

Joseph C. Zinker

Sketches

An Anthology of Essays, Art, and Poetry



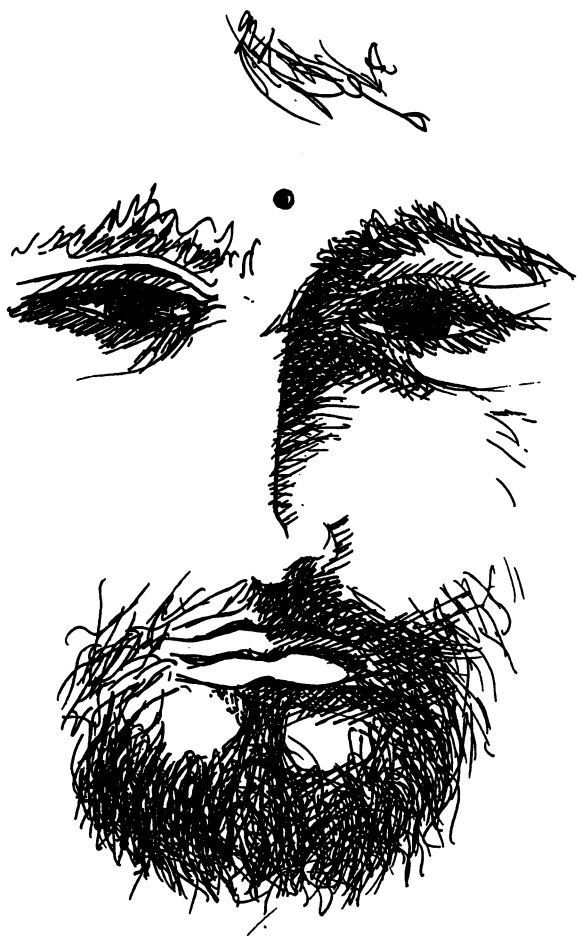
The GestaltPress



SKETCHES:
AN ANTHOLOGY OF ESSAYS,
ART, AND POETRY

Joseph C. Zinker

*Edited and with a Forward
by Paul Shane*



Joseph Zinner 1976

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For Sandra Regina

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Forward

Pieces of a Mosaic

Readers will enjoy the present anthology--*Sketches*--by Joseph Zinker for many different reasons. The most compelling reason is that it gives an intimate view into the professional, personal, and artistic minds of a proven master therapist and teacher in a very unusual mixture of content and format. It does so through a selection of his early essays interspersed with poems, drawings, and paintings. This makes the book especially engaging in that it differs markedly from his previous two works--*Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy* (1977) and *In Search of Good Form* (1994)--both very fine efforts in their own rights--but *Sketches* is an altogether different animal. You will find among its pages a subtle blend of professional thoughts and musings sprinkled with art and poetic meditations. While the main portion of its subject matter is reflections on the practice of psychotherapy, it is not a "professional" book on the topic. While it is littered with Joseph's drawings and poetry, it is not an anthology of reproduced prints and drawings. Neither is it a book of poetry. It's none of those things and yet it contains the best qualities of all three. It's an artistic work demonstrating how art and psychotherapy work may be blended into an aesthetic whole of a life of work.

The reader will also find this book remarkable in that it is so very intimate. Joseph gives the reader glimpses into his mind and heart, giving insights into his life and thought in many ways and on many different levels. Perhaps a glimpse will come from a trenchant remark found in one of the essays; perhaps it will stand out in a line of poetry; perhaps in the lines of a drawing.

This book deserves extended study in and of itself because of the significance of Joseph's influence in Gestalt therapy and its lineage extending back to European depth psychology. Given that my own graduate studies have been in the history and philosophy of psychol-

ogy, I cannot help but to frame Zinker's work within a historical and philosophical context. As I have commented elsewhere, Zinker's main contribution to Gestalt therapy and the existential depth tradition has been as the latest evolutionary link in a chain extending from Paul Goodman and Fritz Perls back to Karl Jaspers (Shane, 1998).

That is, Jaspers, as the modern father of existentialism, coined the concept of the *Grenzsituation*. This term has been translated in a variety of ways including "boundary situation," "limit situation," or, as Goodman knew it in Gestalt Therapy, the "extreme situation" (Perls, Hefferline, & Goodman, 1951, p. 324). Goodman used the term without attribution because it was an idea that was "in the air" at the time as existential philosophy began invading bohemian intellectual circles in the late 1940s. Conceptually, the extreme situation is the philosophical inspiration for that most marvelous of all oxymorons, the "experimental safe emergency." The confrontation with the *Grenzsituation* according to Jaspers leads to the experience of *Existenz*, an experience functionally identical with Perls's aim of using therapy to awaken one's "sense of actuality" (Perls, 1947/1969). It becomes in the 1951 text a technical cornerstone of Gestalt therapy: the creation of a moment of crisis in the form of an experiment.

