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Intimations of a Spiritual New Age: II. Wilhelm Reich as Transpersonal Psychologist Part I: Context, Development, and Crisis in Reich's Bio-energetic Spiritual Psychology

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Wilhelm Reich is the focus of this second in a series of papers on a group of independent figures from the 1930s into the 1950s—also including Jung, the later Heidegger, Toynbee, Bergson, Teilhard de Chardin, and Simone Weil—who in the context of those years of crisis articulated overlapping visions of a future “New Age” spirituality that might in some more distant future serve to balance and even transform a globalizing materialism and disenchantment with traditional religion. The later Reich developed a highly original version of a “vitalistic” transpersonal psychology, as his “religion for the children of the future,” which needs to be differentiated from its more doubtful supportive research in his orgone physics and biology. The spiritual nature of his larger intuitions of a transformative life energy is also reflected in the parallels between Reich's personal development and the classical purgation/illumination phases of unitive mysticism, and the “spiritual emergency” of his final “dark night” crisis. A later paper will concentrate on largely unrealized implications of Reich's work for still evolving directions in consciousness studies, neo-shamanism, the historical Jesus, emergent systems approaches in science, and a future planetary identity.

Keywords: *New Age, globalization, this-worldly mysticism, vitalism, orgasmic potency, character analysis, vegetotherapy/bio-energetics, bions, orgone energy, streaming, accumulator, dark night of the soul, meta-pathology, creativity/psychoticism, schizoid dilemma*

This paper is part of a series (see Hunt, 2017) based on a group of independent figures, who, during the Western crisis years from the world war intimations of the 1930s through the coming of the atomic age in the 1950s, produced multiple, mutually reinforcing intuitions of a future planetary wide “New Age” spirituality. This was understood as necessary for the renewal of a sense of purpose and value for a globalizing humanity having suffered the loss of traditional belief, yet increasingly forced together by an historically unprecedented materialist, capitalist economy.

Key figures in these futural intuitions include macro-historians like Toynbee (1956) and Teilhard de Chardin (1959), the spiritual-existential philosophy of the later Heidegger

(1938/2012), along with essentialized versions of Christianity (Weil, 1947/2002) and Eastern thought (Krishnamurti (1973/1987), and several predecessors to what in this context can be seen as our present transpersonal era of more specific focus on psychedelics, meditation, shamanism, and consciousness studies. These predecessors would include Gurdjieff (1975), Jung (1961), and here Wilhelm Reich—still a figure of major scientific and personal controversy. In what follows, Part I will concentrate on Reich's original anticipation of a transpersonal psychology, and its collision with the spiritual meta-pathologies, and more severe psychotic-like inversions, so often occasioned by more secularized approaches to numinous-ecstatic experience—outside the relative safety

nets of traditional religions—and reflecting what Jung, Heidegger, and the sociologist Max Weber (1922/1963) saw as the crisis of meaning in modernity. Part II, in a separate paper, will focus on the positive implications of the later Reich for such a New Age spirituality—all this on the premise that these first premonitions of a coming planetary crisis in the value and significance of human life may have seen the furthest ahead in this regard by virtue of both priority and sheer originality.

Some New Age Premonitions

The historian Arnold Toynbee (1957), for instance, had the welcome audacity to argue for the future inevitability of a spiritual New Age suitable for, and compensatory of, the materialist economic globalization to come. He based this on his conclusion that the actual “point” of the previous “universalized states” of the Hellenistic era, Romanized Mediterranean, and earlier Near East, China, and India was the final production by their “creative minorities” of our present major world religions and spiritual traditions—with, one can add, the common attempts of their mystical centers to re-constitute more abstract versions of an originary world-wide shamanism of visionary trance, metaphoric mythologies of nature, and spiritual healing (Walsh, 2007; Eliade, 1964; Hunt, 2003). Toynbee (1957) himself saw the basis for such a re-newed spirituality, for an increasingly sensate age to come, in Henri Bergson’s (1935/1956) neo-vitalist understanding of mystical and visionary states as the amplification of a “life energy” that fully felt becomes a sacred unity of all life. It is something very like Bergson’s vision, as in turn influenced by the life-philosophy of Nietzsche (1888/1967; Heidegger, 1939/2016), that the later Reich will develop and specify.

Certainly Teilhard de Chardin (1959), with his related anticipation of an essentialized Christianity based on a sacred incarnation of spirit in all life, had already anticipated the contemporary re-tribalizing counter-reaction against economic globalization in the form of renewed ethnic and religious regionalisms on increasing display, and which would put further forward his spiritual New Age. Yet Toynbee’s prediction of an inevitably re-

newed version of the “axial age” of earlier religious generation, and Heidegger’s (1940/2015) “new beginning” and “last god,” will seem less extreme in light of current psychologies of numinous-spiritual experience as intrinsic to human intelligence, rather than as some evolutionary/primitive residual (Hunt, 2016). Research on the experience of awe and wonder (Shiota, Keltner, & Mossman, 2007) show it to be central to the human sense of novelty and creativity and a major source of a communal altruism with others. The capacity for numinous experience can be understood as the major life span impetus past the emotional egocentricity of early adulthood into an abstract social-personal intelligence (Hunt, 1995b, 2003, 2016). Accordingly the question is less the eventual necessity for some globalized spiritual re-newal, than the form it might take.

Here it is possible to make use of the long standing typology of world religions of Max Weber (1922/1963) and Ernst Troeltsch (1931/1960), who distinguish between the more individual and experientially oriented mystical traditions most developed in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and the more communal ethically centered traditions of propheticism, as in classical Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—with each form also having its minority representation within the other. In addition, Weber and Troeltsch distinguished within both mysticism and propheticism a more “inner worldly” or “immanent” orientation towards a spiritual practice centered within a valued everyday social reality and an “other worldly” more “transcendent” attitude, leading to withdrawal into “virtuoso” practices and special communities. As summarized in more detail in Hunt (2003), short of the extreme class inequalities and societal crises that have historically inclined to fundamentalist propheticisms, one would predict that the spread of economic capitalism, with its individualizing and competitive values, will continue to lead towards the mystical/meditative orientations already central to Jungian and transpersonal studies. Meanwhile the sensate/material values that follow from both a consumer economy and the world-wide secularization of traditional religious values (certainly heralded by Nietzsche’s critique), would

predispose to an inner- or this-worldly orientation for any such widespread mystical renewal.

Even the dystopian global future envisioned by the futurist Harari (2015) and the philosophers Deleuze and Guattari (1972/2009), in which a technological elite sustains a large surplus population disenfranchized by automation and artificial intelligence, would, in its isolating effects, and while producing a schizophrenogenic alienation and drug addicted despair in many, also energize its own “creative minority” of neo-shamanic, psychedelic, and meditative explorations. Indeed Deleuze and Guattari saw Reich’s sensate spirituality of a sacred and *sui generis* “life force” of vitality and aliveness as one such pathway forward. Reich’s published diaries (1988, 1994, 1999, 2012) will show his own long struggle between a sense of contactful vitality, a life energy of personal presence anticipating Maslow (1962) on peak experience and self-actualization, and an isolated despair and disconnection from life and cosmos.

