

PROPOSAL

DOCUMENTARY FILM
ON
WILHELM REICH, M.D.

written by
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I. BACKGROUND ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF THIS DOCUMENTARY

A. INTRODUCTION

On August 23, 1956, why were several tons of ten hardcover book titles and over a decade's worth of published scientific and medical research journals—which had been banned from circulation by a U.S. Federal Court—taken to a New York City garbage incinerator and *burned* under the supervision of Food and Drug Administration agents?

Why, on that day, were boxes of the following ten books—written by a man who was a renowned Austrian-born psychiatrist, research physician and scientist—consigned to the flames of a municipal trash facility under the eyes of FDA agents:

- *Character Analysis* – first published in 1933 in Europe and regarded then and now as a classic text of psychoanalytic technique
- *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* – also published in 1933 after the author—a Jew and outspoken anti-fascist—fled from Germany, a book still considered a classic analysis and criticism of Naziism and Communism
- *Listen, Little Man!* – published in America in 1948, a passionate plea by the author to his fellow man with 32 pages of illustrations by famed cartoonist and writer William Steig (author of *Shrek*)
- *The Cancer Biopathy* – also published in 1948, detailing a decade of pioneering biological and medical cancer research in Europe and America
- *People in Trouble* – published in 1953, an autobiographical work recounting the author's involvement and disillusion with major social and political movements in Europe during the 1920s and 30s
- *The Murder of Christ* – also published in 1953, a unique exploration of the meaning of Christ's life
- Plus four other titles: *The Sexual Revolution*, *The Function of the Orgasm*, *Cosmic Superimposition*, and *Ether, God and Devil*

—plus boxes of published research journals and bulletins comprising hundreds and hundreds of additional pages. All of this literature destroyed. Why?

And why, two months earlier on June 26, had FDA agents traveled to a laboratory and research center in the remote town of Rangeley, Maine to supervise the destruction of several boxes of these same research journals and bulletins?

What was in the pages of these books, journals and bulletins that allegedly “merited” their destruction? Answer: the words “orgone energy,” a term coined by the author and publisher of these materials, Wilhelm Reich, M.D. (1897-1957), for his revolutionary scientific discovery to which he devoted over twenty years of his life.

This documentary will trace Reich’s dramatic life and work in Europe and in America which culminated in one of the most heinous examples of censorship in U.S. history.

B. AN INFLUENTIAL AND CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE

Wilhelm Reich, M.D.—who began his career as one of Freud’s most gifted and promising students—was one of the more brilliant and controversial figures of the 20th century, a man whose life and work intersected with some of the leading social events and forces of his time:

- a leading figure in the development of psychoanalysis in Austria and Germany until his eventual break with Freud
- founded community hygiene clinics and youth counseling centers for the working classes in Austria and Germany
- an outspoken anti-Fascist and a physician in the Communist and Socialist parties in Austria and Germany
- his biological discoveries and early cancer research in his laboratory in Oslo pitted him against Norway’s political and scientific authorities
- emigrates to America on the eve of WWII where his psychiatric, medical and scientific work attracted the interest of scholars, physicians, psychiatrists, educators, artists, musicians, and leading writers such as Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, and the Beats
- his medical and scientific research in America eventually pitted him against major medical, scientific and government institutions in the U.S.

Famous during his lifetime, Reich’s social, political and professional activities brought him into contact with an impressive “Who’s Who” of influential and celebrated people of the 20th century, i.e.:

Freud and all of the early psychoanalysts; Nobel Prize-winning neurologist & psychiatrist Julius Wagner-Jauregg, M.D.; Victor Frankl, M.D., author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*; playwright Bertolt Brecht; Bruno Bettelheim; Willy Brandt, future chancellor of Germany; Arthur Koestler, author of *Darkness at Noon*; Leon Trotsky; Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein; Fritz Perls, student of Reich’s & founder of Gestalt therapy; A.S. Neill, founder of the Summerhill School in England; Alvin Johnson, president of the New School for Social Research in New York; Albert Einstein at Princeton; Yale anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski; civil liberties lawyer Arthur Garfield Hays; Warren Weaver, Director of the Natural Sciences Program at the Rockefeller Foundation; Alexander Lowen, student of Reich’s & founder of Bioenergetics; New Yorker cartoonist & author William Steig; and many others.

