

INTRODUCTION AND CHAPTER 1
from PULSATION: From Wilhelm Reich to Neurodynamic Psychotherapy
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INTRODUCTION

This book collects essays and notes written over a long period, between 1977 and 2011, as I returned in different contexts – a doctoral thesis, two self help books, a book (now split into two) on how we humanly create time in a timeless universe, lectures and talks on the neuropsychology of the emotions – to this book’s core subject, pulsation. The work of Wilhelm Reich has been essential in my study of pulsation, since he first made it definitive of life – although he saw life everywhere in the universe, and I do not. My thinking since 1985 or so when I undertook a deliberate re-evaluation of Reich’s work has been based in my own view of pulsation.

A focus on pulsation can guide a ‘neurodynamic psychotherapy’ such as was first proposed by the grandfather of neuropsychology, Alexander Luria, in 1925 but never realised. With a neuropsychiatrist colleague José Ignacio Xavier I have in recent years formulated an approach to neurodynamic psychotherapy which takes into account current ‘affective neuroscience’ as well as the work of Reich and our own work. But I am sceptical about any model of psychotherapy in which one person is the therapist and the other the patient (or client, or customer). At best the associated ‘transference’ can become friendship or love (raising its own ethical and personal problems) and at worst it can become abuse, control, or to use an inelegant phrase, ‘mind-fucking.’ Since the 1980s when I wrote *Emotional First Aid* and *Couple Dynamics* (discussed in Chapter 7) I have favoured a Do It Yourself / DIY approach in which a person can be his or her own therapist. The word ‘therapy’ is from the ancient Greek word for an attendant, and it can be achieved through a careful attention to oneself. Ideally a person – or perhaps a couple, or a group of friends – can work towards a full experience of life’s core function, pulsation, using books, talks or videos as a guide. It is not necessary to hand oneself over to the power of another.

But here I am referring to healthy people or perhaps the ‘worried well.’ The capacity to pay attention is dependent on neurological intactness. And Reich, referring to a tall story by Baron Munchausen, joked that self-therapy was like pulling oneself out of a swamp by one’s own hair. What about the psychologically or clinically disturbed people who are treated in so-called ‘Mental Health’ services – actually Mental Illness services? Such services use a two pronged approach: one prong is biological psychiatry (i.e. the use of psychotropic medications), and the other is short term psychotherapy, usually Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

CBT is neuropsychologically unsound, since the evidence is that ‘emotion over-rides cognition’, not the other way round, but it is demonstrably effective – in the short term. Just as demonstrably, it has

almost no long term benefit, as public health services are discovering as the demand for more and more psychological therapies escalates – and there is little evidence that these work at all, although some evidence that success depends on the personality and empathy of the therapist. Since the aims of 20th century psychotherapy after Freud and Reich have grandiosely included the goal of changing people – not just helping them in their thinking or feeling – the relative modesty of CBT has at least brought psychotherapy back to earth, so much so that it can be ‘manualised’ and provided by therapists with very little training. And, it must be emphasised, in public health services such as the British NHS, any more complex psychotherapy than the very first stages of CBT is almost always accompanied by the prescription of SSRI anti-depressants. Those messy emotions are unable to over-ride cognition, since they are suppressed. Most 21st century psychologists and counsellors have made a devil’s bargain with psychiatrists.

A devil’s bargain because so-called ‘biological psychiatry’ (so-called because biology is the study of life, and psychotropic drugs damage life) can also demonstrate some short term success, but it not only fails to achieve long term success, it damages people’s brains and creates addiction and cognitive and emotional deterioration. This has most convincingly been documented by Robert Whitaker in *Anatomy of an Epidemic* (2011) but Elliot Valenstein provided similar evidence in *Blaming the Brain* (1988).

This can be summed up in a jingle:

Short term gain,
Long term pain,
Brain drugs destroy the brain.

The process is simple enough: just as prolonged use of a crutch leads to muscle atrophy, so prolonged use of psychotropic drugs leads to the incapacity of the brain to produce the necessary neurotransmitters.

