

TITLE

On August 23, 1956, six tons of books, plus medical and scientific research journals, were removed from a private publishing house in New York City and burned by order of a United States Federal Court injunction.

On March 17, 1960, additional copies of these publications were burned in New York City by order of this same injunction.

These are the events that culminated in one of the most heinous examples of censorship and book-burning in American history.

PART ONE: *“An Exile From Europe”*

Wilhelm Reich, M.D. Arrives in America (New York - August 1939)

On August 28, 1939—four days before the outbreak of WWII—the *S.S. Stavengerfjord* arrives from Oslo. Among its passengers is 42-year old Wilhelm Reich, M.D., an Austrian psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, research physician and scientist whose anti-fascist activities had forced him to flee from Germany to Scandinavia when Hitler came to power in 1933.

Once called Freud’s most promising pupil, Reich is renowned in Europe as the author of *Character Analysis*, a landmark book on therapeutic technique, and *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, a critique of the psychological underpinnings of Naziism and communism.

Two of Reich’s former students are on the dock to greet him: American psychiatrist Walter Briebl, M.D., who had studied with Reich in Vienna and Berlin; and Columbia University professor and psychiatrist Theodore Wolfe, M.D., a leading proponent of psychosomatic medicine and a student of Reich’s in Oslo.

Together with Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski—who would soon be teaching at Yale—Briebl and Wolfe had secured a faculty position for Reich at the New School for Social Research in Manhattan, without which he could not have emigrated to America.

Reich’s Assistant in His Cancer Research Laboratory (New York - August 1939)

Also awaiting Reich in New York is Gertrude Gaasland, Reich’s chief assistant at his cancer research laboratory in Oslo. Three months earlier—in May 1939—Reich had packed up his laboratory and sent it on ahead of him with Gaasland to America.

Reich Re-establishes His Cancer Research Laboratory (New York - September 1939)

Shortly after Reich’s arrival, Gaasland and Dr. Wolfe help him locate a house in Forest Hills (Queens) New York, with suitable laboratory space in the cellar and on the first floor.

In his new home, Reich holds classes for physicians, educators and social workers about his innovative psychiatric work. He also prepares his course for the New School for Social Research, “*Character Formation - Biological and Social Aspects*,” which starts in January.

And most important for Reich, by mid-September he resumes his laboratory research on the origins of the cancer cell and the experimental treatment of cancer in laboratory mice.

Reich’s cancer research in America will continue the work he began in Oslo in 1936.

Background of Reich’s Biological & Cancer Research (Oslo - 1936)

Eager to investigate biological energy functions at the most primitive level—functions of protozoa—Reich secured an amoeba preparation from the Botanical Institute of Oslo. When he asked how to cultivate his own protozoa, he was told it only takes an infusion of water and hay in which, over time, protozoa develop from air-germs that are everywhere.

In his laboratory, Reich observed the Institute’s preparation under high-magnification Reichert ‘Z’ microscopes and saw it contained very few amoebae. The Institute advised Reich to prepare his own water and hay infusions, and to examine them after 10 - 14 days.

To record, observe and study every stage of protozoal development in his infusions, Reich used innovative time-lapse filming technology affixed to high-power microscopes.

Much to Reich’s surprise, however, the development of protozoa—as captured on time-lapse film—was very much at odds with biology’s prevalent “air-germ theory.”

Reich Discovers an Unknown Micro-organism (Oslo - 1936)

Reich’s films revealed a biological process not found in any scientific literature: pieces of swelled hay disintegrated into lively, motile micro-organisms or vesicles; these vesicles grew larger and eventually detached themselves from the hay as amoebae.

Reich’s films showed amoebae constantly developing this way, *not* from any air-germs.

As a control against the possibility of air-germ infection, Reich carried out experiments using various organic substances—grass, plants, earth, foodstuffs, coal, etc.—in sterile preparations: either autoclaving at 120° C, dry-sterilizing at 180° C, or heating to incandescence at 1500° C, then letting them swell in 100° C boiled water.

