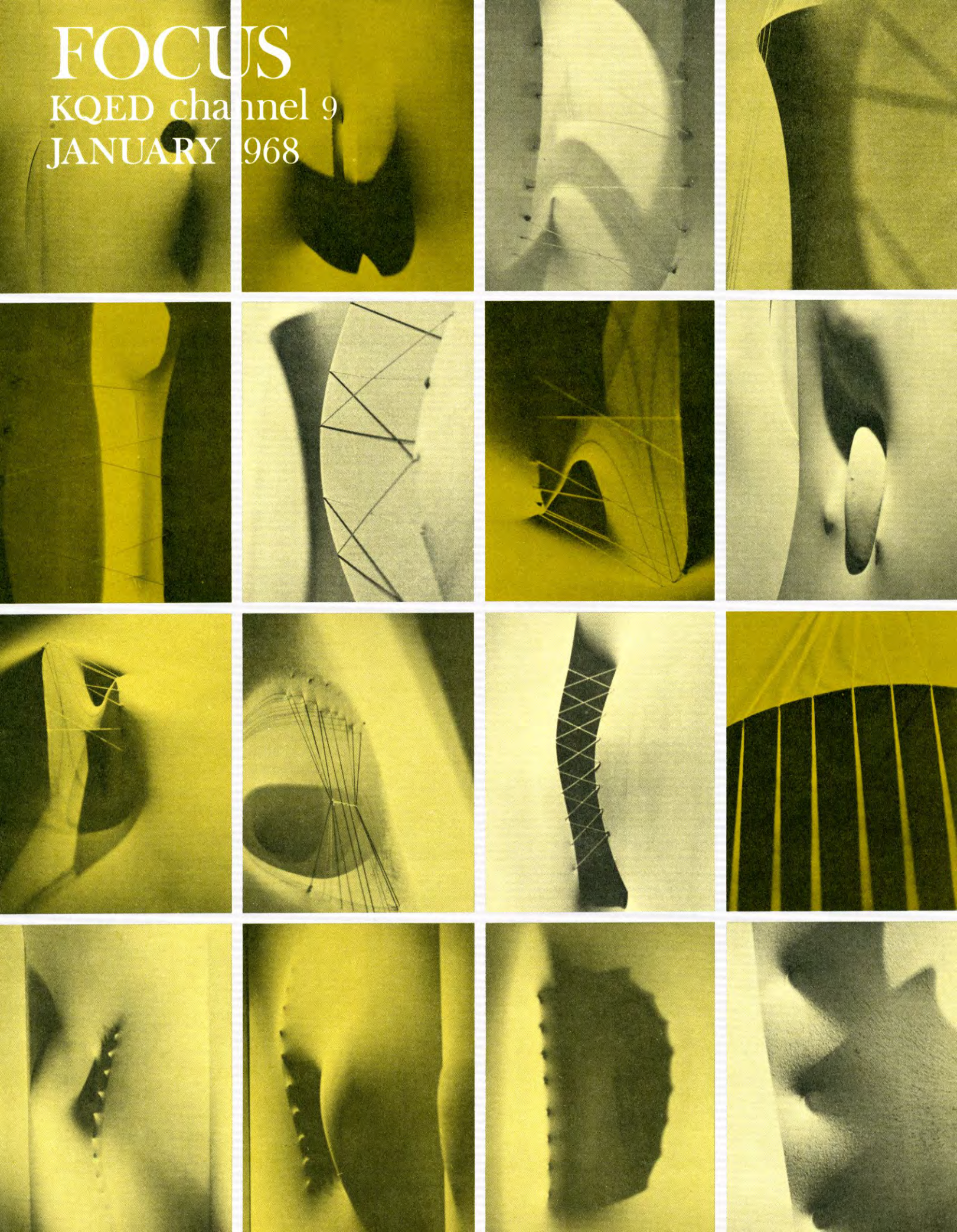


FOCUS

KQED channel 9

JANUARY 1968



experiments with esalen

by Robert Hagopian

The Esalen Institute of Big Sur is just a little over two years old. The idea of doing a television series around its exciting subject matter and outstanding lecturers is as old as the first brochure I received from Esalen, but it couldn't be realized until the institute began its San Francisco program this fall. Since then "Experiments with Esalen" has been a weekly part of our program schedule, Thursday evenings at 8:30. Recently a KQED production team consisting of PBL correspondent Wanda Ramey, cameraman Blair Stapp, audio man Tom Ruston and myself as director went to Big Sur to do a piece on Esalen. We found it one of the grooviest visual places on God's green earth. The following are excerpts from the forthcoming film which will be shown later in 1968.

