

# InPresence 0020: The Misunderstood Genius of Wilhelm Reich with Jeffrey Mishlove

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove

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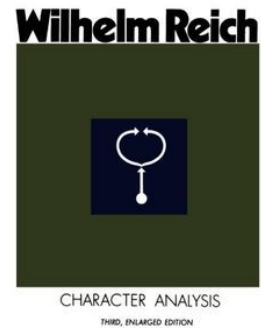
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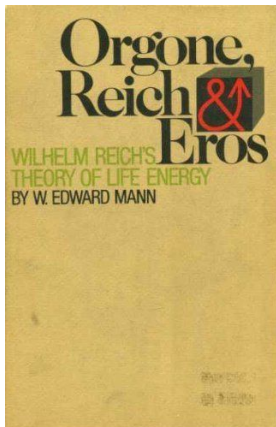
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(00:39) Hello, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove. Today I'd like to talk about one of the most fascinating, important and yet misunderstood figures in the history of psychiatry, and also a very important cultural figure. I'm speaking of Wilhelm Reich, a great psychiatrist who died in a U.S. federal prison in 1957, and was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic at the time of his death. Reich was a classically trained Freudian psychiatrist, and he developed very important theories about the relationship of the human body to psychiatric disturbances.

(01:24) In fact, one could say that every form of "body therapy" that's practiced today owes a debt to Wilhelm Reich. He's sort of the father of body therapies, and he came up with the insight that the various psychological defense mechanisms that were described in great detail by Sigmund Freud actually had their correlations with what he called muscular armoring in the body. I've talked about how we numb ourselves, to protect ourselves from the pain of the world, but Reich went a step further and said that it's actually in our body itself, that we get stiff, our muscles get tight, we armor ourselves against the pains and insults of the world at large, and so he developed methods for treating the body armoring through breathing, through massage.



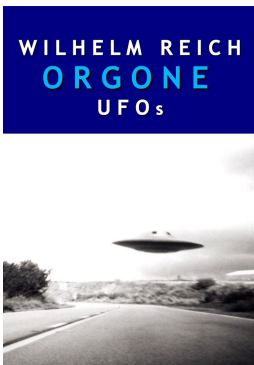
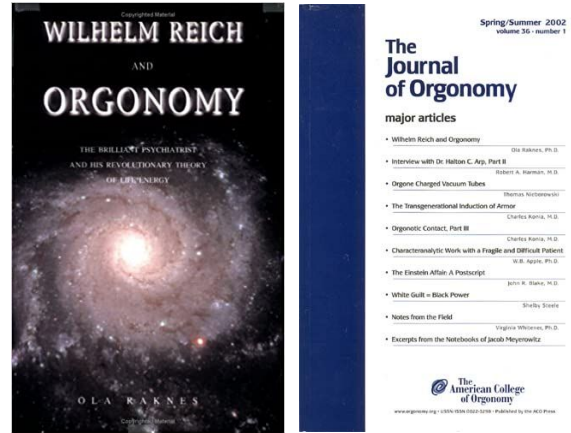
(02:32) He also developed a very important concept for him, "orgone energy." He felt that orgone energy was equivalent to life energy in the body, and that it could be studied, that there were actual ways of seeing it visibly, measuring it, working with it. He created devices he called "orgone accumulators," and he felt that the orgone energy could be very healthy in releasing the muscular armoring of the body.



(03:06) Now, back in 1973, when I was working as a program producer at KPFA Radio in Berkeley, I received a copy of a book called *Orgone, Reich & Eros* written by professor Ted Mann, a professor of Sociology at the University of Toronto in Canada. I happened to take the book along with me as I traveled to Montreal that summer to attend the annual convention of the Association for Humanistic Psychology. And what do you know? I met Professor Ted Mann at

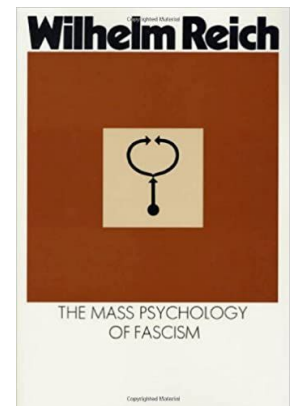
that conference and he was so delighted that I had read his book, which was my reading on the long trip – I took a Greyhound bus from San Francisco to Montreal, so I had read the book by the time I arrived. He was thrilled that I was so into his work. In fact, he became a good friend of mine for many years to come, and even contributed to my college education, which was a wonderful gift.