To Reich’s amazement, sterile preparations yielded *more* disintegration into these lively, motile micro-organisms and amoebic growth than the unsterile preparations. Which was contrary to the traditional laws of sterilization!

Reich theorized that these micro-organisms—often blue in color—were transitional stages from non-living to living matter. He called them “bions” after the Greek word for “life.”

Amoebae and Cancer Cells (Oslo - 1936)

Six months into his experiments, Reich saw a film about cancer cells presented by English researchers. What he saw resonated with him because of his own laboratory observations. Afterwards he wrote in his journal, “Migratory cancer cells are amoebic formations. They are produced from disintegrating tissue...it was a staggering experience.”

At the same time, Reich’s experiments—some with mice—revealed that certain bions could immobilize or kill bacteria, staphylococci, streptococci, *and* cancer cells.

A Causative Agent of Cancer? (Oslo - 1937)

In other experiments, Reich prepared sterile preparations of sarcoma [connective tissue tumors]. His time-lapse films showed sarcoma disintegrating into blue bions, as well as the presence of a *second* type of bion: smaller (.25 micron), rod-shaped and reddish-black.

When Reich injected these smaller, rod-shaped bions into healthy mice, most of the mice became ill and died, many with cancerous growths. Reich called this second type of bion “T-bacilli” after the German word “Tod” for “death.” He theorized that these smaller micro-organisms *might* be one of the causative agents of cancer.

Bions Injections in Laboratory Mice (Oslo, 1937-1939)

From autumn 1937 until the end of January 1939, Reich injected bions into 138 healthy laboratory mice to test the biological effects of blue bions and T-bacilli.

Of the 84 mice injected only with T-bacilli, all of them became ill, many died, some with cancerous growths. Other experiments with the blue bions indicated that *these* micro-organisms acted as a biological antibody against cancer cells and T-bacilli.

Discovery of a Radiation in Bions (Oslo - January 1939)

In January 1939, Reich discovered a radiation phenomenon in bions cultivated from sea sand that had been heated to incandescence, then infused in boiling water. He wrote, “Under the microscope this new kind of culture appeared as large, scarcely motile packets of energy vesicles glimmering with an intense blue.”

Reich called these micro-organisms “SAPA” bions (SAnd PAcKet), and observed that they exerted a stronger biological effect on bacteria and cancer cells than other bions.

To discern if this bion radiation was electromagnetic, Reich began using Faraday cages for experiments and visual observations. And wondering if this radiation might be radioactive, he consulted several physicists, including Dutch physicist W.F. Bon.

Reich soon concluded that this radiation was neither electromagnetic nor radioactive, but rather an entirely different and previously unknown biological energy.

In terms of Reich's cancer research, the micro-organisms he called SAPA bions would be crucial when he re-established his laboratory in New York in September 1939.

Experiments with Cancer Mice in America (New York - December 1939)

In his New York laboratory, Reich's experiments reveal that SAPA bions can kill amoeboid cancer cells and T-bacilli. He is now eager to test their effects on cancer mice.

One of his students—a physician in the pathology laboratory at Columbia-Presbyterian Hospital—procures some cancer mice (Paris strain) for Reich's laboratory.

On December 16, 1939, Reich injects SAPA bions subcutaneously into his first mouse with cancer, i.e., a mammary tumor.

A Cancer Tumor Grows Smaller (New York - December 1939)

Over the next few days, Reich cautiously records in his laboratory notebook and journal that the mouse's mammary tumor—hard and the size of a large bean—is now shrinking. Six days later—on December 22nd—he records that the tumor is 50% smaller.

These promising results with this first cancer mouse will motivate Reich to continue his experiments on over 100 cancer mice in the subsequent months.

A Promising First Four Months in America (New York, Sept. - Dec. 1939)

By the end of 1939, as war rages in Europe, Reich has much to look forward to. Safe in America, he is hopeful about the progress of his cancer research. Physicians, educators and social workers are coming to his home for seminars and training. And in January he begins teaching his course at the New School for Social Research.