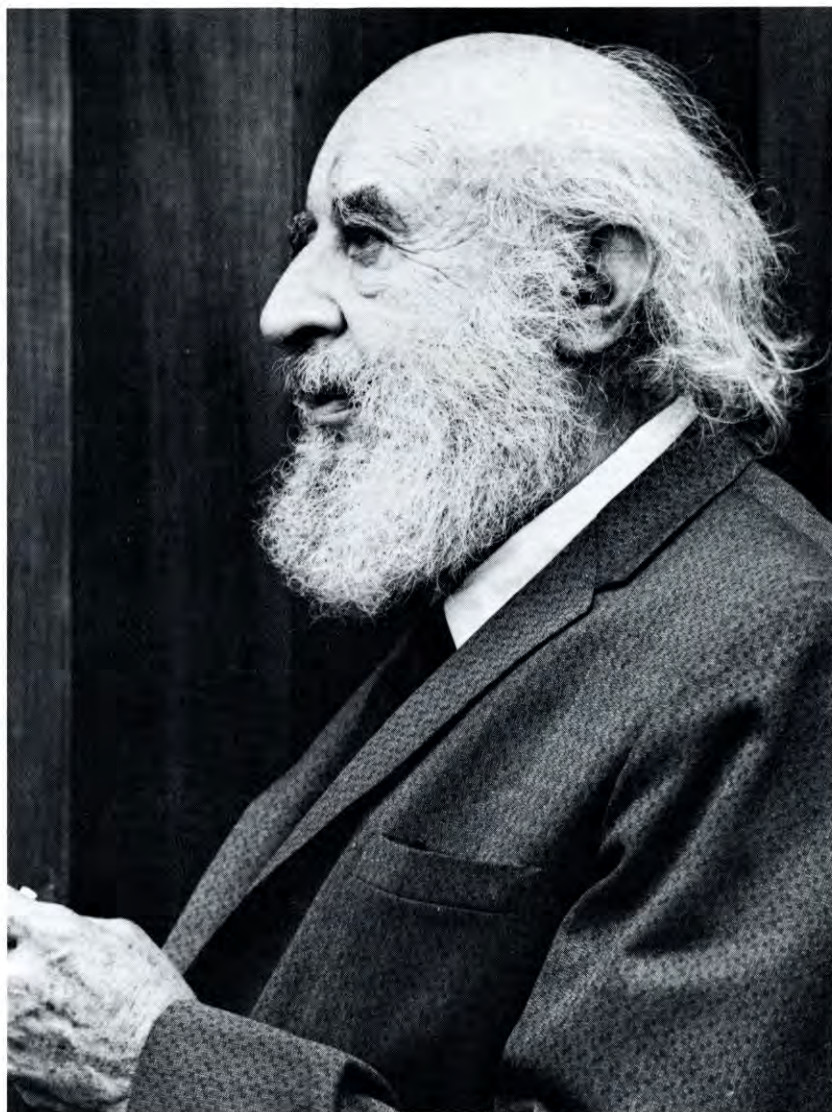


photo: Patti Prout

Dr. Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt Therapy

On What Esalen Is About —

from Wanda Ramey's interview with Esalen President Michael Murphy

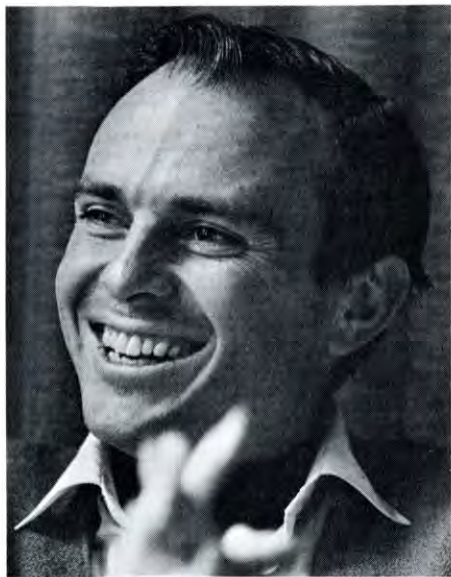


photo: Michael Alexander

Michael Murphy

Our program of weekend seminars and workshops focuses on an area that doesn't really have a name yet. Aldous Huxley called it non-verbal humanities. We think we're a laboratory, a forum, a new form of education. We want to explore areas that have been neglected in modern education. We're making an attack on the assumption that education is nothing but reading, writing and arithmetic and its higher derivatives. We're trying to give substance to the idea that you can educate relationships, can educate senses, and can educate control over various bodily functions along the ways of the yogas in India. The whole idea of alterations of consciousness that Hippies and LSD has given focus to is something that is really valid. But we're doing this without drugs. Only about 1% of our program is concerned with discussions of the use of drugs. We are continually demonstrating the

enormous amount of work going on to educate the whole man without drugs and the tremendous vitality of these methods. We're saying that relationships are kind of an ultimate turn on.