The Conceptual Background for Reich’s Transpersonal Psychology of Life Energy

The larger place of Reich’s bio-energetic psychology in a potential New Age this-worldly spirituality can be seen in the contrast between the recent macrosociologies of Rifkin (2009) in his *The Empathic Civilization*, on the 20th century development of human empathy, and Harari’s (2015) darker portrayal in *Homo Deus* of the global implications of an “artificial” 21st century technology. On the one hand, Rifkin summarizes our unprecedented increase in understanding of the nature and importance of empathy and relational understanding, reflected in 1) the awareness of infants as feeling, sensitive beings, 2) the development of psychotherapy and an existential-phenomenology of deep empathy for all forms of human experience, 3) an acceptance of sexuality and sexual freedom as intrinsic to personal well-being, 4) social-democratic values of individual liberty, equality of opportunity, and rejection of economic oppression, 5) a shared fraternity with all living beings, and concern for the natural ecology necessary for their sustainability,

6) the intrinsic valuation of physical nature, extending from Thoreau (1854/1982) to Lovelock’s (2009) Gaia hypothesis, and 7) the beginnings of a global digitally based communality and social connectivity. It is striking to realize that Reich made major contributions to all but the last of these developments.

On the other hand, Harari (2015) foresees the globalizing opposite of Rifkin’s empathy in the progressive replacement of much human functioning by more efficient “artificial intelligence” and automated “expert systems.” While this would leave an economically surplus population absorbed in substitute virtual realities, it creates a technologically sophisticated managerial elite cultivating a “new Prometheism” of enhanced longevity, hybrid digitalized brain augmentation, and widely shared versions of what are most probably fantasies of an artificial immortality based on consciousness “uploading” into silicon substitutes for carbon based life. Certainly a current artificial intelligence ideology understands consciousness and life as purely computational algorithms finally and more efficiently translatable into artificial systems simulating and improving on their natural forms—culminating in recent fantasies of a future “singularity” in which artificial systems would somehow replace and dominate human control (Chalmers, 2010).

For Harari, without some re-sacralizing of the uniqueness and intrinsic value of humanity, life in general, and natural ecology—the very “is like” of all consciousness—there is the danger of our collective loss of the existential reality of being human and of the essence of what it is to be alive. Who better saw this than Wilhelm Reich—with his still earlier distrust of the potential reach of “mechanism”—scientifically and socially—and his holistic intuition of a force of aliveness and felt being as the naturalistic source of his “religion for the children of the future” (Reich, 1953, p. 197; 1999, p. 360)?

To return then to Toynbee’s (1957) related intuition of a New Age spirituality, integrating science and a naturalistically understood religion based on Bergson’s (1907/1944; 1935/1956) *sui generis* and non reducible *élan vital*: Bergson

understood this life energy as latent within the physical universe, emerging as the “lived time” consciousness of motile creatures, and most fully realized in the mystical core of the world religions (Barnard, 2011). It remains to see how Reich would end with much the same view, but starting from the more materialist ambition of physically measuring Freud’s libido, or sexually based “psychic energy,” usually seen as the most mechanistic and reductionist aspect of psychoanalysis.

Reich would eventually follow his own version of the path already taken by Jung, who also initially cited Bergson in opting for a more universalized psychic energy (Addison, 2016; Jung, 1948/1960). For Jung this was open to direct experience as the *tremendum* or sacred power aspect of Rudolf Otto’s (1917/1958) phenomenology of the numinous—its *mysterium* aspect being centered more around awe and wonder. For Jung the concept of a generalized psychic energy, which would include but not be limited to sexuality, was a naturalistic version of Polynesian *mana* or Native American *wakonda*—a cosmic energy felt both within and without as a unitive mysticism. Reich would arrive more gradually at a life force, his orgone energy, understood more broadly than his earlier concentration on orgasmic potency, and manifested within as the bodily “streaming” sensations he already knew to be similar to Tantric practices, and without as a cosmic orgone he saw as the naturalistic basis for Chinese *chi* and Indian *prana* (1942; 1949/1975).

Reich’s path here will make more sense if one takes Freud’s psychoanalysis as primarily a descriptive psychology of understanding rather than of any purported causal explanation (Maslow, 1966; Hunt, 2003). Then Freud’s “economic” or “quantitative” language of libido can be seen as his unacknowledged crypto-phenomenology of consciousness—of the flow, pulsation, and expansion/contraction of “feeling” (Zepf, 2016), “felt meaning” (Hunt, 2014), or expressive “forms of vitality” (Stern 2010). It is Freud’s energy language that actually offers a potential bridge between the interpersonal “object-relational” perspective of contemporary psychoanalysis and a genuine transpersonal psychology—a point also

clear to Almaas (1986). Keeping in mind the view of psychosis as the conflicted inversion of mystical states, it was this language of libidinal energy that Freud (1914/1959; 1915/1959) used to describe schizophrenia as the withdrawal of libidinal cathexis into primary narcissism, *thanatos* as a primal energy dissolution, and what he took as the regressive withdrawal into the “oceanic sensation” of mysticism. It was this economic or energy language that he used to describe delusional states in his case of Schreber (Freud, 1911/1959). It is also Freud’s only terminology for normal consciousness, in terms of its “anti-cathexis” of felt resistance, and the “hyper-cathexis” that was the cross-modal integration of the senses later central to Gendlin on “felt meaning” (Gendlin, 1978; Hunt, 1995)—and its ecstatic vitalization in Reich’s “streaming.”

The later Reich’s Bergsonian/Nietzschean expansion of Freud’s libido was inevitable, as also for Jung, if they wanted an experiential psychology of transpersonal experience—and its psychotic inversions—derived from a previous psychodynamics.

An Overview of Reich’s Life and Work:

Complexities and Tragedy of a 20th Century Life

Reich’s life (1897–1957) begins and ends in personal tragedy. Growing up in a secularized Jewish family on his father’s farming estate in Eastern Austria, he was precociously aroused sexually by the age of eleven through the discovery of his idolized mother’s multiple affairs with his tutors, only to suffer her suicide after he finally informs his rather brutal father. The guilt stricken father then neglects his health and dies when Reich is seventeen (Reich, 1988; Sharaf, 1983).

Reich died of heart failure in a United States penitentiary after ignoring FDA court injunctions against his orgone accumulator research, preceded by court ordered burning of his books, years of increasing controversy and isolation, a growing alcoholism, and varying degrees, still debated, of a delusional paranoia.

In between there is an immensely creative life of a personal, professional, and collective search for reparation and redemption—reflected in his psychoanalytic work on the capacity for

orgasm, sexual health and liberation, and its integration with Marxist political reform and sex education, leading into his highly original invention of bio-energetic therapy and his formulations of orgone energy. It was the application of his controversial orgone accumulator research to the psychosomatic research on cancer that would trigger his governmental prosecution. His final years saw his attempt to apply a speculative orgone physics to atmospheric research in the context of his alarm over the dangers of a dawning atomic age, UFOs, and his premonitions of a coming planetary ecological crisis. The larger context of all this was to champion a sacredness of life itself and the individual human potential for a sense of vital presence, contactfulness, and personal freedom—very much anticipating Maslow (1962) on self-actualization. Meanwhile the radicalness of these successive developments, complicated by his own reactivities, meant the continuous shedding of followers with each new step, such that he could finally only console himself that he was preparing a naturalistic religion, his “new religion of life,” for a more distant “children of the future” (Reich, 1953, p. 197; 1999, p. 360).

There are striking ironies that will run through this inevitably condensed overview to follow, and which must substitute here for the more extensive treatments of Reich by Sharaf (1983) and his second wife Ilse Ollendorff Reich (1969). First, there is the radicalness of his attempt to fuse psychoanalysis and Marxism as movements of liberation, along with the strikingly egalitarian and open relationship with his early followers, juxtaposed against the later authoritarianism of his behavior at Orgonon, his rural Maine institute, where he returns to the earlier bullying and intimidation of his father. Then there is the giftedness of his capacity for natural and empathic observation applied both to his bio-energetic therapy and the forms of physical nature, juxtaposed with what have seemed to many as the pseudo-mechanisms of his orgone accumulator and cloudbuster, especially given their ultimately uncertain relation to his larger intuition of a cosmic or unitive energy that was to be the naturalistic source of traditional notions of God. Finally, and more tragically, there is the

government prosecution for medical quackery and final death in prison, contrasted not only with his obvious sincerity but with his repeated ignoring, in the name of scientific and personal freedom, of the legal advice that would have prevented the worst of this—his martyr-like identification with Socrates, Galileo, and Jesus in *The Murder of Christ* (1953) to the point where he was so treated.

