upon the circumstances, I may make some small gesture to acknowledge what

we both have experienced or can obviously see, or I may make a small invitation for them to comment, if it seems appropriate and in keeping with the overall therapeutic style we have developed together.

There are exceptions and variations to the process I have just shown. Usually, whatever way each of us learned sandplay seems like the “right way.”

SHADOW AND EXCEPTIONS

Dora Kalff is reported (Feldman, 1993, p. 6) to have said that she did nothing, really, but wait. Kalff said, “It looks easier than it is. It takes all of my energy to do nothing.” This reverberates for me. It seems to me that she is saying two things: How profoundly she *values waiting*—silently attending, trusting the sandplayer’s psyche, and how very *difficult it is to wait*. Yet, that is our task, to lead people to their depths.

We must try to preserve this silent way as much as possible, preserve what is precious, carry on the legacy. Silence guards the sacred place, where sacred rites take place—in the inner world.

So if I depart from “the silent way,” I must be sure it is truly called for because of special circumstances, not because being silent is *difficult* to do. I want to talk a little about some of these special circumstances in regard to ourselves and some regarding our clients.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES FOR THERAPISTS

First, about ourselves. Each of us has our own personal style of “silence,” which we must be true to in order to be authentic. In this case, we must keep to the essence of silence: to create a safe and free atmosphere for the client to do their inner work, and not to interfere with their process. We need to keep an eye on our personal shadow and our projections. One form these can take is inappropriate images or impossible ideals about how we ought to be as sandplay therapists.

One trap for me—and others—is the idea of the wise and intuitive Jungian. It so happens that abstract thought—intuitive thinking—is difficult for me and I often have to think a while and wait until my unconscious gives me an insight. But I can’t help but compare myself to other fantasied therapists who must surely know the archetypal

meanings of a sandtray at a glance. And I may project, momentarily, onto clients that they might assume I have immediate insights about their fresh sandtray, when, in actuality, I've just started to mull over some vague impressions that have not yet jelled, like, "Let's see, Hermes is the messenger. But what are some of the myths about him? Why can't I remember myths!"

What's happening here? In my self-absorption, I've been speaking to myself, which is breaking the silence—my inner silence. I have lost my groundedness in my primary role due to an inner pressure to fulfill an ideal. I've fallen into a polarization of opposites: on the one hand, a very exaggerated ideal, and on the other, a minimization of what I can do. Instead, I should maintain the essence of silence, which is to *stay attuned* to the client, and register what the whole experience and images simply *tell* as we go along. I call this "simple wisdom." Not interpretations. Not pronouncements. Just impressions grounded close to the raw sandplay experience itself.

Therapists inclined to this kind of mistake might be those who are new or reporting to supervisors—and therefore understandably self-conscious, and also those who are feeling types, sensate types and extraverts. We think we should *be* the archetype of the wise old man or the wise old woman, which we project onto the elders. Such expectations aren't possible or appropriate. Even Jung, one of our wisest, said that he parked his theory at the door to see each client afresh. So why do we so burden ourselves like this? Partly because we do want to understand as much as we can. But also, I think, because we mistake what people write, which is in an intellectual tradition, with what they actually do in a clinical setting. In reality, they are undoubtedly more flexible, in touch with their client in a feeling way, and more tentative in their thinking, using "simple wisdom" along the way.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES WITH CLIENTS

Now, let's turn to special circumstances in *clients*, which may require us to keep not the "letter of the law" about the strict structure of silence, but the essence of silence in sandplay. Let's look at different stages and see what they require.

The ego, the conscious mind, tends to be absolute in its either/or thinking, and may lead us into becoming rule-bound, thinking we should literally be completely silent. And this is usually so, and facilitates going inward. But not always. We have to take our own authority and rely on common sense and our clinical judgment about what is good for this client right now.

Let's consider *children*. Children often gravitate to the sandtray like ducks to water and become totally absorbed within themselves. But sometimes children engage us quite spontaneously to be their companion and ally as they work. In my limited experience with children, I've found that they talk sometimes as they work, and ask for support in little ways. It seems right to respond with encouragement and help when I sense that they need some warm support to feel free and sheltered. To react otherwise, to remain silent and refuse help, could be misunderstood and cast them into a parental or authoritarian atmosphere of restraint and criticism.