On Altered States of Consciousness

After observing a man turn on with CO₂ gas, Wanda Ramey interviews psychiatrist Lee Sanella on altered states of consciousness. Mr. Sanella works with San Francisco Ventures, an association which like Esalen, is concerned with self-discovery through group encounters.

RAMEY: You mentioned that he felt as if he had died. What does this particular experiment have to do with dying?

SANELLA: Well, as you'll recall, he said that he no longer felt the presence of an observer, of someone

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ESALEN

(Continued from page 6)

watching him—like himself watching what was going on. He'd lost control. The observer left and at this point a sort of ego death occurs and this is what he meant by dying. It's a psychological sort of dropping of the controller, the ego and we're not used to the sensation. It can be a great joy to do this and a great fear. This man had evidently been cut off from his feelings for a good length of time during his adult life and especially from his feelings for men, probably originating with some kind of estrangement from his father, and under these conditions of stress and of the agents that we use, these feelings came up because he hadn't had them. They're probably very heavily covered with various kinds of defenses so they were allowed to come through. Then he contacted me physically and because he was able to make this contact with me, he made contact with something very precious to himself, about himself as a man. Then he cried and in the second experience he had a great deal of fear, because one of the components probably of the reasons why he didn't make contact was because of a lot of fear that existed at this time in his childhood. Then the fear came through because when you make contact with a man, this is bad you know—it's homosexual and all those sorts of things and the fear comes through. That's why I gave him more then, to allow him to go into the fear deeply. At that time he experienced death and he said, "It was just like I died." When a man can die to that sort of terror, something new in him can live.

Fritz Perls on Gestalt Therapy

Excerpts from a paper delivered at the American Psychological Association Convention in New York City, September 1966.

Marshall McLuhan has written a book in which he expands the notion: the medium is the message. What is the message we receive from the medium of group therapy? Group therapy tells us, "I am more economical than individual therapy." Individual therapy counters, "Yes, but you are less efficient." "But," asks group therapy, "Who says YOU are efficient?"

You will notice that on my private stage these two therapies immedi-

ately begin to fight, to get into a conflict. For a while, I tried to resolve this conflict in Gestalt therapy by asking my patients to have both individual and group therapy. Lately, however, I have eliminated individual sessions altogether, except for emergency cases. As a matter of fact, I have come to consider that all individual therapy is obsolete and should be replaced by workshops in Gestalt therapy. . . .

The intellect, the whore of intelligence, we might liken to a computer which is, however, a pallid substitute for the vivid immediacy of sensing and experiencing. The psychologist and the so-called rational therapist, by playing interpretation and explanation games, only reinforce this deceptive dominance of the intellect and interfere with the emotional responses which are at the center of our personality. In the emotional desert of neurotic patients, we seldom find any feelings other than boredom, self-pity, and depression. . . .

Freudianism barks up the wrong tree of cause and interpretations; psychology in general does it by mixing up mind and phantasy. Every patient barks up the wrong tree by expecting that he can achieve maturation through external sources—through being psychoanalyzed, reconditioned, hypnotized, or marathonzed, or by taking psychedelic drugs. Maturation cannot be achieved for him. A therapist can do nothing but provide him with the opportunity—by being available both as a catalyst and as a screen upon which he can project his neurosis. . . .

Now, in the group situation something happens that is not possible in the private interview. To the whole group it is *obvious* that the person in distress *does not see* the obvious, does not see his way out of the impasse, does not see (for instance) that most of his misery is a purely imagined one. In the face of the collective conviction of the group, he cannot use his usual phobic way of disowning the therapist when he cannot manipulate him. Somehow, trust in the group seems to be greater than trust in the therapist. It is always a deeply moving experience for the group and for me, the therapist, to see previously robotized corpses begin to return to life, gain substance, begin the dance of abandonment and self-fulfillment. THE PAPER PEOPLE ARE TURNING INTO REAL PEOPLE.



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