In the 1920s Reich was the charismatic rising star of psychoanalysis, strongly supported by Freud for the originality of his technical training seminar on therapeutic resistance analysis—and widely appreciated by the younger analysts for his empathy, creativity, and enthusiasm.

Although Freud himself remained critical of Reich’s phenomenology of full orgasmic genitality as causally curative, even Erik Erikson (1963) would later concede that Reich’s preoccupation with client sexual experience will provide a deep reflection of larger character issues. Freud’s reservations grew by the late 1920s, following Reich’s sudden political radicalization from his personal witnessing of the worker riots of Vienna and their “machine-like” government suppression (Reich, 1976). Reich soon began his theoretical attempts to unify psychoanalysis and Marxism as conjoined movements of liberation, to be followed on the practical level by a movement for sexual education and liberation. This became Reich’s Sex-Pol movement, equally upsetting in the end to both the more cautious Freud and to Reich’s fellow communist party members—with Reich (1967, 1976) later recalling as one of the high points of his life addressing rallies of up to 10,000 in early 1930s Berlin. His travelling clinics sought to make birth control, abortion, and free therapeutic counselling widely available to the working classes. For the orthodox of both movements this all seemed a dangerous distraction, while Reich, in what some close to him saw as a “true believer” extremism, saw only their fear of an authentic freedom.

Meanwhile during these same years into the 1930s Reich was also developing his highly original “character analytic” therapy, based on the entirety of the clients’ expressive mannerisms, gestures, and bodily postures, with their rigidities holding back a spontaneous vitality/

contactfulness. This spontaneity would emerge as the “orgasm reflex” he was already describing in terms of inner body sensations of streaming—their spontaneous muscular vibrations, tension releases, and inner feelings of flow and pulsation so similar to the body image transformations in early stages of meditation (Kornfield, 1979). However, to his fellow psychoanalysts these sounded like the body hallucinations of schizophrenia—soon initiating the same diagnostic rumors around Reich that had been earlier applied to Jung (Roazen, 1975; Sharaf, 1983). So perhaps there is some naïveté in Reich’s shock that by 1934 he had been expelled within the same year from both the international orders of psychoanalysis and Marxist communism. There was extreme necessity in his need at that point to escape Nazi arrest over his scathing *Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1946/1970), so that now divorced from his psychoanalyst wife, he ends up forced out of Denmark, then Sweden, and finally settling in Norway.

There, by the mid 1930s he has established his own small, now avowedly non-political, organization, still with the same egalitarian atmosphere of trust and spontaneous openness with co-workers. On the one hand, he develops his character analysis into a modern bio-energetic therapy, which he termed “vegetotherapy”—in the sense of the then term for the autonomic nervous system regulating the muscle tension, breathing, and the manual pressures with which he now worked directly as a “hands on healing.” This would evolve into his seven segment “body armor,” from eyes to pelvis, not only corresponding to Tantric chakras, but potentially in hindsight supporting a psychological basis for a cross-modal “synesthetic” model of their kinesthetic-visual “streamings” (Hunt, 1995). Based on specific techniques for each segment, from eye rolling, gag reflex, and deep breathing, to manual pressure, he now had a “direct therapy” bypassing the relational psychodynamics with which he became increasingly impatient—this perhaps to his own later detriment.

On the other hand, these Norway years saw the beginnings of the biological research that would culminate in such controversy. Reich, as with Freud (1914/1959) and Ferenczi (1933/1968) before,

had been struck by the similarities of the flow, pulsation, and expansion/contraction of feeling states, especially for Reich in sexual orgasm, with the movement patterns of protozoa. Reich began his own microscope research on protozoa at nonorthodox levels of magnification to highlight these form constants of dynamic movement. Then, heating and autoclaving both organic and inorganic compounds, he discovered these same patterns of “life-like” motion in more elementary vesicles he termed “bions.” Negatively charged and capable of being cultured, he found two types of bion—one seeming to help recovery and the other accelerating disease in the cancerous mice he will now study for most of his later life. While in his more careful writings he described the bions as showing life-like processes, at other points his enthusiasm led him to assertions of a spontaneous bio-genesis (Reich, 1938/1979; 1948/1973).¹ His more extreme claims, and his amateur status as a biologist, called forth sharp critiques from the Norwegian biologists he sought out for validation, and these spilled over in the late 1930s into a series of scathing and mocking (“God Reich creates life”) newspaper attacks (Sharaf, 1983).

Something happened here to Reich from which he never recovers. He reacts with feelings of intense rage, shame, and social withdrawal, soon leading to a bitterness, suspiciousness, and demands for total allegiance now directed at his colleagues and co-workers. Their response when he departs for America in 1939, and just ahead of Nazi occupation, was mainly one of relief (Sharaf, 1983).

Things now moved with increasing rapidity, both conceptually and in terms of any tradition of more careful scientific validation. On the one hand, becoming increasingly recognized in New York, the 1940s sees Reich’s writing and re-writing of his major systemic works, moving toward the larger context of the naturalistic spirituality to come—from *The Function of the Orgasm* (1942), *The Cancer Biopathy* (1948/1973), and *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1946/1970) to *Character Analysis* (1949/1961), *Ether God and Devil* (1949/1973), and *Cosmic Superimposition* (1951/1973). Here a life energy, orgone can be felt

both within and without the body as a unitary vital Beingness that is understood as the true source of the world religions.

On the other hand, and as the empirical ground for that larger context, he saw confirmation of his earlier intuition that his bion cultures, with their formative life-like processes, might radiate their own specific energy, thus explaining his dark room observations of eye irritation, prickly tactile sensation, and especially the flowing and flickering arcs of blue-violet light already reminding him of the similar motions of lightning, the Northern Lights, flowing water—and still later the spiral structures of galaxies. His “accumulators,” with successive organic and inorganic sides that might both attract and disperse this energy, seemed to intensify the visual effects *and* show small elevations in temperature—soon extended to related electroscope and vacuum tube effects. It is when he also finds these same measurement differences in control accumulators without bion cultures—all since multiply replicated (DeMeo, 2009; Mann, 1973; Muschonich & Gabauer, 1987; Sharaf, 1983)—that he concludes, rightly or wrongly, that he *is* actually measuring the more general cosmic life energy he now calls orgone.² By the mid 1940s, after an abortive attempt to interest Einstein in his findings (Reich, 1953), Reich is using larger accumulators to accelerate healing in both psychotherapy and, on an exploratory basis, with a small number of terminal cancer patients. It is this work that in 1947 comes to the attention of the FDA, based on a series of critical/mocking articles seemingly instigated by other emigre psychoanalysts who resented any possible association with the still notorious “revolutionary” (Sharaf, 1983).