Reich has also reconnected with his daughters, 15-year old Eva and 12-year old Lore, who he has not seen since August 1936 in Marienbad. They live on Manhattan's Upper West Side with their mother and her husband, having emigrated from Prague in July 1938.

And living with Reich now in Forest Hills is Ilse Ollendorff, a 29 year-old German émigré introduced to him in October by his laboratory assistant, Gertrude Gaasland.

But what Reich does *not* know is that by the end of 1939—four months after his arrival in America—the State Department in Washington D.C. is preparing to investigate him.

A Memo to the State Department (Washington D.C. - December 1939)

On December 7, 1939—the week before Reich's first cancer mouse experiments—Paul C. Squires, an American Consul now on duty at the State Department, sends a memo to the Secretary of State, Cordell Hull.

Squires—whose career includes posts in England, France, Switzerland, Monaco and Argentina—is passing on information “which has come to me through confidential sources believed reliable concerning the Communistic activities of Dr. Wilhelm Reich,” as well as two others: Dr. Edith Buxbaum and Dr. Harold Aaron.

These “confidential sources” also claim that Reich had been “a paid Communist agent in Austria prior to the Anschluss and to have been expelled from that and from other countries.” (To this day, these “confidential sources” have never been identified.)

The State Department Contacts the FBI (Washington D.C. - January 1940)

On January 6, 1940, Assistant Secretary of State George Messersmith sends a letter with Squire’s memo to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. On January 19th, Hoover forwards this information to a “Special Agent in Charge in New York. Subject: Subversive Activities.”

The FBI Investigates Reich (New York/Washington D.C., January - March 1940)

As Reich carries on with all aspects of his work—including laboratory experiments with SAPA injections in cancer mice *and* developing a bion serum—this “Special Agent in Charge in New York” begins to investigate Reich’s political background.

On March 6th, the agent reports to Hoover that a “confidential informant” [whose name is blacked out in Reich’s FBI file] “disclosed that Dr. Wilhelm Reich was on the so-called Medical Advisory Board of the Communist Party of America.” He asks Hoover to ask the State Department for passport information on Reich and the others: Buxbaum and Aaron.

On March 29th, Adolf Berle—the new Assistant Secretary of State—sends a memo to Hoover: the State Department has files on a “*William* Reich,” but no information on *Wilhelm* Reich, Edith Buxbaum or Harold Aaron.

But over the next few months, the State Department will continue to investigate Reich.

Factual Errors in the Original State Department Memo

The original State Department memo (December 7, 1939) bears some scrutiny as it raises many questions and contains numerous factual errors. It is still not known who these “confidential sources” were or why they named Reich, Buxbaum and Aaron.

Interestingly, Edith Buxbaum—who emigrated to America in 1937—was a psychoanalyst, a part of Reich’s social circle in Vienna, the best friend of Reich’s ex-wife Annie, and a witness at their 1922 wedding. And like the Reichs, she *had* been involved in Socialist and Communist activities in Europe.

But the confidential source’s claims that Reich was “a paid Communist agent in Austria” and that he had been expelled from Austria and other countries are factually incorrect.

Factual Errors in the FBI Investigation

The FBI's investigation also raises questions and factual errors. The identity of the Special Agent's "confidential informant" remains unknown to this day. And this informant's claim that Reich was on the "Medical Advisory Board of the Communist Party of America" has no factual basis at all. Reich was *never* involved with the American Communist Party.

A Confusion of Names

Assistant Secretary of State Messersmith's memo on March 29th is also significant because it introduces the name *William* Reich into these early government investigations of *Wilhelm* Reich. This will produce considerable confusion in future phases of these investigations.

Factual Accuracy

The fact is Wilhelm Reich *had* been involved as a physician in Communist and Socialist circles in Europe in the 1920s and 30s, at a time when these left-wing movements were the only viable alternatives to the rising tide of authoritarianism and fascism.

PART TWO: "A Physician Joins the Fight Against Fascism"

Riot and Massacre in Vienna (July 15, 1927)

In his diaries and publications, Reich identified this infamous day in Austrian history as the seminal moment of his politicization.