As opposed to concentrating solely on the actual situation and waiting for gestalt completion at some critical mass point in awareness as Goodman recommends or mechanically directing the client step-by-step to an impasse point as does Perls, Zinker makes the experiment into a collaborative effort, a shared experience, and a spontaneously evolving act of creative energy; one that is aimed at a goal to be sure, but also one that is open-ended in outcome.

Zinker's legacy is to have transformed the Gestalt experiment with language, images, principles and values embodied in the aesthetic. His project has been both aesthetic and epistemological in nature. What helps one achieve this fundamental shift in aesthetic vision is based, in part, on the therapist's presence and his or her ability to make phenomenological observations about process rather than content. It is for this reason that Joseph often facetiously describes himself as being merely "a process junkie."

The idea for this book came about a few short years ago at the GestaltPress with the original intention to present some of the lesser-known essays by Joseph. The project began with the rather amorphous plan of featuring a group of essays along with reproductions of Joseph's art and poetry that would give the reader a more intimate glimpse into Joseph's thought and work than a standard psychotherapy text. Our reasoning was to introduce the reader not only to the trajectory of Joseph's conceptual thought over the course of his career while also displaying Joseph's aesthetic creativity as it is such an integral part of his perspective. If there is one unifying thread to Joseph's work it is the incorporation of the creative act in all of its manifestations: in painting and drawing, in writing, in therapy, in living.

That was pretty much all we followed as a blueprint and the book has been growing organically for more than a year since that time. The process of its growth has been quite interesting to witness as it has been marked with unexpected and often happy events. For example, Joseph collected materials over the months finding them here and there to eventually fill a large file folder bulging with old journal articles. Then came more articles found in the odd file cabinet and unopened carton in his basement. Then a pack of black-and-white line drawings was found. During the course of this collecting, a close friend of Joseph's--Wendell Price--brought to our attention some old paintings and drawings given to him by Joseph some years ago--some even reaching back to Joseph's childhood in 1950s Brooklyn, New York. Color slides of paintings, old scraps of poetic scribbling, lecture notes, framed pieces of art... many things turned up for reading, remembering, contemplation, discussion, selection, and rejection.

Slowly, like a plant gradually rising and unfolding its leaves one at a time, the book began taking shape. Many past articles and paintings were reviewed, but only a few were chosen for various editorial reasons. The standards of selection used were quite simple: select only the best, the most representative of Joseph's work, and what would be best graphically reproduced. It was our collective intention from the beginning to let the material ultimately dictate its own organization. As I look at the book as a whole, as a Gestalt, I experience a parade of images, ideas, and insights that are all uniquely

Joseph's. I see that all of the things that we selected have come together in such a way as to feel that each of them was "just right" for this project. My experience, as I feel it, is also punctuated by impressions and feelings of things I've known about Joseph personally, having been a friend and colleague for more than a decade, but also by other things that I had not known. That is, in one way I have heard Joseph discuss some of the ideas contained here either in conversation or in a lecture and so they resonate with me as being known. In another way, however, especially in Joseph's poetry, he gives his feelings, some of them painfully raw, and so he draws my heart even closer. In this regard, for me, this book holds a feeling of being in the presence of something familiar, yet I still find things among its pages that continue to surprise and delight me everytime I open it. This book is much like my friend and teacher, Joseph: a source of friendly warmth and comfort, shrewd insights and hard-won wisdom, playful humor, as well as the novel, the deadly serious, and the thought-provoking. On behalf of the GestaltPress, I sincerely hope that the reader will take as much pleasure in enjoying the many different pieces in this anthology as we have in assembling them--like a mosaic--into a finished, and aesthetic whole.

Paul Shane

Brecksville, Ohio
February 13, 2001

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it's scary
to receive
love-
"surrender"

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First of all, I want to thank Gordon Wheeler not only for inviting me to create this anthology but for his constant presence in recent years as an advocate of my writing and my creative work. My editor, Paul Shane, lived with the creation of *In Search of Good Form* and now with the careful editorial construction of writings and images in this book.

I thank Sonia Nevis and Edwin Nevis for the interviews at the end of the book. Sonia's ideas have always been helpful in my writing. A good friend's thinking is not always easy to hear and accept, but a wise man is one who listens well. Honesty between friends can hurt deeply; can infuriate--but also adds "muscle" to our formulations about life.