Already more formal and distanced, even arrogantly so, with his co-workers and laboratory assistants, Reich responds to the steadily intensifying pressures of government investigation and threats of imprisonment with an intensification of his Norway newspaper rages and increasingly delusional suspicions and jealousies that fewer and fewer could endure. He writes anguished letters to multiple government agencies, Eleanor Roosevelt, and even President Eisenhower, both to forestall the FDA with more powerful interventions and because

of his growing intuition that this “energy of life” might be a possible antidote to the death energy of atomic radiation. The final disaster to his institute, driving away most of his remaining associates, is the Oranur crisis of 1951—in which an ostensible interaction between the orgone accumulator and a small amount of radium triggered elevated geiger counter levels and group symptoms of collective panic, nausea and dizziness, and physical weakness (Reich, 1951). Reich himself was already in crisis, shortly to have his first major heart attack, and in hindsight the entire episode may have been more of a mass panic fatefully coincident with both a major flu epidemic in the area and actually elevated radiation levels in Maine newspaper accounts attributed to the atmospheric effects of Nevada atomic testing (Ollendorff, 1969; Wilson, 1981).

Reich’s physical research, the intended empirical context for his naturalistic spiritual psychology and which was already completed before the Oranur crisis, now took on a more desperate, even slapdash quality. Reich became convinced that the grounds of Orgonon were temporarily not habitable, with a stagnation and bleakness in the atmosphere that he attributed to a more general Deadly Orgone Energy (DOR), along with its continued feelings of dizziness, dread, and emotional deadness. He adapts the accumulator principle to the hollow tubes of his “cloudbuster” in an attempt to de-toxify the effects of Oranur and dissipate the deadness of atmosphere he is also starting to link to local soil erosion and forest decay. Observing cloudbuster effects on cloud formation and weather, he set about the attempts at weather control that were actually favorably reported in the Maine newspapers of the day. Then, having just read an early book on UFOs, he became convinced that his cloudbuster operations were somehow interacting with them, and that the UFOs may have something to do with what he fears as a planet wide process of desertification. With court injunctions pending, this leads to his Tucson expedition of 1954/1955 where a radium enhanced cloudbuster seems to produce a re-vivification of the desert landscape, and his small group observes the seemingly avoidant behavior

of several sighted UFOs. Reich will henceforth interpret airforce planes flying overhead, in Tucson and Maine as signs of secret support on the part of Eisenhower (Reich, 1951, 1954, 1955, 1957).

Even in this most clearly delusional and personally desperate phase of Reich's career, it is striking how he has continued to intuit themes still of major futural relevance. His observations of increasing desertification, ground erosion, and forest and wild life depletion show a sensitivity to the planetary wide ecological destruction soon to be documented in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Meanwhile, it may well be that the sort of planetary consciousness and concern for all humanity exemplified in his "space man" preoccupations also reflects something of the level of discourse appropriate to the continuing planetary dangers of atomic warfare and the mass destruction threatened by man-made climate change. Orgone and Deadly Orgone then become more his dramatic externalizations of a larger sense of planetary responsibility and moral choice. In that sense, Reich was indeed seeing very far ahead.

Two final points on Reich's physical research: First, it has a very different status than his earlier separate mastery of the existing disciplines of psycho-analysis and Marxist theory, which had allowed him the genuine creativity of their further development. In his biological and physical research he was necessarily an amateur, and his studies begin so to speak in "midair," with no relation to existing research traditions. They will also lack the careful control and replication studies that he had come to dismiss as "mechanistic" science in favor of a more open ended observational capacity. Second, and crucial for this larger consideration of Reich as transpersonal psychologist, the relation between his physical research and his spirituality of a cosmic life energy was and remained indirect, always first guided by his experiential sensitivities and intuition.

As early as 1933, Erik Erikson (Evans, 1969), who greatly respected Reich's psychotherapy, described Reich as speaking of the same radiating blue energy between the stars of a clear night sky and between couples in love. The concept of a free life-like atmospheric energy came first

from the flowing imagery he saw in the dark room.³ The northern lights and their similarity to "streaming" sensations in clients later led to a cosmic orgone, and his cloudbuster work followed hours spent outside observing wind and weather. The measurement work comes later, more as post hoc support and illustration than any experimental proof. He described his overall system as an "abstract animism" (Reich, 1942, 1949/1973) in which a fully felt vital embodiment of an energetic flow—linked to orgasmic and ecstatic bliss—comes to merge with these same patterns in physical nature as a unitive consciousness. Despite Reich's driven concern with a scientific grounding for his orgone physics, the system resonates more promisingly, and not accidently in terms of its actual inspiration, with the nature mysticism of an Emerson (1836/1963) or Thoreau (1954/1982). It will emerge in Part II as its own kind of abstract neo-shamanism.

Reich as Transpersonal Psychologist

Reich's engagement of his own version of a secular, this-worldly psychology of spirituality unfolds on theoretical, empirical, and very very personal levels.

An Original This-Worldly Mysticism

Reich's fully developed system is an original anticipation of transpersonal psychology. The experience of orgone energy is understood as the numinous source of the world religions. The Ether of modern physics Reich saw as its secular mechanization, while the traditional concept of God was its metaphysical projection.

All true religion corresponds to the cosmic, "oceanic"... bexperience of a unity with an omnipresent power, and simultaneously of temporary, painful separation from this power. The eternal longing for return to one's origin ... , for being embraced again by "the eternal," pervades all human longing. It is at the roots of man's great intellectual and artistic creations, ... it pervades all great goals of social organization Such ideas as "sin" have their origin in an attempt to explain the separation. (Reich, 1949/1973, p. 121)

One finds here all of Otto's (1917/1958) dimensions of the numinous—the *mysterium* as awe and wonder, the *tremendum* as its power and energy, and moral dependency, humility, and “creature feeling” at our sense of separation from that unity. Reich understands Freud's “oceanic feeling” not as regression but as our inner attunement to a cosmic orgone energy. Where the traditional religious mystic projects this core experience onto a supernatural “beyond,” the more fragile sense of self in schizophrenia, as Jung (1928/1960) also held, is overwhelmed by it (Reich, 1949/1961).

In terms of Weber's (1922/1963) typology of world religions, Reich's system is a “sensate” or “inner worldly” mysticism.⁴ It is mystical, in contrast to the ethical dualisms of the prophetic traditions (and Reich's own earlier Marxism) because it posits a directly transformative experience of “organ sensation” and its larger cosmic resonance (Raknes, 1970). It is “this-worldly” or “sensate” in its concentration on a more personal and bodily energization, his orgasmic potency, characterized as a simultaneous experiential vitality and a “giving” contactfulness with others—a more abstract amplification of his early phenomenology of sexual orgasm (Reich, 1942, 1949, 1961). It is closely related to Almaas (1988) on “personal essence” and Maslow (1962) on “self-actualization,” as the synthesis of a vital autonomy and loving empathy. Reich's description of inner streaming sensations, descending from head to pelvis, is reminiscent of Almaas (1986) and Gurdjieff (1975) on the experience of vital presence as the inner bodily descent of a living liquid flow.

Of Laski's (1961) three forms of unitive mysticism; mysticisms of love, as in St. John of the Cross and Mahayana Buddhism, mysticisms of knowledge, as in Plotinus and Vedanta, and mysticisms of energy, as in Tantrism, Taoism, and shamanic empowerment, the main emphasis of Reich's orgone is towards the latter—fused with his earlier template of sexual love. Both Almaas (2017) and Krishnamurti (1973/1987) see the valuative aspect of numinous energy as one of freedom—certainly reflected in Reich's lifelong concerns with sexual and social liberation. In addition, the various qualities of essential freedom—for Almaas

(2017) an aliveness, spontaneity, effluence of feeling, creative brilliancy, and capacity for joy—were characteristic of Reich himself, at his best at least, and of his understanding of self realization as vitality/contactfulness.