At the time, said Reich, "I was apolitical, a scientific worker, a physician with a highly successful private practice and wealthy American pupils. I was a member of the bourgeoisie." At age 30, he was also First Clinical Assistant at Freud's Psychoanalytic Polyclinic and Director of the Polyclinic's technical seminar for analytic candidates.

On July 15, 1927, Reich was in the streets of Vienna as an eyewitness to a bloody confrontation where police opened fire on hundreds of demonstrators from the Vienna Workers Union. The shooting lasted three hours, leaving 85 dead and over 1000 wounded.

The demonstration was triggered by the July 14th acquittal of several monarchists accused of firing into a Socialist Party gathering in the town of Schattendorf. A man and a 6-year old child were killed.

What struck Reich on July 15th was the complacency of most of the crowds despite the bloodshed, the lack of any effective Social Democratic or Communist leadership in the streets, and his impression that the police were acting like a "senseless machine." These and other issues of group psychology and behavior troubled Reich profoundly.

Reich Joins the Arbeiterhilfe (Vienna - July 15, 1927)

That same day, July 15th, Reich had a Communist doctor register him in the medical group of the Arbeiterhilfe [Worker's Help], an affiliate of the Austrian Communist Party.

Reich Discusses July 15th With Freud (Vienna - July 1927)

Later that month, Reich met with Freud to discuss his concerns about the July 15th tragedy. Mass psychology had been the subject of Freud's 1921 book *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. But Freud biographer Peter Gay called it "a rather lonely text" since Freud never followed up on the promising leads in this study.

And Freud did *not* share Reich's urgency over what he felt were deeper questions posed by these events: Why were masses of mistreated people so helpless? Why did policemen, many of whom were sons of workers and farmers, shoot at other workers and farmers? And what did such behaviors say about one's *capacity* for freedom and *fear* of freedom?

According to Reich, Freud seemed to have little understanding of the events of July 15th and viewed it merely "as a catastrophe similar to a tidal wave."

Politicized at Age 30 (Vienna - 1927)

Reich's membership in the Arbeiterhilfe marked the start of his struggle against fascism and Naziism as a physician, public speaker and writer. This would result in significant upheavals for Reich, professionally and personally, first in Europe and later in America.

But even before joining the Arbeiterhilfe in 1927, Reich's relationship with Freud and the psychoanalytic community—begun when he was a medical student—had started to cool.

And prior to medical school, Reich was no stranger to significant upheavals in his life.

A Boy from Bukovina (Austro-Hungary, 1897 - 1914)

Born in 1897, Reich grew up in Bukovina, the easternmost edge of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Ukraine). He and his brother Robert were raised on a large and prosperous farm, with servants and private tutors. In these rural surroundings, Reich enjoyed hiking, fishing, hunting, and cultivating a love and knowledge of the rhythms of the natural world.

When Reich was 14-years old, his mother committed suicide after years of emotional and physical abuse from Reich's father. Three years later in 1914, Reich's father—now in dire financial straits—died of tuberculosis in a sanitarium.

Reich and his brother were struggling to keep the farm going when World War One erupted two months later on July 28, 1914.

The Russians Invade Bukovina (Austro-Hungary - 1914)

When Russian troops swept through Bukovina, Reich was captured by Russian soldiers. He narrowly escaped being sent to Russia as a hostage and had to flee his home.

A Soldier in the Austrian Army (Austria & Italy, 1914 - 1918)

Reich served in the Austrian Army for four years, rising to the rank of lieutenant and seeing action on the Italian front. What most impressed Reich about this experience was the inhumanity and machine-like nature of war.

From Law School to Medical School (Vienna - 1918)

In August 1918, as the war was winding down, Reich obtained a furlough and enrolled in law school at the University of Vienna. A couple months later, he met an old friend enrolled in the medical school who reawakened Reich's interest in natural science.

Deciding that law was really not for him, Reich transferred to the medical school.