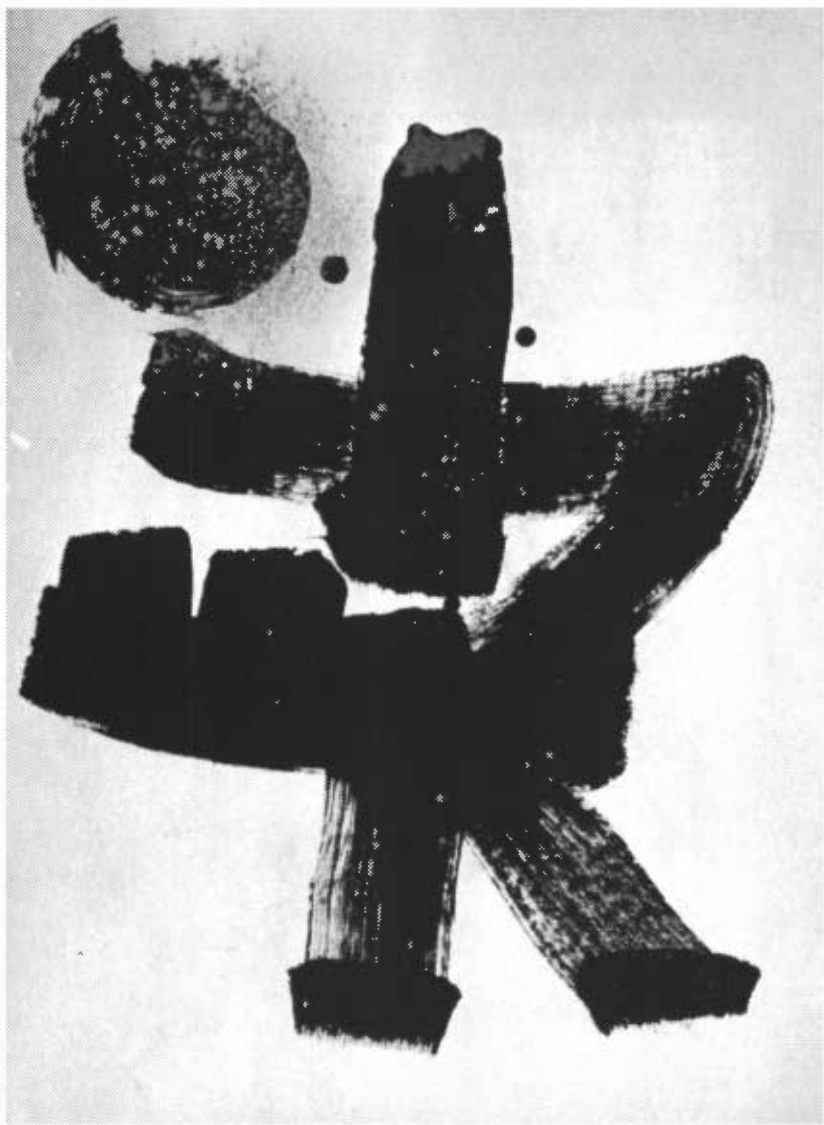
I thank colleagues who interviewed me: Irving Bailin, Robert Harman, and Clive Hierons.

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Finally, I want to acknowledge the kind and patient help of my dear wife Sandra Regina and that of my daughters, Judith and Karen. Special thanks to my friend Wendell Price who held on to the art I tried to throw out and who photographed much of my work for the present volume.

Joseph Zinker *Wellfleet, Massachusetts*
January 5, 2001



1992

Preface

Dear Reader,

Here is a collection of some works I have produced during the last thirty-eight years. They include my thoughts about therapeutic eclecticism, the nature of presence, how polemics, and systems influence interventions in psychotherapy, and synthetic thinking. Over the years I've been fascinated by synectics, the nature of pattern formation in the physical world. In my travels around the world I have again fallen in love with Chagall, Picasso, the poetry of Neruda, the ancient streets of Malta and Jerusalem, the music of Mozart, Beethoven, and Villa-Lobos. Every artistic experience fired my interest in bringing my work closer to the arts.

