Mary Jane Markell, in Sand Water, Silence- The Embodiment of Spirit, provides an in depth review and elaboration of the transformational power of the sandplay and articulates how the movement that occurs within this process elicits healing energy. Markell draws upon the theoretical work of Dora Kalff, a pioneer in the field of sandplay therapy and integrates indigenous wisdom, Eastern spiritual traditions, quantum physics, myth, and alchemy as she considers how the alchemical process is revealed in the sand tray in nonverbal ways.

She poses the following question: “What is the meaning of transformation of the energies of Dora Kalff’s theory, which we tacitly take for granted as part of the infrastructure of sandplay? How does it (how do we?) become both embodied and ensouled? More importantly…what is the significance of the body as the true path to the awakening of the spiritual dimension in life, that is, the body as mediator between nature and spirit” (Markell, 2002, p. 17–18).

Markell considers how working therapeutically in sandplay heals, informs, and transforms. She elucidates the alchemical nature of this process where the archetypal energies and creative processes become spontaneous expressions of the psyche at a particular moment in time and space and how this energy is contained by the vessel of the sand tray, Markell concludes, as did Kalff, that working imaginatively with sand and water has the potential to transform and heal at a cellular level. She elucidates the importance of symbolic activity as a vehicle for embodied transformation and draws on myth and spiritual alchemy to explain how our embodied self carries the creative potential that leads to the transformational energy of renewal, rebirth, and eventually psychospiritual wholeness. She also describes the importance of the feminine principle in this renewal process.

This indeed, is an important book for sandplay and other creative arts therapists who work with imagination and symbolism. Markell elucidates how the healing process is actually visible and can be observed during nonverbal, symbolic play. These insights are illustrated through clinical examples from her own practice as a sandplay therapist. She offers this book, not as an answer, but in her own words, “to arouse discussion within the sandplay community…” (p. 21). This book would be an excellent vehicle for this purpose.

While this is not an easy book to read, it is timely and a treasure that bridges therapeutic insight with cross-cultural wisdom and energetic healing. It is not a book conducive for the novice sand play and creative arts therapist as it requires considerable background and experience in symbolic and therapeutic

Copyright © 2007 Transpersonal Institute
play to be fully understood. It is also helpful if the reader has a general background in indigenous wisdom, Eastern philosophy, mythology, and alchemy. On the other hand, it is a book that can be read over and over again for its ability to inspire and to add layers of deeper understanding about nonverbal transformation during creative and therapeutic processes.

I found myself drawn into the parallels between sandplay and the wisdom traditions and resonated deeply with Markell’s insights about how imaginative play during sandplay is kindred to the shamanic process. While I found the writing in this book to ramble, the titles of the chapters confusing, and myself wishing that she included more sand scenes photos to illustrate her points, I also found the author’s articulation of an essentially nonverbal process both fascinating and helpful to my own sandplay practice. Markell gives voice to the movement that arrives mysteriously in sand tray during symbolic play. It deepened my own understanding of the transformative process and offered intelligent insights into the nature of sandplay and life itself.

In the end, I do recommend this book for creative arts therapists and educators who wish to explore the energetic dynamics nonverbal, creative processes. This book has enhanced my own thinking in this area and as a result I will be noticing and better able to articulate energetic healing movement in the creative and sandplay processes of my clients.

The Author

Jane Mary Markell is Founding Member of Sandplay Therapists of America, a Teaching member with the International Society of Sandplay Therapists. She studied with Dora Kalff and has worked with children and their families and has lectured internationally on sandplay therapy.

The Reviewer

Nancy Mangano Rowe, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology. She is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Creative Arts and Sandplay Therapist and has a private practice in the Hudson Valley, NY.