In November, the war ended. Germany and Austria were defeated, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was broken up, and Bukovina became part of Romania. "I never saw either my homeland or my possessions again," Reich said. "Of a well-to-do past, nothing was left."

PART THREE: "A Medical Student in Vienna"

Reich Discovers Freud (1919)

In his first semester in medical school, 21-year old Reich was part of a student group that organized a sexological seminar. They believed sexology was essential for medical students, yet this important subject was not a part of their medical curriculum.

Reich was disappointed with the seminar. "Those first lectures I attended made sexuality seem bizarre and strange," he said. "A natural sexuality did not seem to exist." So Reich began to rigorously study the leading sexological literature of the day, i.e., publications by:

Iwan Bloch, M.D. (the father of sexology); Auguste-Henri Forel, M.D. (psychiatrist/neuroanatomist/entomologist); Albert Moll, M.D. (psychiatrist); Cesare Tarruffi, M.D. (surgeon and professor of anatomical pathology); Carl Jung, M.D. (psychoanalyst); Georg Back, M.D. (physician); and Sigmund Freud, M.D. (the father of psychoanalysis).

Reich said, "Freud's *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* and his *Introductory Lectures* determined my choice of profession."

PART NINE:
“The Discovery of Orgone Energy”

Cultivating a New Type of Bion (January 1939)

For the first time, Reich used sea sand to cultivate bions, i.e., sterilized sea sand heated to incandescence and put in a potassium chloride/caustic potash solution to promote swelling. A growth in *this* solution was inoculated on agar and egg medium to form *another* growth that, under the microscope, showed large packets of bions “glimmering with an intense blue.”

Reich called them SAPA [SAnd PAcKet] bions. He observed that they were much bluer than other bions and that they had an even stronger biological effect than any previous cultures.

Biological Effects of SAPA Bions (January - February, 1939)

“The effect of the SAPA bions on rot bacteria, protozoa and T-bacilli was much more powerful than that of other bions,” said Reich. “Brought together with cancer cells, they killed or paralyzed the cells even at a distance of approximately 10 microns.” Reich filmed all of these phenomena, and for weeks he examined the bions daily under the microscope.

A Possible Radiation in SAPA Bions (January - February, 1939)

Soon Reich’s eyes began to hurt whenever he looked at the SAPA bions for any length of time under the microscope. His eyes developed a violent conjunctivitis, forcing him to see an ophthalmologist. This, along with the powerful biological effects of these bions, made him suspect that he might be dealing with a radiation phenomenon in these micro-organisms.

Reich’s Initial Tests for Possible Radiation (January - February, 1939)

“I first tried a very primitive method of testing the cultures for radiation,” Reich said, “by placing the test tubes against the palm of my left hand. Each time I thought I felt a fine prickling, but was not sure of the sensation.”

Reich also put SAPA bions on a microscope slide, which he then placed on his skin for ten minutes. Under the bions—separated from the skin by the quartz slide—an anemic spot with hyperemic margin developed on his skin, indicating an increase in blood flow to the margin area. “The SAPA cultures reddened the skin within a few minutes,” Reich said.

Soon the palm of Reich’s left hand became inflamed and painful. And the air in the room where the cultures were kept became heavy, causing headaches if windows were closed.

Other Possible Radiation Phenomena (January - February, 1939)

In a dark room, Reich placed SAPA cultures on or near photographic plates—some plates were covered with cardboard or black paper, some plates remained uncovered. To his amazement, *all* of the photographic plates became fogged.

Is This Radiation Radioactive? (January - February, 1939)

From these subjective and objective observations over four weeks, Reich initially believed this radiation was radioactive, i.e., that the sand—heated to incandescence, then immersed in a swelling solution—disintegrated into a particular type of bion that emitted radioactivity.

This wasn't an unreasonable assumption given that radioactivity had been discovered in other natural materials, such as uranium salts in 1896 by chemist Henri Becquere; *and* in pitchblende, a mineral ore from which the Curies distilled polonium and radium in 1898.