Almaas and Krishnamurti also suggest that the spiritual meta-pathology of the freedom dimension, reacting against its pure openness, can be a defensive reification and over-specification—for Krishnamurti (1973/1987) a trying to “measure the immeasurable” where a fuller “allowing” would have been too overwhelming. This becomes especially relevant for any contemporary reconsideration of Reich's preoccupation with his accumulator and cloudbuster research. Since orgone was ultimately “impalpable,” just how necessary might that really have been for his “religion for the children of the future?”

Purgation, Illumination, and Dark Night in Reich's Spiritual Development

Perhaps the best case for Reich's inner development as transpersonal realization comes from its close fit with Evelyn Underhill (1955) and Edith Stein (2002) on the classic path of Christian mysticism. They described successive phases of purgation/suffering followed by expansive visionary illuminations, these alternating phases on the way toward a unitive realization that may or may not be interrupted by a penultimate Dark Night of the Soul. Indeed both Simone Weil (2002) and contemporary research (Taylor, 2013) find life crisis to be the most frequent setting for spontaneous ecstasy and peak experience. Reich's life shows successive cycles of this suffering and illumination, culminating in the Dark Night of his last years.

For Underhill and Stein the phases of illumination gradually move toward the more abstract and subtle phases of realization that St. John of the Cross termed “contemplative.” Here intuited meanings become nonconceptual, ineffable, and indeed incomprehensible in ordinary language and image. It is this nonconceptuality of the all-encompassing that can usher in St. John's “Dark Night of the Soul”—with its loss of all the meaning held within one's previous more concrete illuminations, and so leading to a sense

of abandonment by God. The experience has become so palpable that, while it erases and replaces all previous realizations, it is too subtle to be recognized yet in its own right.

[This] divine wisdom is so sublime it exceeds the abilities of the soul ... and[its] natural understanding is overwhelmed and extinguished. (Stein, 2002, p. 124)

The result is “nothing.”

For both Underhill (1955) and the psychoanalyst W. R. Bion (1965, 1970), in his original approach to mystical experience, the dilemma here becomes how to be and embody in the fullness of the moment what has previously been known and envisioned, but not *been*—in Bion’s terms how to *be* the “formless infinite.” That will require a surrender of self, of our normative egocentricity: a “more drastic purgation of the very shrine of the self: that ‘heart’ which is the seat of personality” (Underhill, 1955, p. 388). Such a surrender and opening to the felt emptiness is only possible with a radical sense of humility. Where that degree of openness is not yet possible there can only be Stein’s “affliction” and “torment” of the Dark Night—with its sense of emptiness, emotional aridity, and a devastating aloneness.⁵ The personal soul must remain in this condition:

until it becomes so delicate, simple, and refined that it can be one with the Spirit of God. (Stein, 2002, p. 126)

Wilhelm Reich could intuit an all-encompassing cosmic orgone, but, held within an increasing personal affliction, not *become* it.

A partial comparison comes from Mother Teresa. Her posthumously published letters to her confessor (Teresa & Kolodiejchuk, 2007) describe how, around the beginning of her increasingly prominent charity work, her previous illuminative visions were replaced by a Dark Night of “dryness,” “abandonment,” and “loneliness”:

I am told God loves me—and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul There is such a terrible darkness within me, as if everything was dead—no faith—no love. (p. 187)

Then after many years there was a release:

A deep joy ... I have come to love the darkness For I believe now it is a part of Jesus’ darkness and pain on earth ... that he wants to go through it with me ... I surrender myself to him. (Teresa & Kolodiejchuk, 2007, p. 214)

One is left to wonder if her growing fame and recognition had unintentionally held in place a more specific identity and limiting sense of self.

More extremely for St. John of the Cross (Stein, 2002) this more typical Dark Night account can pass over into something more overtly “hellish”—an anguish too intense to be endured which Teresa was spared but Reich was not. In contemporary terms it will sound like an extreme form of “spiritual emergency,” with its mix of spirituality and psychotic-like states (Lukoff, 1985; Grof & Grof, 1992). Stein writes of “the souls who go down to hell alive,” with a “destruction of the natural way of understanding” that is “frightful,” and “a substantial darkness that attacks ones very being.” There are “false perceptions” and an indescribable terror and anguish that is “the hell of the next life” (Stein, 2002, pp. 125, 129, 130, 150). This certainly offers its own “phenomenology” of acute psychosis.

The transpersonal psychologies of spiritual emergency developed by W. R. Bion (1965, 1970) and A. H. Almaas (1988) suggest that such barriers to a fuller spiritual opening are often based on earlier developmental trauma. Bion (1967) suggested that the all-pervasiveness of repeated childhood states of confusion and dread are the only life experiences that approach, in their very diffuseness, the similarly all-encompassing realizations of authentic mystical experience. For Bion the re-activation of these early “imagos,” which in the language of Almaas (1988) have remained “unmetabolized,” disturbs and distorts—in psychotic-like fashion—

the potential experience of God as “formless infinite.” They “prevent an ineffable experience by their concreteness and therefore unsuitability to represent the realization” (Bion, 1967, p. 145). The resulting distortions become the spiritual “metapathologies” of Maslow (1971)—grandiosity and inflation, inner isolation and withdrawal, and/or emptiness and despair. In their more extreme form they pass over into the “hellish” and psychotic—and on all levels block surrender and openness.

Returning with this template in mind to Reich, it is striking to find reflections of these cycles of purgation and illumination finally leading toward his intuition of a nondual unity, with that path first distorted in *Dark Night*, and then shattered in the “hell” of his final years.

One can locate a first purgation and awakening of the larger self in Reich’s first major adult life crisis in 1927—his 30th year. It well illustrates Erikson’s (1963) observation that transformative crisis, whether leading one forward or back, will involve the fateful convergence of somatic, personal, and social-economic dimensions. Reich’s brother, his only living relative, had just died of tuberculosis, and Reich’s own early diagnosis necessitated a sanitarium stay. This gave him time to reflect on the growing tensions with Freud and his inner circle over his rejection of *thanatos*/death instinct and his insistence on the directly curative nature of orgasmic potency. His sanitarium stay was followed, within days, by his sudden political radicalization and Marxist conversion on witnessing the violent suppression of worker protests. The result was a sudden sense of renewal, a euphoric vitalization and empowerment, and dedication to a utopian social betterment.⁶ He feels for the first time his sense of responsibility to a unique historical calling. These next years would see his initial observations of the inner “streaming sensations” in himself and clients, and the never forgotten exhilaration and charisma of his Berlin rallies (Sharaf, 1983; Reich, 1967). There is an expansion in sense of self indeed reminiscent of Maslow and Almaas (1988) on “personal essence”—a sensed empowerment, contactful love, creative brilliancy, and joy. In short

it is a conversion experience that would inspire some in his circle and frighten others (Sharaf, 1983).

This era of initial inspiration comes to an abrupt end in the purgative crisis of 1933/1934, with Reich’s near simultaneous expulsion from both the psychoanalytic and Marxist organizations. It had been in their convergence that he had found his expanded mission and identity. The subsequent consolidation that followed his exile and the establishment of his own organization in Norway soon ushered in its own illuminative expansion. These next years see his highly original development of a bio-energetic therapy of vital embodiment, and the sudden beginnings of his bion research—both based on his intuitions of common motion constants—and so energy—extending across human orgasm, protozoan behavior, and the flow and pulsation patterns of all moving organisms. Having hung this first formulation of a general life energy on his bion research, he is personally devastated by the purgative crisis following the 1937 newspaper attacks. A communal enthusiasm gives way to his intense sense of embarrassment and shame, growing social isolation, and first appearance of the rages and suspicions directed at his assistants that would deepen in later years.