In my first major work, *Creative Process in Gestalt Therapy*, I explored the relationship of the creative impulse and how it affects the elegance of psychotherapy... For me, the magic moment of any creation emerges in the thickened space between two or more human beings. In Gestalt therapy, we call it "contact," but contact does not begin to describe the powerful process of experiencing the beauty of another human being, experiencing the pathos of our daily struggle to survive, to play, to love. In the film, "Life is Beautiful," we see how the most awful aspects of human cruelty can connect with the sweet innocence of a little boy and a grown man's ability to magically transform his life, so as to save the boy's life... I was such a boy...in the Second World War in Europe; while sitting in a cathedral basement, where everyone was worried to death--I managed to transform my fright to focusing on the beautiful fabric of my mother's dress. It quieted me. This was happening while my father and brother were outside in the streets of Lutzk burying fallen corpses. This was a moment

of transformation of an eight-year-old boy. For the following 20 years, I struggled with my nightmares of being chased by Nazis. At the same time, I continued drawing and painting. By age 18, I spoke Russian, Polish, English, Yiddish, some German, and a little Hebrew. I wrote poetry in Yiddish and Russian in the displaced persons camps in Germany. I was reinventing myself and the world around me. Years later, I wrote a doctoral dissertation on the dying process of an African-American woman so as to ease my death phobias. Psychotherapy with psychoanalysts and, most importantly, with Erving Polster helped me to be less frightened and to move forward as a husband and a father.

Still, I paid a heavy price for my experiences, a basically post-traumatic person. I didn't know how to be a friend, how to be generous, how to really give and receive...all this happened while I managed to be a psychotherapist. I was able to be outrageously creative and, on occasions felt as if I was performing miracles with my clients. But sadly, I have made mistakes and the enormous pain of my regret has muted all self-congratulatory statements of my successes. As a wise friend of mine told me, "In the final analysis, one's woundedness is ultimately a source of strength, but there is always the presence of the shadow polarity to be reckoned with, and for this, one can never escape responsibility."

The sense of being thrilled as well as feeling suicidal is expressed in several of the poems in the book. Yet, somehow, the sensation of loving and being loved saved me. My soul and my heart are deeply scarred. But, I am alive.

Several interviews in this book show how I managed to connect with friends and colleagues. Slowly, I learned to feel joyful about the learning process with my peers.

As I page through the book I see a painting by a 16-year-old boy of desolate Brooklyn buildings with "empty eyes." Yet, the longing for color and the yearning for beauty come through... I see an idealized man's face... and another face, loose and relaxed with a note about surrender. Then I see a recent Japanese calligraphy that has enormous power and integrity... another idealized drawing of a face with a diagram of a heart in his chest. I see a drawing of a man with

Sketches

horrendously frightened eyes and an image of a frightened mother with her child... and more.

I have opened my soul especially in these drawings and many of the poems.

In my life, I have fought hard to look ahead and to look forward to walk serenely in front of my Cape Cod cottage hand in hand with my wife, my daughters, and my friends. Today I am writing this for you with complete transparency. A full life is replete with hurts, regrets, mistakes and also victories and thrilling discoveries. I have never felt so real, complete, and rich as I feel today. I am able to bear having been irreparably damaged, to have disappointed myself and others. This is the paradox of being broken and complete at the same time.

I am an old man with arthritis and a collection of pills. But at night I retire with someone who saved my life, saved my soul... A blessing.

And so I offer you these little productions in the hope that some of them will touch your minds and hearts.

Enjoy.

Joseph Zinker

*Wellfleet, Massachusetts
May 2001*



The creative intention is a yearning in one's body,
a desire to fill the container of life.
This yearning expresses itself in energy, movement,
rhythm.
The activity of creation, its expression, is a loving
assertion of life.
Creation is an act of thankfulness or an act of cursing.
It is the privilege of tasting seeing, touching life,
a celebration of being
or a pleading for a meaningful exit.

J.Z., 1/1/76

Apperceptive Mass: My Grounding

Spring 1980

Psychotherapy does not take place in a vacuum. It is not “laid on” another person. Rather, it is a dynamic interaction between at least two people. One person is the specialist, the therapist, the counselor; the other is the client, a person in need, a fellow traveler. The creative process emerges from the interaction between the inner lives of these two people.

As therapists, we pay a great deal of attention to where the client comes from, but little to where we come from. Many reduce this question to a discussion of the relative merits of medical training versus training in pastoral counseling, clinical psychology, or psychiatric social work. A number of my colleagues have written elegant articles on educational methods, supervision, and theoretical and practical requirements of advanced training programs for therapists.

But a discussion of training provides only a partial view of a therapist's background. Some years ago, while working in Curacao, I asked a group of professionals to evaluate their formal education. A bright and sensitive Englishman pointed out that, although he had received adequate training, his education was abominable. He explained this discrepancy by describing training as the learning of basic tools for acquiring knowledge--the mechanics of mathematics, reading, writing. The goal of education, as he described it, is an appreciation of our own lives and the lives of others, and a sensitivity to and understanding of the events around us. It is a subtle process through which we create a rich tapestry of our lives.