



Wilhelm Reich, Biologist

By James E. Strick

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Psychoanalyst, political theorist, pioneer of body therapies, prophet of the sexual revolution—all fitting titles, but Wilhelm Reich has never been recognized as a serious laboratory scientist, despite his experimentation with bioelectricity and unicellular organisms. *Wilhelm Reich, Biologist* is an eye-opening reappraisal of one of twentieth-century science’s most controversial figures?perhaps the only writer whose scientific works were burned by both the Nazis and the U.S. government. Refuting allegations of “pseudoscience” that have long dogged Reich’s research, James Strick argues that Reich’s lab experiments in the mid-1930s represented the cutting edge of light microscopy and time-lapse micro-cinematography and deserve to be taken seriously as legitimate scientific contributions.

Trained in medicine and a student of Sigmund Freud, Reich took to the laboratory to determine if Freud’s concept of libido was quantitatively measurable. His electrophysiological experiments led to his “discovery” of microscopic vesicles (he called them “bions”), which Reich hypothesized were instrumental in originating life from nonliving matter. Studying Reich’s laboratory notes from recently opened archives, Strick presents a detailed account of the bion experiments, tracing how Reich eventually concluded he had discovered an unknown type of biological radiation he called “orgone.” The bion experiments were foundational to Reich’s theory of cancer and later investigations of orgone energy.

Reich’s experimental findings and interpretations were considered discredited, but not because of shoddy lab technique, as has often been claimed. Scientific opposition to Reich’s experiments, Strick contends, grew out of resistance to his unorthodox sexual theories and his Marxist political leanings.

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Review

Presents Reich above all as a scientist, a gifted researcher and a serious biologist... **Strick**'s learned and thoroughly researched book contributes enormously not just to an understanding of Wilhelm Reich, but to the broader milieu of European biological science in the 1920s and '30s. (Paul Lerner *Times Literary Supplement* 2015-12-02)

Wilhelm Reich, Biologist portrays a fascinating, unexpected episode of the interwar life sciences, and provocatively calls for a reappraisal of Reich's laboratory work on the basis of novel archival insight. (Mathias Grote, Lecturer, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Wilhelm Reich, Biologist is a bold and well-researched book, with refreshingly new perspectives on a famous and controversial scientist who continues to fascinate new audiences as a remarkable personality in the history of science. (Håvard Friis Nilsen, historian of psychoanalysis)

From the Author

A website is available at wilhelmreichbiologist.org for my new book *Wilhelm Reich, Biologist*, with some background material, color microphotos, access to some primary source documents, etc. to accompany the book. These will be especially useful in technical details for any scientist who wishes to repeat the experiments. Please visit it and examine the additional resources. -Dr. James Strick

About the Author

James E. Strick is Professor in the Department of Earth and Environment and Chair of the Program in Science, Technology, and Society at Franklin and Marshall College.

A website is available at wilhelmreichbiologist.org to accompany this book *Wilhelm Reich, Biologist*, with some background material, color microphotos, access to some primary source documents, etc. to accompany the book. These will be especially useful in technical details for any scientist who wishes to repeat the experiments. Please visit it and examine the additional resources.

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