And three and a half months earlier, in November 1938, Dutch physicist W. F. Bon had specifically asked Reich if he'd observed any radiation phenomena in any of the bions.

Seeking the Help of Physicists (February 1939)

On February 18th—after four weeks of studying these phenomena—Reich wrote two letters. One was to Bon. “I am writing to you today with an urgent request,” he began. He described his observations and asked Bon if he'd investigate the SAPA bions.

The other letter was to physician Tage Philipson in Denmark, Reich's friend and colleague who had visited his laboratory in January and seen the SAPA cultures. Reich asked him to contact Niels Bohr, the Nobel-prize winning physicist, now the head of the Institute for Theoretical Physics in Copenhagen. Reich wanted to send Bohr some SAPA cultures.

Reich also asked about any eye specialists in Copenhagen who might know of the dangers from exposure to radioactive material. “I have been examining these bions for several hours a day at magnifications of up to 4000X, also in dark field, for about four weeks,” he said. And Dr. Havrevold, who worked in the laboratory, was also complaining of eye pain.

Philipson replied that Bohr was away in America, and the assistant he spoke to was very skeptical. Bon, however, agreed to have Reich send him SAPA cultures to study.

Visual Phenomena in the Darkness (February - March, 1939)

Meanwhile, to observe SAPA radiation in total darkness—instead of simply under the microscope—Reich moved dozens of cultures to the basement. Once Reich's eyes became accustomed to the dark, “the room appeared not black, but grayish blue. I saw fog-like vapors, streaks of light and dots darting about.” After an hour, his eyes were inflamed.

One night Reich spent five consecutive hours in the dark basement. “After two hours, I began to see quite distinctly a radiation from the palm of my hand, the sleeve of my shirt, and (looking in the mirror) the hair on my head. Gradually the blue glimmer surrounded my body and objects in the room like a hazy, slow moving, gray-blue luminous vapor.”

Later, Reich had Dr. Havrevold participate in these observations in the basement. “Though completely uninformed, he confirmed the majority of my observations,” Reich said.

Is This Radiation Electromagnetic? (February - March, 1939)

Reich also explored what, at first, seemed to be *electromagnetic* properties of this radiation. Here he was following the thread of his earlier bio-electrical experiments of sexuality and anxiety which verified electrical properties in the body's biological energy. One of Reich's principal tools for determining if SAPA radiation was electrical was the Faraday cage.

Reich Uses Faraday Cages (February - July, 1939)

Invented in 1836 by British physicist and chemist Michael Faraday, the Faraday cage is a metal enclosure—usually comprising mesh walls, but sometimes solid—that blocks out electro-magnetic energy from the outside to ensure the enclosure is free of electrical charge. Inside the cage, electroscopes are used to confirm the absence of any exterior electricity.

Reich used Faraday cages of various sizes, including one large enough to sit and work in, (not unlike the first “cage” experiment of Faraday himself that involved a foil-lined room).

To isolate SAPA phenomena from any electrical energy, Reich placed test tubes and Petri dishes of SAPA cultures *inside* Faraday cages for microscopic work and experimentation.

Focusing on the Nature of SAPA Radiation (February - April, 1939)

Reich documented his observations and experimental results in laboratory notebooks, his private journal, and in frequent letters to W.F. Bon, to whom he sent some SAPA bions.

In a letter acknowledging Bon's receipt of the bions, Reich said, “I do not wish to abandon the true subject of my work, the cancer experiments.”

But investigating the properties of SAPA radiation was already a major focus of Reich's laboratory, and soon led him to conclude that this *might* be an entirely new form of energy.

Additional Objective Phenomena (February - April, 1939)

In a follow-up letter to Bon, Reich reported “Our mysterious ‘something’ does not appear to be ordinary electricity or ordinary magnetism. But it influences matter in such a way that phenomena resembling magnetism and electricity manifest themselves at the electroscope.”

For example, SAPA cultures produced reactions from the electroscope. And materials ordinarily used for electrical insulation—glass, rubber gloves, porcelain and wool—apparently absorbed the SAPA radiation and induced electroscopic responses.

