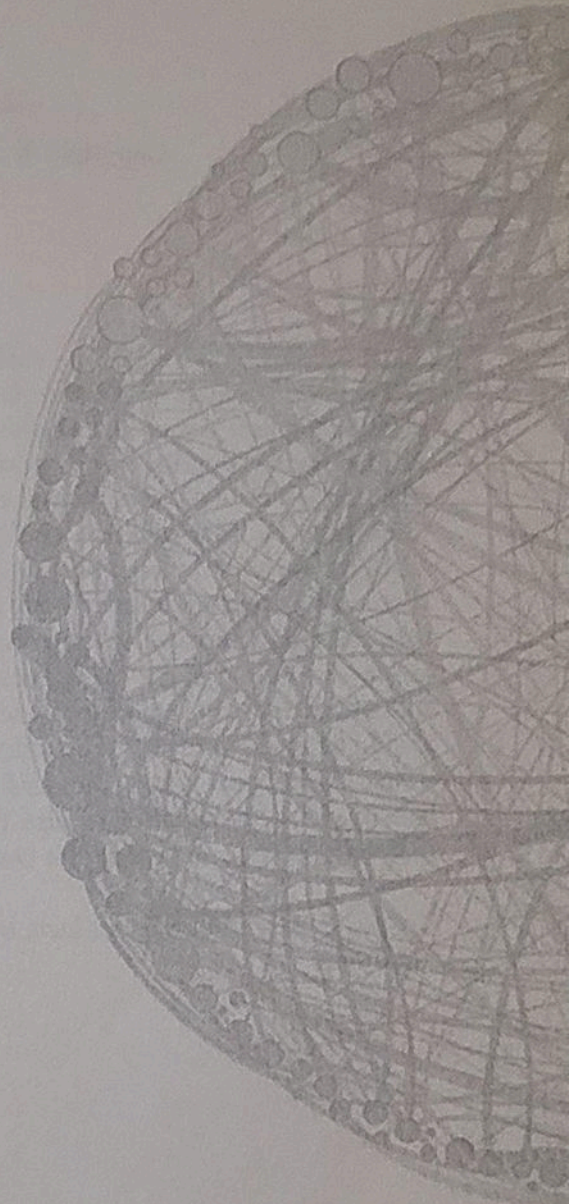


How to CHANGE Your Mind

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PENGUIN PRESS

New York | 2018



monastery where the world of classical thought was saved from oblivion, a place where the guttering flame of psychedelic knowledge was assiduously fanned during its own dark age, that place would have to be Esalen, the legendary retreat center in Big Sur, California.

Perched on a cliff overlooking the Pacific as if barely clinging to the continent, the Esalen Institute was founded in 1962 and ever since has been a center of gravity for the so-called human potential movement in America, serving as the unofficial capital of the New Age. A great many therapeutic and spiritual modalities were developed and taught here over the years, including the therapeutic and spiritual potential of psychedelics. Beginning in 1973, Stanislav Grof, the Czech émigré psychiatrist who is one of the pioneers of LSD-assisted psychotherapy, served as scholar in residence at Esalen, but he had conducted workshops there for years before. Grof, who has guided thousands of LSD sessions, once predicted that psychedelics “would be for psychiatry what the microscope is for biology or the telescope is for astronomy. These tools make it possible to study important processes that under normal circumstances are not available for direct observation.” Hundreds came to Esalen to peer through that microscope, often in workshops Grof led for psychotherapists who wanted to incorporate psychedelics in their practices. Many if not most of the therapists and guides now doing this work underground learned their craft at the feet of Stan Grof in the Big House at Esalen.

Whether such work continued at Esalen after LSD was made illegal is uncertain, but it wouldn't be surprising: the place is perched so far out over the edge of the continent as to feel beyond the reach of federal law enforcement. But at least officially, such workshops ended when LSD became illegal. Grof began teaching instead something called holotropic breathwork, a technique for inducing a psychedelic state of consciousness without drugs, by means of deep, rapid, and