Yet whatever the cost, by the early 1940s and relocated to America, there is a further and final illuminative expansion. A cosmic life energy is now everywhere. The same patternings of this energy—its flow and pulsation—are not only reflected in orgasm, inner streaming sensations, and protozoan and bion behavior, but outward into the same streamings in water, wind, northern lights, and galactic spiral structures. His bio-energetic therapy—the inward release of these cosmic patterns—approximates its own version of Indian chakra channels of blissful flow and activation. In short he has intuited and is now authoring an original, naturalistically understood unitive spirituality.

To follow Underhill (1955) and Bion (1965, 1970), Reich’s challenge by the mid 1940s would be how to *be*, *become*, and *embody* that unitive understanding. This is the period, before the FDA inquiries, when his books are increasingly

recognized in liberal psychiatric and political circles. He has become world famous. Yet it is during this time, and unlike Mother Teresa with no idea of what was happening to him, that he enters the Dark Night of a loneliness and desolation. From his diaries of late 1946 and early 1947:

I am completely alone And this despite or because of the breakthrough. This is frightful I am expanding as I withdraw from this pseudo-life. No other earthly human being can understand me. I am clinging to my courage. (Reich, 1999, pp. 362, 386)

As Bion would have suspected, this intensifying sense of aloneness re-evokes the earlier trauma of his parents' deaths. Also from early 1947:

I feel as I did ... thirty five years ago when my parents' fate catapulted me into the vastness of life. How alone and deserted I was in those days, and how little I was aware of it. (Reich, 1999, p. 385)

Blocking the way for Reich's passage through this Dark Night was his growing grandiosity—a defensive narcissism that had replaced an earlier openness to his associates. Repeatedly in the diaries he now identifies himself as a "genius" on the level of a Newton or Kepler. In his angry diatribe *Listen, Little Man*, originally not intended for publication and written in the mid 1940s, his normative "little man" addresses Reich himself:

You have become a great man Other great men say you are a very great man, ranked among the giants of scientific thought. ... In a few years your name will be on all lips [Then comes Reich's answer] You fail to see, little man, that you are driving this man, who ... wants only to help you, from all social life, because ... you've made it unbearable. ... You sow the terrible seed of loneliness in him. (Reich, 1948, pp. 10, 19, 20)

Melanie Klein on Loneliness

The psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1963) discussed two forms of loneliness—resulting from the "depressive" sense of loss and the "schizoid" sense of emptiness—both, one can add, potentially

to be re-evoked in the mystical Dark Night, and both suffered by Reich.⁷ Depressive aloneness carries with it the capacity for grief and guilt, and for Klein, the need to make some form of reparation and reconciliation. Both Storr (1989) and Rank (1932) saw this as a major impetus to creativity. It was central for Reich in both his initial work on sexual liberation as mental health—which would help reconcile his mother's destructive affairs—and later in a universal energy of life and rejection of Freud's *thanatos*—implicitly redeeming his mother's death, and with a final focus on survival of the planet.

Klein's "schizoid" aloneness is a sense of inner emptiness, desolation, and deficiency. It is also entailed in the loss of felt presence in prodromal schizophrenia (Sass, 1998) and the more extreme social withdrawal and anhedonia of chronic psychosis (Landis, 1964). On a higher developmental level it is amplified as the emotional aridity of the classic Dark Night (Hunt, 2007). It is this form of emptiness that has taken over Reich's inner life by the mid 1940s. From 1942:

I am gradually losing interest in human beings I am still struggling against complete indifference to people, and even more I refuse to allow myself to view mankind as a strangely distorted, twisted, miserable mass of plasma. An understanding of the roots of the biological distortion as seen in the human race could be the essence of my scientific work—or might it be madness? It frightens me, it's too much. I do not want the vast loneliness it demands of me. (Reich, 1999, p. 165).

He fears that he must sustain the courage required for his work or risk his own sanity (Reich, 1999, pp. 363–364).

Reich's "Hellish" Dark Night: 1948–1957

Beginning with the FDA investigation into his accumulator work with cancer patients, and growing public attacks, Reich's Dark Night begins to enter the more agitated phase St. John of the Cross termed "hellish"—with its "disturbances of understanding," "false perceptions," "desolation," "anguish and terror." With the Oranur crisis of 1951 his earlier unitive vision breaks in two:

there is now a conflicted dualism of life vs. death, good vs. evil, Orgone vs. DOR. Ever more abrupt leaps in reasoning have led to DOR as the cause of an exteriorized atmospheric bleakness and the “cloudbuster” for its dissipation. The cloudbuster then leads to weather control and the fight against planetary desertification, and finally to UFOs.

Again, this life crisis will run together the somatic, personal, and societal: There is his first heart attack, drinking to blackout, divorce, the desertion and/or driving away of most assistants, visits by government agents, and issues of legal defense (Reich, I., 1969). Meanwhile, his last writings begin to include bizarre anacronisms—HIG’s for “hoodlums in government”—and delusional beliefs—now well past Maslow’s metapathology—that Air Force overflights secretly signal Eisenhower’s support. Although terrified of prison and contemplating suicide, his growing identification with martyrdom in *The Murder of Christ* (1953) has already led him to ignore the legal advice that would have shielded his work. Without the expected legal defense, his books are banned, accumulators destroyed, and he is imprisoned at the age of sixty.

There is, however, a final development in this period of hellish Dark Night—as Reich’s own version of Stein’s (2002) psychotic-like “going to hell alive.” Writing to his young son near the end of his year in prison he says that he is now praying and going to chapel services. Visited by a friend he says, without previous rage, that he has only pity for those who persecuted him, since “they are just sick and unhappy people” (Reich, 2012, p. 243). Asked about his plans after his upcoming parole hearing, “He would be more by himself. He would go the solitary way” (p. 243). This seems reminiscent of the “broken humility” that Weber (1922/1963) saw as necessary to a “this-worldly” mysticism—with its necessary acceptance of the pain of being-in-the-world. It is also what Underhill saw as needed for release from the Dark Night. We cannot know where this might have led, since Reich died of heart failure, alone in his cell, the night before his parole hearing.

For Stein (2002, p. 161) God’s “perfect empathy” for the individual soul is such that he must

honor the “great mystery of personal freedom,” and so withhold Grace until the soul reaches its full acceptance and surrender. Running through Reich’s utter sincerity, there had been the unintended arrogance of his attempt to measure the immeasurable—to “accumulate” the numinous. That, and his defensive grandiosity, only prison could shatter. Here is Stein (2002):

One should renounce all natural knowledge and satisfaction, and all supernatural favours from God, in order to go to meet in dark faith the incomprehensible God himself.
(p. 297)

At the end of his life, Reich may have been about to do this.

Reich’s Inner Struggle:

Impetus and Impact on a Transpersonal Psychology

Reich’s life-long personal suffering, both impetus and barrier to his full realization of a “religion for the children of the future,” is part of the larger dilemma of a genuine creativity. Perhaps echoing W. R. Bion (1967) on spiritual realization as bringing forward personal dynamics of a similar globality/intensity, empirical research on the highly creative shows correlations with mid to high levels of questionnaire measures of psychoticism (Carson et al., 2003; Ludwig, 1995; Michalica & Hunt, 2013), and with the tendency to experience spontaneous mystical/ecstatic states (Ayers et al., 1999; Hunt et al., 2002). Reich’s entire career is an illustration of both sides of this creative dilemma—a bi-valent tendency moving him at once toward transcendence and his fears of disintegration.