Metal, such as copper and iron, seemed to attract the radiation and then “re-emit the radiation in greater intensity.” And in one experiment, metal objects such as scissors, pincers and needles became highly magnetized by the SAPA bions.

Additional Subjective Phenomena (February - May, 1939)

For months, “I subjected one person after another to the skin test and to the observation in the dark,” Reich said. There were repeated confirmations of prickling sensations, reddening of the skin, and of the visual phenomena in the dark basement.

And using the palms of their hands, many people detected “something like an electrical aura when the hand is held approximately 1-2 centimeters away from the copper wall of the Faraday cage” in which there were test tubes and Petri dishes of SAPA cultures.

Additional Objective Phenomena (February - May, 1939)

To make SAPA radiation more visible in microscopes and Faraday cages—and distinguish it from possible subjective eye phenomena—Reich experimented with matte screens and fluorescent materials against which the radiation became more visible.

And as he’d been doing since his earliest bion research, Reich passed electrical currents through SAPA bions to study their effects on SAPA movement, structure and electric charge.

Reich in Oslo and W.F. Bon in Holland (February - July, 1939)

Bon confirmed some of Reich’s subjective and objective observations, and was unable to confirm others. But—as evident by their frequent letters over many months—their exchanges were always cordial, serious and productive scientific dialogues for both men.

Reich Names This Radiation “Orgone Energy” (March 1939)

Around the time that Reich realized that SAPA radiation was *not* electro-magnetism, he gave a name to this energy in his laboratory notebooks, private journal, and letters to Bon. By March, two months after discovering this radiation, he was calling it “*orgone energy*”.

Reich derived “*orgone*” from two words: “*orgasm*,” because its discovery evolved from his study of the orgasm function [tension→charge→discharge→relaxation] at the most basic biological level, leading to the discovery of the first bions in 1936; and “*organic*” because this biological energy charged organic substances like wool, rubber, glass, cellulose, etc.

Orgone Energy as the Energy of Libido

In his journal, under the heading “Dangerous Conclusion,” Reich hypothesized that orgone energy “is the specific form of biological energy” in living matter. And since his “orgasm theory...equates the sexual and the vegetative”—i.e., non-cognitive, involuntary physical functioning—Reich believed orgone “must at the same time be the specific sexual energy.”

Thus, Reich was theorizing that among orgone energy’s numerous properties in living matter, within the human organism it was also the biological energy of the libido—the existence of which Freud had once anticipated and then abandoned.

First Published Mention of Orgone Energy (New York - March 1942)

Reich never publicized or published anything about orgone energy in Oslo; this work was still in its infancy and the press campaign against his bion research was still very much on his mind. “I do not wish for a second time to become the target of another highly upsetting campaign against my work,” he wrote to Bon.

Consequently, the term “*orgone energy*”—first coined in March 1939—would not appear in print until three years later, in March 1942 in Reich’s first research journal in America.

Planning to Emigrate to America (1939)

Concurrent with Reich’s discovery and early research of orgone energy in 1939 were his efforts to emigrate to America in late spring or summer of that year. In New York City, Dr. Wolfe was seeking a position for Reich at Columbia University where he was teaching. Only when this position was confirmed could Reich secure a visa required for emigration.

Reich planned to have his assistant Gertrude precede him to New York with his laboratory and archives, and find a suitable home in which to re-establish the laboratory. He wrote to Wolfe, “I am looking forward greatly to the calm and fruitful work environment I hope to find in America.” But Reich’s life and work in America would be *without* Elsa.

Reich and Elsa (December 1938 - April 1939)

Their relationship had always been a passionate and difficult one. By the end of 1938 Elsa had told Reich she would not be accompanying him to America. In 1939, they were living separately and seeing each other sporadically. And as Reich’s emigration plans progressed, she reiterated her wish to remain in Oslo.

Reich’s Priority in America: His Laboratory Work (May 1939)

By May, with no word yet from Columbia University, Reich’s emigration papers had to be delayed. Still, he pressed on—his priority in America would be his scientific research which was costly to maintain. “Absolutely essential laboratory work swallows enormous sums of cash,” he told Wolfe, which he hoped to earn as a therapist to American trainees and patients.