C. OVERVIEW OF REICH'S LIFE & WORK (1897-1957)

In the 1930s, Wilhelm Reich, M.D.—renowned psychiatrist, physician and scientist—discovered a powerful biological energy in specific micro-organisms, an energy that did not obey the familiar, recognizable laws of electro-magnetism. For the next two decades Reich devoted his life to the investigation of this energy's laws, properties and uses.

Reich confirmed the existence of this energy in living substances, including the human organism; verified its presence in the atmosphere; developed instrumentation to observe and collect it; and harnessed it for a variety of purposes, including:

- diagnostic blood tests for early detection of diseases
- experimental cancer treatment
- motor power
- weather engineering, including rainmaking & desert greening
- anti-nuclear radiation experiments

Reich called his discovery “orgone energy.” But sadly it was a discovery that the world was not ready for. In the 1950s, a 7-year campaign by the Food and Drug Administration to discredit Reich's work—aided and abetted by the American Medical, Psychiatric and Psychoanalytic Associations—culminated in a 1954 Federal Court injunction ordering the banning and burning of Reich's publications.

In 1956, Reich's publications were burned at his laboratory in Rangeley, Maine and at the Gansevoort Street Destructor Plant in New York City. In 1957, Reich was imprisoned for contempt of court and died in the Federal Penitentiary at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. In 1960 his publications were burned again at the Gansevoort Street Destructor Plant.

D. REICH TODAY

Starting in 1960, all of Reich's banned and burned books have been brought back into print, plus several new titles, thanks to New York publisher Farrar, Straus & Giroux working with The Wilhelm Reich Infant Trust.

Reich's Archives—i.e. The Archives of the Orgone Institute—are located in the Center for the History of Medicine collections at the Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard University, one of the world's premier medical libraries.

Reich's laboratory and research center in Rangeley, Maine is now open to the public as the Wilhelm Reich Museum. Its bookstore sells reprints of all of Reich's published research journals and bulletins which were banned and burned in the 1950s.

There are also a number of small groups throughout the world dedicated to Reich's work. Regrettably, however, the chilling effect of burning Reich's books, the widespread defamation of his character and factual distortions of his work have curtailed any significant awareness or interest in his medical and scientific legacy from the traditional medical and scientific communities.

E. THE UNIFYING THEME OF REICH’S LEGACY: HEALTH

Reich’s medical and scientific legacy is a rich and promising one, as documented in 22 books, in his published research journals and bulletins, and in unpublished materials in his archives. The common unifying theme in all of his work was health: emotional and physical health in his psychiatric work; the origin and development of the cancer cell in his micro-biological research; experimental cancer treatment in medicine; and planetary and atmospheric health in his weather-engineering research.

Reich succinctly summed up the basic pillars of his legacy in the following words:

- “Changing basically the care of infants and children to prevent armoring and its concomitant diseases.”
- “Utilizing the orgone energy accumulator as a tool of scientific research and medical efficacy.”
- “Utilizing the technology of the medical DOR-buster and the cloudbuster to shift and change energy potentials in the living organism and the atmosphere, creating a new kind of medicine and weather modification.”
- “Developing a noiseless, smokeless motor.”
- “Developing a new chemistry which will eventually enable man to grow any kind of foodstuff artificially.”
- “Making deserts green and fruitful.”

II. DOCUMENTARY STORYLINE

Reich’s extraordinary life of struggle and discovery needs to be presented coherently so that widespread audiences can easily grasp:

1. His pioneering scientific research of a universal energy principle in psychiatry, biology, medicine and physics.
2. The powerful opposition and hostility to Reich’s pioneering research, first in Europe and then in America.
3. The relevance of Reich’s scientific and medical legacy to specific contemporary issues: human sexuality, infant health, psychiatry, microbiology, cancer research, weather engineering, atmospheric physics.