It is probably impossible to draw any clear line within Reich’s life and work between the impact of what Maslow and Almaas saw as a spiritual metapathology—exaggerations of personal dynamics that distort realization but do not impact conduct in the world—and the more psychotic-like “spiritual emergency” that distorts both transpersonal experience and social life, and risks something more permanently clinical/diagnostic. Karl Jaspers (1922/1977), one of the originators of existential-phenomenological psychiatry, makes a distinction between creative

figures such as Nietzsche or Van Gogh, where the pressures of incipient psychosis drive but do not distort creative work, and others, where one must include Reich of the 1950s, when psychoticism enters into the work—reflected in the sheer abruptness of his arrival at DOR, cloudbusters, and UFOs. Reich himself was painfully aware of these pressures within, and their complex relation to his earlier creative breakthroughs, not to omit what he knew of the diagnostic opinions of his previous psychoanalytic colleagues:

Describing his shock at the violent suppression of worker protests in 1927:

The first encounter with human irrationality was an immense shock. I can't imagine how I bore it without going mad. ... It was a kind of eschatological experience so frequently encountered in a pathological form in schizophrenia ... a form of psychic illness regularly accompanied by illuminating insight into the irrationalism of social and political mores The difference between the experiences of a schizophrenic and ... a strong creative mind lies in the fact that revolutionary insight develops ... over long periods of time. (Reich, 1976, p. 7)

And later:

If a valid idea cannot find an adequate form of expression, this is an indication of insanity or may induce it. ... I was well aware of my own personal equation which threatened from within I might be a victim of an old insecurity acquired in childhood. (Reich, 1976, p. 119)

Yet even where the final Reich seems to have carried over into delusion, with his galactic warfare, secret protection of Eisenhower, FDA as communist conspiracy, and his:

Am I a spaceman? Do I belong to a new race on earth, bred by men from outer space in embraces with earth women? (Reich, 1957, p. 1)

There is a nuance and variability not usual with clinical paranoia. Thus he places his "spaceman"

comments in the context of one's civil liberties, to believe what one chooses, *and* in the context of a larger planetary identity. Also he could admit when challenged that the FDA investigation might have been more bureaucratic than conspiratorial (Sharaf, 1983, p. 456). He also freely concedes that Freud had been right that his attempt to integrate psychoanalysis and a utopian Marxism had been misconceived—that political revolution could not change fixated character structure (Reich, 1967).

One sees the difficulty for Reich of knowing that influential others view you as insane, while also fearing you might actually become so, yet holding the view—surely veridical—that you are at the least also a creative visionary addressing matters of world-historical significance.

What is consistent through Reich's adult life are the forms of inner dilemma that both drive him forward and later distort. In the mid-1950s a few closest to Reich try to persuade him to seek help from the British object relations therapist Harry Guntrip, who also had a pastoral background (Reich, 1969; Sharaf, 1983). Reich finally declines, concerned about those already destructive rumors, and unsure if his work would be properly understood. Part of the irony here is that the therapeutic traditions that would have been of help, Kohut's (1984) self psychology of narcissism and Guntrip (1968), Fairbairn (1954), and Winnicott (1971) on the deeper schizoid dilemma of an inner emptiness in sense of self, were not only not fully developed at that time, but partly anticipated within Reich's own character analytic therapy. What is clear in Reich's life is what transpersonal psychologists now term "flight to transcendence" (Almaas, 2004) or "spiritual bypass" (Welwood, 2000), in which serious psychodynamic problems are avoided in a premature cultivation of higher states—well illustrated in Reich's increasing distain for his earlier psycho-therapeutic work in favor of moving directly into bio-energetic bodily release and expansive vitalization (Sharaf, 1983).

Running through Reich's adult life is a progressive dilemma in sustaining an inner cohesion in sense of self, what Kohut (1984) would see as a narcissistic vulnerability intensifying with each crisis of non support. Most obviously there

is the increasing sense of grandiosity—"A person like me comes along once every thousand years" (Sharaf, 1983, p. 25)—and the diffuse rages and suspicious jealousies directed at those closest to him. For Kohut narcissistic rage defends against deeper feelings of shame and deficiency. It was a devastating sense of shame, reminding him of his feelings after his mother's death, that led to a more or less permanent social withdrawal and distrust after Norway. There is also the loss of an earlier light hearted humor, what little left becoming mainly sarcastic and bitter (Sharaf, 1983).⁸ That said, it is important to add that Kohut (1985) also sees high levels of creative work, even apart from earlier trauma, as entailing its own narcissistic dilemma, since periods of expansive brilliancy are inevitably followed by fallow periods of felt emptiness and self doubt—which Reich himself describes and for which he would already have little tolerance.

It was the psychoanalytic work of Fairbairn (1954), Guntrip (1968), and Winnicott (1971) that came to best understand these deeper feelings of intense shame, futility, and inner emptiness in terms of a "schizoid dilemma," against which narcissistic grandiosity would defend. It is based on a sense of inner deficiency reflecting a felt lack of "loving recognition" for an initial undefended "true self," which must henceforth be held back and hidden from further injury. While nothing is known of Reich's earliest childhood, there is record of his mother's long term unhappiness, her suicidal shame after her affairs were exposed, and the devastating emptiness Reich felt after her death and his role in her exposure. There may be a reflection of this deeper sense of deficiency in Reich's lifelong fascination with Ibsen's play *Peer Gynt*—the subject of his first psychoanalytic paper (see Reich, 1942). Gynt, after a life of wild escapades and self indulgence, finally returns home, only to be challenged by a figure of death to show if he had ever been truly himself, so as not to be dissolved into nothingness. Gynt finds the question itself unintelligible, but is rescued by his long abandoned wife, who tells him he had always been himself within her faith and love (Ibsen, 1867/1964). It does not seem accidental then that Reich's bio-energetic therapy would anticipate Fairbairn and Winnicott in its concern with the

vitalization of a fully embodied self, in the face of a widely pervasive schizoid inner deadness that Reich, like Fairbairn, saw as endemic in Western culture—with its impersonal, "mechanical" understanding of sexuality and early infant care.

The Jungian analyst Kalsched (2017) shows how a deep wound to this initial sense of a "vital innocent aliveness," while often defensively exteriorized into just the public struggles in which Reich was so often engaged, can only be healed by the more quiet surrender to its inner suffering and sense of loss. This is what Reich may have reached in the silent suffering of his final imprisonment. It would also be this acceptance that could open to the "broken humility" needed to resolve the spiritual crisis of his Dark Night—to *become* the Being he had first intuited.

For W. R. Bion (1962) the schizoid dilemma of a disembodied, deadened self will also involve, as Reich himself saw, just the mechanical thing-like sense of personhood against which he struggled. Bion sees here a kind of "thought disorder" that confuses a thing-intelligence of causality with the empathic person intelligence of feeling and understanding. Here the indifference and implacability of the physical order infiltrates and so distorts alive personhood, which can become especially obvious in the bizarre machinery of paranoid delusions. The result for Bion can be a simultaneous over-abstractness and over-concreteness—reflected in the classic split of mind and body—for Reich "mysticism vs. mechanism"—running through Western thought.⁹ Despite Reich's efforts at a mediating holistic "functionalism," his system suffers this same split. There is at one extreme an abstract and ultimately impalpable cosmic orgone, along with our potential for its self aware transformative experience, and at the other extreme the physical quasi-mechanisms that would "accumulate" and "prove" its concrete existence. Orgone energy—as ultimate nondual unity—is too abstract for such measures, while changes in accumulator temperatures are too concrete to have the significance Reich placed on them. For Bion and Underhill numinous experience can be felt, become, and only indirectly formulated, but not "accumulated."

It is the unresolved issue of this split in Reich's thought (and life) that still stands in the way of his incipient transpersonal psychology as a naturalistic, this-worldly spirituality "for the children of the future." Its further clarification and reconciliation might now have the potential to proceed further in the direction of Reich's essential project.