“I assume that by doing about four hours of vegetotherapeutic work each day,” he wrote to Wolfe, “I will be able to earn enough to carry the costs of the laboratory. At the present time my aspirations are concentrated solely on concluding the cancer work and the radiation work.” He dismantled his laboratory, then sent it with Gertrude to America on May 20th.

People Sitting Inside the Faraday Cage (May 1939)

Reich sent dozens of bion cultures to America, as well, including SAPA cultures. He also kept dozens of SAPA cultures *and* the large Faraday cage in Oslo, to continue studying orgone energy phenomena and other people’s observations of this phenomena.

This included having patients and students sit daily for 10 to 30 minutes in the Faraday cage where SAPA cultures were being kept. “After a while, some of them react, without knowing why, by exhibiting such symptoms as giddiness, sensations of electrical tension, headaches,” Reich reported to Bon. One patient developed a severe conjunctivitis.

Reich also carried out more experiments in the Faraday cage with matte screens coated with fluorescent material to make the orgone radiation more visible.

Faraday Cage - Precursor of Orgone Energy Accumulator (New York, 1939 - 1940)

In America, Faraday cages would evolve into “*orgone energy accumulators*,” which would become Reich’s principal research and medical tool. And people sitting in Reich’s large Faraday cage in 1939 in Oslo, for the express purpose of being exposed to orgone radiation, would anticipate people sitting in orgone accumulators in the 1940s and 1950s in America.

And people sitting in orgone accumulators in America would be the impetus for a Federal court order to ban and destroy Reich’s books, research journals and bulletins.

Reich’s Emigration is Delayed (June - July, 1939)

By June, despite Dr. Wolfe’s efforts, the position for Reich at Columbia University had fallen through. Wolfe and Walter Briehl, M.D.—a New York psychoanalyst and Reich’s former student—now tried to interest the New School for Social Research in hiring Reich.

It was an astute tactic. In 1933, school president Alvin Johnson had founded its University in Exile—renamed the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science in 1934—which, over the next twelve years, sponsored 183 refugee scholars from Europe. Among them were Claude Levi-Strauss, Max Wertheimer, Ernest Kris and Rudolf Arnheim.

To bolster this effort, Reich wrote to his friend, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski—now in America and teaching at Smith College—to solicit his support. “My dear Willy,” he wrote back, “I shall be only too happy to do all I can to help you,” which included “writing a letter to my friend Alvin Johnson at the New School for Social Research.”

Reich’s First Publication About Cancer (July - August, 1939)

While waiting to hear from the New School, “I have been helping to set the type for my first work on cancer,” Reich wrote in his journal. “It’s good—not an untrue sentence in it.” Entitled *Bion Experiments on the Cancer Problem*, it was based on his lecture a year ago to the Norwegian Society of Medical Students. It would be his last European publication.

A follow-up to *Die Bione*, this 25 page monograph—with “38 micro-photographs” plus drawings—discussed the origin and evolution of cancer cells; the effects of PA [Packet] bions on cancer cells; and the T-bacilli, the deadly bions found in the degenerative process of cancer tissue and other substances, which induced cancerous growths in mice.

Reich's Final Days in Oslo (August 1939)

In early August, Alvin Johnson cabled the American consulate in Oslo that Reich would be teaching at the New School for Social Research. Reich's visa was subsequently granted.

Reich spent his last few days in Oslo with Elsa. And on August 19th, he boarded the *Stavangerfjord* alone for his journey to America, his sixth and final emigration.

During Reich's voyage, the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact was signed in Moscow on August 23rd, setting the stage for Hitler's invasion of Poland nine days later that would plunge the continent into war.

While onboard, Reich wrote Elsa a letter—posting it on the ship for its return to Oslo—which concluded, “Elsa, I loved you very, very much—very much indeed. Farewell.” Reich would never see Elsa or Europe again.
