



# WORLD JOURNAL FOR SAND THERAPY PRACTICE

PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

## The Alchemy of Relationship: Transference, Countertransference, and Co-Transference


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*The co-transference is always there.*  
(Bradway & McCoard, 1997, p. 47)

The quality of relationship between therapist and client is an essential element of Jungian/Kalffian sandplay. To understand the complexities of the therapeutic relationship, we first look to Freud's and Jung's early groundbreaking ideas about *transference* and *countertransference*. Transference and countertransference, once understood as something to be gotten rid of through more analysis, became appreciated as a valuable resource in therapy, providing a connection with unconscious information to aid the client's healing. As time went on, transference and countertransference were no longer considered separate, and because *transference/countertransference*-inseparable and constantly influencing each other. Bradway's (2022) concept of *co-transference* in sandplay speaks to this inseparability and was part of a sea of change bringing the idea of *relational fields*, or *intersubjectivity*. Neuroscience confirms that human beings can be connected emotionally and viscerally, and silently communicate right brain-to-right brain (Schore, 2022). Siegel (2004) states, "relationship is the most integrative force we have." Jung anticipated these developments when he talked about transference/countertransference as acting like a *chemical combination*: "When two substances combine, both are altered. This is precisely what happens in the transference" (Jung, 1966, p. 7). Both therapist and client are transformed in this relational process of healing.

Alchemy is an ancient symbolic system that gives us images and metaphors for transformation of our internal worlds. Frequently this transformation comes from our interactions with others. According to Jung, "every genuine encounter between two human beings" brings integration and shows us that "the living mystery of life is always hidden between Two" (Jung, 1979, p. 125).

But how might we begin to understand how these work in the therapeutic relationship? One way is to explore alchemical images from the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, the 16<sup>th</sup> century alchemical text that Jung (1966) used to describe the deepening and ultimately

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transforming process in psychotherapy. We can look at these images in the same way we might view a series of sandplay images by *feeling into* the images and exploring the symbols. For Jung, these alchemical images symbolized the process of psychic energies combining in a way that mysteriously transforms inner and outer relational patterns in the shared unconscious. Attention to the relational container further deepens the therapist's awareness of somatic, emotional, relational, symbolic, and spiritual connection with the clients. This kind of attunement is key in providing the free and protected space of sandplay, thereby creating the *right conditions* for the psyche's self-healing capacity (Kalff, 2020).

Jung (1966) used the *Rosarium Philosophorum* to describe the archetypal (universal) nature of the transference/countertransference bond in therapy. In a series of drawings [shown during the conference presentation], we can experience phases of the therapeutic process. The *Rosarium Philosophorum* shows an unfolding of transformation within the clinical relationship and within the client's psyche. As we move through the phases, we first find the alchemical fountain, symbol of the great womb, container for the work. Next, we meet the inner masculine and feminine energies symbolized as King and Queen have appeared. They get to know each other and establish trust. Then they immerse themselves in the dissolving waters of the unconscious. Symbolically, this dissolving through chemical combination allows the Wounded Healer in the therapist to resonate with the client's suffering. This is the beginning of the alchemical process of *coniunctio*, which means union or integration. From the union of opposites something new arises, change occurs. The therapy continues to deepen. The process continues to bring integration and the arrival of new attitudes along with the death of old, rigid psychic attitudes. Integration is experienced by both therapist and client.

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