The essence of our role here with children is to provide a natural *background* for them to play. A background of buoyancy—as well as taking them seriously, so they can engage in their deeper task. Instinctively we try to sense the kind of subtle atmosphere a child needs to do their work, whether it is one of whimsy, earnestness, being bad or daring to enter dangerous ground.

For instance, imagine that you find yourself murmuring a sound to convey, "I'm here, nearby," to help with a child's fears or inhibitions. A mistake one could make in helping them like this is not letting the boat leave the shore, not letting them be on their own to do their own inner tasks. The child may need to be center stage without thinking of anyone else, to flounder, to encounter fear, to do whatever they need to do in their inner world in order to discover their own resources and evoke symbolic healing—beyond our help. Yet, again, the help in the form of such verbalizations might be exactly the right thing to do.

Certain adults can also be an exception to initial ego silencing in sandplay. They may suddenly be afraid to play—enter the unknown—and require some small help. Others may need continuing sounds of relatedness on the part of the therapist during the early stage in order

to gradually phase into natural and deeper silence. If their on-going therapist were to suddenly become stony-silent, it might seem awkward and unnatural, and they might misunderstand it as judgment or abandonment.

For example, a very extraverted woman told how she felt quite self-conscious doing sandplay in the absolute quiet of an early therapist. However, it was different when she later worked with Dora Kalff, who must have sensed this self-consciousness, because she made small talk for a while in an easy-going, delightful way so that the woman lost her self-consciousness. The paradox here is that for some people, this kind of warm-up and small talk can actually occupy the conscious mind and lull their fears enough to allow their unconscious to come forth.

Although most introverts are used to silence, so that any talking would be distracting and very inappropriate for them, most extraverts are different. They may need to be gradually led to it. Once extraverts find it, however, they may sink deep into their very introverted side and have to remain totally undisturbed. So one needs to be sensitive to individual differences. George Bernard Shaw's (1952) version of The Golden Rule may apply here: "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same" (p. 257). Trust your unconscious instincts and be flexible, so *you* will know what to do.

Trauma. There are important exceptions to keeping silent for people who have been very wounded in childhood or have undergone trauma in adulthood. They may need a healing presence throughout, and on rare occasions, some verbal reassurance.

For example, let's imagine a client whose mother was "never there" emotionally, or unreachable because of drugs, depression or dissociated anger. When the client enters this realm in their sandplay—how they felt the time their mother "disappeared," they may need a therapist who is clearly present. The therapist then accompanies them down this stairway so they don't fall off into space, so they can do their symbolic work to heal and to become whole again.

Imagine a client who is doing sandplay as if she *is* herself a young child again. At the moment she is re-living her inner experience of physical or sexual abuse, encountering the unspeakable, the unthinkable. Whimpering or crying in anguish and pounding bad objects in the tray in terrible protest and rage. This catharsis helps, but is not enough for healing. Even her deep symbolic movement in the tray (involving walls, fragmentation and connecting) is not enough. As a clinician, you know that she also needs a witness, and a witness who cares. That's what was missing, and what can help heal. So a therapist might move just a bit closer, and murmur, "Uh *buh...*," as if to say, "I'm with you and I care." And, later, "Let yourself breathe easy.... Start to rein in your feelings...and come back to the room."

Breaking Free of Rules. On rare occasions, sandplay gives us unique and important opportunities to "break the rules"—in the spirit of sandplay. This happened with a man who felt heavily burdened by his parents' high expectations and criticism, which he had internalized in his perfectionism and his desire to please. He longed to break out of his inner feeling of being bound and confined, and become more autonomous, free and wild.