The following are the key story points that will be presented and discussed in this film:

- Based on his clinical psychiatric work, Reich agrees—as the young Freud had once postulated—that the Libido may be a physical biological energy in the human body, and not merely a psychological idea.
- Develops “character analysis,” an innovative, highly acclaimed psychoanalytic approach to alleviate neuroses. (1920s-30s)
- Active in left-wing politics in Austria and Germany, fueled by his belief that existing social institutions must adapt to people’s emotional and sexual needs. (1920s – 30s)
- His political activities and theoretical differences lead to open conflict and an eventual break with Freud.
- His activities and publications result in the German Communist Party banning his literature from circulation within the Party. (1933)
- Reich flees from Germany when Hitler comes to power. (1933)
- Reich is expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association. (1934)
- In his laboratory at the University of Oslo, he conducts bio-electrical experiments with human subjects to verify the existence of a biological energy expressed in emotions. (1935)
- Laboratory experiments to investigate these energy functions in amoeba reveal micro-organisms evolving from sterilized non-living matter, i.e. transitional forms from non-living to living substances. Reich calls these micro-organisms “bions” from the Greek word for “life”. (1935-36)
- Reich publishes the results of his experiments, which precipitates a year-long attack of him in the Norwegian press. (1937-38)
- Reich begins plans to emigrate to America, hoping to find a more receptive climate for his work. (1939)
- Bion experiments lead to the discovery of a biological energy radiation, confirming the existence of an unknown energy in these micro-organisms. Reich calls this energy “orgone”. (1939)
- Begins experimental treatment of cancer mice with bion injections. (1939)
- Emigrates to New York City to teach at the New School for Social Research, arriving in New York on August 28, four days before WWII begins. (1939)

- The FBI, suspicious of Reich’s political activities in Europe, begins to investigate him, something they will do on and off into the 1950s. (1939)
- Reich discovers orgone energy in the atmosphere. (1940)
- Begins experimental treatment of cancer mice with orgone radiation, using a scientific and medical tool called an “orgone energy accumulator”. (1940)
- Reich meets twice with Albert Einstein in Princeton to solicit his interest and support for orgone energy research. (1941)
- Begins experimental orgone radiation treatment of terminal cancer patients using large orgone accumulators. (1941)
- After Germany declares war on America, Reich is detained as an enemy alien for 3 weeks on Ellis Island, based on information in his FBI file. (1941)
- Reich purchases an old farm in Rangeley, Maine as a site for a laboratory and research center. Reich calls this property “Orgonon”. (1942)
- Develops a laboratory and research center at Orgonon in Rangeley, Maine. Also lays plans to build a hospital. (1943-1948)
- An article entitled “*The Strange Case of Wilhelm Reich*” appears in New Republic magazine. It is brought to the attention of the Food and Drug Administration. (1947)
- Based on false allegations in the New Republic article, the FDA begins what will be a 7-year campaign to discredit Reich’s work. (1947 - 1954)
- Reich develops a motor propelled by atmospheric orgone energy and tries to interest the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in this research. (1947-48)
- Concerned over the growing possibility of nuclear war in Korea, Reich seeks an antidote to nuclear radiation sickness by testing the effects of orgone radiation on radioactive material. (1951)
- Reich tries unsuccessfully to interest the Atomic Energy Commission in this new and dramatic area of orgone energy research. (1951-53)
- Reich invents the “cloudbuster,” a technological tool that alters concentrations of atmospheric orgone energy to affect cloud formations and weather patterns. (1952)
- Reich uses cloudbusters to experiment with weather engineering and breaking droughts. (1952-1956)

- The FDA convinces a Federal Court to issue a Complaint for Injunction against the interstate shipment of orgone accumulators and Reich's publications. (1954)
- Reich writes a letter to the Judge, explaining that a court of law has no jurisdiction over matters of natural science, and refuses to appear in court. (1954)
- The Judge issues a Decree of Injunction on default, which goes even further than the original Complaint by ordering the destruction of orgone accumulators and much of Reich's literature. (1954)
- Reich goes to Arizona for weather experiments in the desert with cloudbusters. (1954-55)
- While Reich is in Arizona and without his knowledge, one of his students moves a truckload of orgone accumulators and literature from Maine to New York, a violation of the Injunction. (1955)
- Reich and the student are arrested for contempt of court for violating the Injunction. (1955)
- Reich is tried for criminal contempt of court, found guilty, and sentenced to two years in prison. (1956)
- Reich's publications are burned in New York City and at Orgonon in Rangeley, Maine, under supervision of FDA agents. (1956)
- Reich is imprisoned in the Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, and dies there 8 months later at the age of 60. (1957)

III. CREATIVE APPROACH

A. Scripted Voice-over Narration

Because there has been so much error and distortion about the basic facts of Reich's life and work (even among many favorably disposed to Reich), it's important in this film that Reich himself, at long last, is "allowed to speak for himself" and "set the record straight" about basic facts.