(04:16) Now, he met Wilhelm Reich, when Reich had a facility in Maine and was doing research on orgone energy, and professor Mann even built orgone accumulators and began experimenting with them. There's a very exotic literature about it. I think there's a Journal of Orgonomy. People still practice Reichian methods today, and have this journal. It gets quite extensive, because Reich believed that the orgone energy, which was like the life energy of the body, also permeated the entire universe. And amongst other things he built these devices he called 'cloudbusters', which he felt would project orgone energy into the sky and could control the weather. And furthermore, he felt that using these cloudbusters he could summon, occasionally, UFOs.

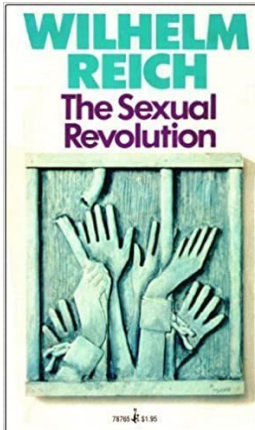


(05:15) So Reich is doing all of that, and in addition, using the orgone energy accumulators as a cure for cancer. Well, the American Medical Association couldn't put up with all of this, and they attacked him severely, and as a result of that he was, as I say, arrested and put into prison. He died there in 1957. At the time of his death, he believed that President Eisenhower was going to recognize his greatness and release him from prison. Now, I can say today, people do recognize his greatness. In fact he's been an enormous cultural figure.

(06:01) One of the things that he wrote about is the sexual orgasm. He felt that sexual orgasm itself is a way of releasing the muscular armoring associated with our psychological defense mechanisms, but that if that muscular armoring is too strong then one doesn't get to fully appreciate the pleasure and the beauty of an orgasm. He also wrote an important book called *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, in which he identified sexual repression and muscular armoring as the root of authoritarian fascist governments. And of course, he was born in Ukraine. I think he moved to Austria for a while. He traveled to the United States in 1939 to escape the Nazis. That's when he began developing his theories of orgone energy.



(07:02) Now in the 1960s – some of you may recall or know from your study of history – there were student riots in Paris, and there were communes of students in Paris, and they were fascinated by the work of Wilhelm Reich. It's reported that during these riots they had copies of Reich's book, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, and were throwing them, hurling them at the police. It was an era where people promoted the idea of free love, and there were communes based on Reich's philosophy that did promote the notion of free love. It is liberating oneself completely from the restrictions of sexual repression – in the Victorian Era-style – sexual repression and muscular armoring, as a way of opening oneself up to higher ways of being.



(08:02) Now, my friend Ted Mann in his wonderful book – I still think it's one of the best books ever written on Reich, *Orgone, Reich & Eros* – compared orgone energy to some of the Asian concepts of qi, ch'i, prana energy, and also compared the idea of muscular blockages, muscular armoring, to some of the notions you get in, say, Kundalini Yoga, where they talk about the "koshas", or energy fields of the subtle body, prana, for example, traveling through the body and nadis, or sometimes acupuncture lines, and he felt that what Reich was doing was in many ways parallel to this work.

(08:58) I think it's fair to say that the Asian notions of prana, qi and chi, also relate the life energy of the body to the energy of the cosmos as a whole. Reich felt that the galaxies – you know, spiral structure of the galaxies – were held together by orgone energy. It's still very mysterious. There are, as I say, people who are proponents today. There is also a dark side. There is what some people call negative orgone energy that can be very harmful, that using these cloudbusters sometimes the negative orgone energy would cause trees to wither and die by accident.

(09:43) So, it suggests a whole vast arena of phenomena that have been researched by a small clique of people, and it's not well understood. It's not at all integrated into mainstream science. I'm of the opinion however, that when it comes to the unfolding of your own natural psychic and intuitive abilities, bodywork is very important. Letting go of muscular armoring, letting energy flow through the body. So I advocate massages, I advocate hot tubs, I advocate yoga. Whatever you can do on the physical level to help the energy flow smoothly through your body is going to be beneficial on many, many levels. It's always interesting to think about the important role that this misunderstood man – and perhaps legitimately a paranoid schizophrenic man, but also a great genius – has bequeathed to us. And I'll leave you with that thought. Thank you for being with me. (10:57)

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