Conclusion

Reich would have rejected the idea that his primary contribution would become his own version of what is now "transpersonal psychology." The core of his work was to be the grounding in physical science of a spirituality understood as a natural human capacity. While at best indirectly evocative of his notion of a cosmic energy of life, his accumulator and cloudbuster studies gradually became his central—and in hindsight misleading—preoccupation. His insistence on this physical grounding of the transpersonal followed both from his earlier rejection of what he saw as Jung's occultist "mysticism," and as perhaps his ultimate refutation of the accusations of psychosis thrown out by Freud against all of his most creative (and so genuine) followers. Reich's own self doubts in that regard—not withstanding his original contributions to the complex overlap of creativity, psychoticism, and spirituality—could only intensify the anguish of his highly public governmental persecution. A physically measurable orgone would be the final proof of both the truth of his work and his own sanity.

Instead, the observational validity of his larger system can now be seen to rest on the sheer originality of his deeply empathic and carefully observed bio-energetic psychotherapy and his descriptive phenomenology of expansive personal and unitive transpersonal experiences. That ought to be enough.

Part 2 will accordingly attempt a fuller articulation of what remains both valid and promising in Reich's organismic-holistic transpersonalism—outlining its continuing potential for further development and its relevance for what he also foresaw as a New Age spirituality needed to re-sanctify consciousness and life itself.

Notes

1. Strick (2015), in his careful review of the scientific status of Reich's initial bion research, which followed the tradition of a by then supplanted vitalist biology in which he had been trained as a medical student, points to the similarity of the *life-like* behavior of the bions to recent research in astro-biology on what do seem to be transitional forms, similarly midway in size between bacteria and protozoa, between organic and inorganic. Whether it could ever justify Reich's later extrapolations to a general life energy, there was definitely a previously unrecognized there, there.
2. Reich's temperature and electroscope accumulator findings have been replicated by Reicheans and non Reicheans, showing an energy charge akin to static electricity, which Reich insisted was itself an effect of orgone (Sharaf, 1983; Mann, 1973; DeMeo, 2009; Muschonich & Gebauer, 1987). Mann (1973) placed Reich's bio-energetics with related notions of an electro-magnetic bodily field (as also in Becker & Selden, 1985), and cited more recent similar temperature, health, and relaxation effects with artificial negative ion atmospheres—and their similar reaction against external humidity. The accumulator, with its alternating organic and inorganic sides, would be a weak electrical capacitor, blocking any artificial currents, but necessarily admitting a low level background atmospheric radiation (see also Mancic, 2014), potentially interacting with any contained organisms, and similarly affected by larger variations in weather. The scientific problem here is that Reich's broadly replicable results cannot prove his larger orgone hypothesis, since not only do they already presuppose it, but simpler explanations are available.
3. Reich's observations of what he insists are external visual effects in dark room accumulators are strikingly similar to Reichenbach's (1926/1968; Mann, 1973) 19th century observations of blue-violet imagery, seemingly based on the same ultra-violet visual sensitivity that can

develop in prolonged darkness, and which he also ascribed to a universal life-like energy he termed *Od*. For both Reich and Reichenbach only certain “sensitives” could perceive these effects, a sensitivity reminiscent of recent questionnaire research on the trait of “openness to experience,” which predicts not only reports of mystical experience, but a range of spontaneous imagery (McCrae, 1993; Glicksohn & Barrett, 2003)—and which would only be augmented by a sensory deprivation setting. Another aspect of trait openness is enhanced suggestibility (Hilgard, 1968), although to be fair to Reich his research preceded Martin Orne’s (1969) systematic work on the implicit “demand features” of human research. Demand features would be especially expectable, given Reich’s charismatic enthusiasm, in his therapeutic accumulator treatments.

4. Reich always rejected the use of the term “mysticism” owing to what he saw as its connotation of the super-natural, preferring instead “abstract animism” (1942). This seems also due to its earlier associations with Jung and the bizarre Nazi occultisms of the 1930s (Reich, 1946/1970; Hunt, 2003). Reich here reflected widespread concerns in Freudian circles at the time of an affiliation between Jung’s “collective” or “racial” unconscious and National Socialist views on race, as well as Hitler’s cult-like appeal (Reich, 1942, p. 127, 213). Jung (1946/1964) would later have to separate his understanding of a collective archetypal imagination from its “racial” and political mis-use—including his own (see also Hunt, 2003).
5. The demarked suffering of a Dark Night is less obvious in Buddhism and Taoism, where the more impersonal goal of realization is one of formlessness from the beginning, in contrast to the Christian centering on personal soul, specific imagery of the cross, and imitation of Jesus in daily life. Nonetheless, accounts from Buddhist meditation can describe fears of “dying” (Kapleau, 1967) and “deficient emptiness” (Epstein, 1998), and Taoistic sources (Giles, 1959) describe related states of

“absence” from an unconscious clinging to self identity.

6. The seeds for Reich’s social utopianism can be found in the radical egalitarian atmosphere among the troops at the end of World War I, with Reich somehow surviving all four years on the front lines (Reich, 1988).
7. In itself the aloneness of Dark Night is an amplification of an intrinsic existential reality that emerges with the greater self awareness of development in adolescence, to be potentially encountered in traditional coming of age vision quests in traditional societies, and in the initial phases of spiritual realization, as the necessary step toward the “unselfing” of an abstract emotional intelligence (Hunt, 2016). Both Almaas (2017) and Krishnamurti (1973/1987) saw numinous experience as the spontaneous inner “dialogic” response to that emerging sense of self aware adult separateness that has the potential to transcend an earlier egocentrism. Reich had his own understanding of a necessary and intrinsic aloneness that must precede any opening to an answering sense of the sacred. In his diary from 1938:

To be alone is to be suspended in outer space. It means feeling the infinite and making the acquaintance of God. (Reich, 1994, p. 177)

8. The decline in Reich’s relationship with his co-workers and followers can also be understood in terms of Bion (1970, 2013) on the forms of relation between creative leader, or “mystic,” and their respective group—as commensurate, symbiotic, or parasitical. Reich’s development within an already established psychoanalysis allowed an initial “commensurate” give and take between his therapeutic innovations, the younger analysts drawn to him, and Freud’s early approval. Established again as head of his own independent group in Norway, his relations with this group, still egalitarian in spirit within a more definite hierarchy, show a mutually useful “symbiosis.” Once in the United States, however, his attitude has become, indeed to his regret, more formal and even consciously

“parasitic.” In addition to demanding an ever more exaggerated loyalty, he complained:

The more people who come the less they help me personally. (Reich, 1999, p. 349).

They seduce you by admiration ... I have had to destroy one organization after another in order to remain free. (Reich, 1967, p. 35)

Reich’s withdrawal was certainly fueled by his growing sensitivity to the unconscious of those around him—an openness to “projective identification” that neither he nor they would have understood at that time, intensifying a suspiciousness that would either make him appear, or others feel, paranoid. For an example of the more self aware development of such sensitivity and yet its overwhelming intensity in the context of psychotherapy see Searles (1986), and in the context of a contemporary spiritual teaching see Johnson (2018).

9. Bion (1963) made the point that psychoanalytic theory itself, in its struggle to both represent and embody inner personhood, suffers from its own form of this “thought disorder”—perhaps inherent to the necessity of physical metaphor for the representation of consciousness (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Hunt, 1995a). For Bion, in psychoanalysis each of its conceptual levels—an interpretative oedipal complex generalized to all people—and a quasi-physiological “economic” language of energy—are both, and simultaneously, over-abstract and over-concrete.

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