This will ensure the correctness of basic facts about his life and work, rather than allowing anyone to misspeak or offer their opinions or "interpretations" as fact.

Consequently, the film's voiceover narration about the storyline of Reich's life and work will be derived, as much as possible, from Reich's own words—i.e. excerpts from Reich's:

- published books and articles
- personal diaries
- work journals
- laboratory notebooks
- audio recordings
- correspondence
- published interviews with Reich
- unpublished manuscripts and papers
- legal documents

B. Interviews

Interview clips—a crucial part of any documentary process—will play a prominent role in this film as well. They will *complement* Reich's own account of his life and work in significant ways to enrich the film's content.

Interspersed throughout the film will be interviews with historians, scientists, members of Reich's family, physicians, psychoanalysts, etc. These people will amplify, corroborate or elaborate on basic factual information; they will also express varying opinions about specific aspects of Reich's life and work, some favorable, some unfavorable.

Another key role for interview subjects will be to discuss the relevance of Reich's work today, and opportunities for more widespread consideration and practical applications of his social, medical and scientific legacy.

C. Visual Elements

- Any primary materials from Reich's Archives of the Orgone Institute (see next page—**IV. Primary Materials**)
- Historic film and photographs from other archives and sources.
- Computer animation to illustrate aspects of Reich's medical and scientific work, i.e. orgone radiation in orgone accumulators, effects of orgone radiation on radioactive material, principles of cloudbusting, etc.
- Location shooting in Rangeley, ME.; Portland, ME.; Forest Hills, New York; Countway Library of Medicine, Boston; Europe.
- On camera Interviews (*names to be determined*).

IV. PRIMARY MATERIALS

This will be the first documentary in which *all* primary materials owned or copyrighted by The Wilhelm Reich Infant Trust may be accessed and considered as content.

This includes over 7000 pages of publicly available PUBLISHED WRITINGS by Reich (i.e. 22 books, plus reprints of his research journals and bulletins) as well as 98-cubic feet of rare materials in the ARCHIVES OF THE ORGONE INSTITUTE at Harvard's Countway Library of Medicine:

- 1) PUBLISHED BOOKS, RESEARCH JOURNALS, BULLETINS (1920s – 1950s)
 - Excerpts, quotations, illustrations from any of these materials
- 2) FILMS (1920s – 1950s)
 - Reich, family and friends in Austria, Germany, Norway
 - Laboratory work in Norway and the United States
 - Reich and co-workers at his home, laboratory & research center in Maine
 - The orgone energy motor
- 3) TIME-LAPSE MICROSCOPIC FILMS (1930s – 1950s)
 - Bion experiments
 - Development of cancer cells
 - Reich Blood Tests
- 4) PHOTOGRAPHS (early 1900s – 1950s)
 - Childhood
 - Austrian Army in World War I
 - Austria, Germany, Scandinavia, United States
- 5) AUDIO RECORDINGS OF REICH (1940s – 1950s)
 - performing laboratory experiments
 - conducting formal seminars
 - conducting organizational meetings
 - in private discussions with co-workers
 - by himself recording his private thoughts
 - being interviewed by Kurt Eissler of the Freud Archives
- 6) ORIGINAL UNPUBLISHED DOCUMENTS & PAPERS (1920s – 1950s)
 - Personal diaries
 - Work journals
 - Laboratory notebooks & protocols
 - Correspondence
 - Charts, schematics
 - Manuscripts (handwritten & typed)
 - Legal documents

Another valuable primary resource to be prominently featured in this film will be ORGONON itself, Reich's 175-acre home, laboratory and research center in Rangeley, Maine that he developed from 1943 to 1948 on what was formerly a farm.

Today Orgonon is preserved and operated as The Wilhelm Reich Museum:

7) THE PROPERTY AT ORGONON

- 175 acres of fields and forests in the beautiful Rangeley Lakes Region of Maine
- Waterfront on a small lake known as Dodge Pond
- Panoramic mountain and lake views from the hilltop

8) ORGONE ENERGY OBSERVATORY

- Reich's study and library preserved exactly as he left them
- Exhibit Hall that includes Reich's original laboratory equipment
- Stunning views from its flat roofs and observations decks of lakes, mountains, forests, fields and sky

(This building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.)

9) STUDENT LABORATORY - now the Conference & Office Building

10) TWO COTTAGES - formerly the residences for Reich and his family.