It was decades ago, but I remember the scene vividly. In the middle of a sandplay he suddenly said out loud, "I've a crazy impulse just to throw all the figures into the tray!" He turned ever so slightly toward me. I could have replied or not. I replied, "Do you really want to?" He said, "But I mean *all* of them! The whole cabinetful." I caught that current of wild river in him that really wanted to, needed to. I made a split-second check inside myself to see if it was truly all right with me, and I decided that it was worth it—for him to be free! So I said, "It's okay with *me...*!" with a glint in my eye, like "Do it if *you dare!*" And he did. Swept all the objects by the armful into the sandtray. A royal mess. We were both laughing, exhilarated! How different this was from silence, deadly silence, which would have spoken louder than words of the sense of parental disapproval. I'm glad I replied. That's still sandplay. In fact, it's the real spirit of *play*, which is so important in the sandplay process.

Exceptions for certain clients. Many clients spontaneously talk about the sandtray afterward. This is often harmless, and in fact often helpful. The important thing for us to do as therapists is to distinguish what is helpful from what will interfere with the sandplay process and/or the therapy in general.

I think that looking at the tray with soft eyes and doing *amplification*, that is, staying close to the data (such as, "These horses are coming into the center; they're wild.") is okay. But I don't like *interpretation*. There is a big difference. First, let's take amplification. When sandplayers are describing their immediate experience of the objects and how the objects related to each other during the sandplay (for instance, "I thought of this animal as very small and alert, like a chipmunk,") they're still staying close to the unconscious process, affirming and sharing it, in a sense preserving it in its original form. On the other hand, interpretations tend to rely on intellectual knowledge, which can be more abstract and distancing. One relies on second-hand knowledge that may categorize objects as symbols and give them fixed meanings. Clients may leap to archetypal conclusions before the inner figures can live and breathe and play out their own lives!

In considering exceptions to a silent aftermath, one should keep in mind that extraverts are naturally inclined toward sharing their experience. To talk may actually be their way of affirming and consolidating inner experience. However, some extraversion, some careful sharing between client and therapist, can have a beneficial side effect. On occasion, I've found that this kind of shared experience can leave us some meaningful images, that later, in their raw, original, indivisible, untranslatable form, become a short-hand or foreign language between us in therapy. For example, "feeling like the vigilant rabbit," "the dead girl," "up against the big wall," "the troubador," "the dense, black meteorite."

A big exception to the general injunction about silence in the aftermath is a client who has been subjected to trauma. In the course of doing different kinds of active imagination, such as visualization

work, I have found that when a client's material has been traumatic or dissociated, it may slip back into the unconscious and become "lost" again. Clients sometimes—not always—want to have it "read back to them." Sometimes they need such witnessing, but sometimes not. So I try to be sensitive to whether they need to re-view it.

In sandplay, certain clients may want a picture of what happened. I wait to see if they ask, or I might ask their preference. In any case I exert my clinical judgment. I think these are important clinical *decisions* that must be made, rather than left by default to routine practice.

AN INVITATION

This address would not be complete without a final note about trying to become more conscious of silence—for better or worse—among ourselves as sandplay therapists, whether at a conference, in our small groups, or as a reader of this journal. Notice when you feel silenced. Is this ego-silencing imposed from within or without? For it is always a choice—to speak out or remain silent. Stand and raise an issue, tell your experience. Or perhaps you're not ripe, or the situation isn't right, so silence is indeed golden. However, if you have something to say, but can't, at least jot down a note to yourself and stew on it. Speak to a sandplay colleague, query a presenter alone if that's easier, ask your small group, or write a *Reflection* for the *Journal of Sandplay Therapy*.

I hope people will speak from their experience. We have a lot to learn about sandplay. As time goes on, we have a wider diversity of clients, and therapists, to draw upon. Let us keep the field alive and growing.

SUMMARY

I've talked about silence as a departure from the city pace with its noise and words to the more natural, non-verbal world of the woods and its creatures. We enter the inner world with its stirrings of silence—allowing the *creative spirit*, and its symbolic language, to come forth. We respect the ineffable—deep silence—and we keep true to the *essence* of silence in sandplay.

Silence and Sandplay

Our role as therapist is to *attend* the silent process of sandplay, to wait, to be content with “simple wisdom” and keep faith that the unconscious knows the way. Our egos not presuming to know the path, not interpreting what “it” means, but listening to that eloquent voice, the symbolic movement in the sand, and honoring that movement of great creative and healing powers beyond our knowing.

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