In my work in memory clinics I have seen many MRI scans of people who have been on long term psychotropic medication for schizophrenia or bipolar disorder which show vascular damage although the person has no vascular history, or atrophy (particularly of the frontal lobes which govern executive function, and of the hippocampus which governs memory acquisition) well beyond the expected for age. Oh well, these are brain diseases are they not? Actually not, when they first appear. There is not, originally, even any evidence of the mythical ‘chemical imbalance.’

Over thirty years of evidence have begun to make an impact, and conscientious psychiatrists are beginning to ratchet back their enthusiasm for medication. The eminent J Allan Hobson has even stated, in *Out of its Mind – Psychiatry in Crisis* (2002), that in effect psychiatry must embrace neuroscience or die. He has also mooted the possibility (following Luria) of a neurodynamic psychotherapy. And neurodynamic thinking based on the research of neuroscientists like Jaak Panksepp in *Affective Neuroscience* (1998) and *The Archeology of the Brain* (2012) is coming alive.

It is ironic that what we may now jokingly call ‘Big Pharma’ and the US Food and Drug Agency (FDA) achieved the humiliation and imprisonment of Wilhelm Reich (he died in prison in 1957) for his promotion of the ‘Orgone Accumulator’ which the FDA ‘demonstrated’ was a useless fraud. Whether or not the orgone accumulator worked as Reich thought it did, it is hard to imagine that its use could have caused an epidemic of brain damage.

This book will discuss briefly Reich’s ‘crazy’ ideas about ‘orgone energy’ and ‘life energy’ – insofar as they are related to pulsation – and more extensively his theory of the function of the orgasm. He thought of calling his body-oriented psychotherapy ‘orgasm therapy’, but backed off – understandably, since it implied that the therapist might be giving the patient an orgasm. But even in the anything-goes world of 21st century sexuality (so far), in which every variety of sexual activity is open to discussion, there is a curious lack of focus on orgasm itself. Could it be that what Reich defined as ‘orgasm anxiety’ still exists?

If pulsation is indeed, as Reich thought, the central life function, an understanding of it has much to contribute to our human understanding of life. And whether in neurodynamic or DIY therapy or in medicine it may help distinguish between what is working well – is healthy or whole – and what is not. Again, I have reservations about ‘treatment’ - even in medicine. After all with most of the 25% or so of people who are obese to the point that type 2 diabetes is inevitable (and often leads to brain damage) it proves impossible to persuade them to change their diet or take more exercise. Similarly it is hard to persuade many people with depression to take half an hour’s walk every day – although this has been demonstrated to be more effective, even in the short term, than antidepressants. I doubt if it will ever work to instruct people how to breathe more fully – let alone to undertake some form of pulsation therapy, unless they are drawn to it. This book is not about changing people, but invites them to pay attention to pulsation and their blocks to it, and so to change themselves – if they want to.

I have edited these chapters and made of them as much of a narrative as I can, but no doubt a certain unevenness will remain. This is inevitable. I cannot rewrite my own history or start this study from scratch. Perhaps it is a narrative in the sense that it follows my own discovery of pulsation across more than forty years. Professionally this has been a voyage from Reichian therapy via neuropsychology to a tentative formulation of a neurodynamic psychotherapy. In another book, *Time / No Time*, now a sort of companion to *Pulsation* but originally combined with it in the same huge and unmanageable text, I explore the paradox of time and timelessness in poetry and science. (Several pages in Chapter 2 discussing the distinction of pulsation and pulse-waves are common to both books.) It is the everyday presence of pulsation as evidence of life in a universe which is mainly unalive that interests me, as I hope it interests you. And – who knows?

– perhaps our increased awareness of pulsation in ourselves will constitute a small spontaneous change that may enable us to live more fully.

The first scientist to identify pulsation as a basic life function was the psychiatrist Wilhelm Reich. My psychology PhD dissertation, *Human Pulsation*, 1977, focussed on Reich's theory that the opposing branches of the Autonomic Nervous System mediated alternating expansion and contraction of the organism in relation to the world. But neither Reich nor I had realised that pulsation in a living organism is not merely alternating expansion / contraction, as in the oscillation of a pendulum, of the earth's atmosphere, or of energetic pulses in electromagnetic fields or sound waves. These are all 'equal phase' (sine waves). In the living organism, pulsation, as in the propulsive movement of a jellyfish, the beating of a heart, or breathing in and out, is 'unequal phase': an expansion is followed by a slower contraction.

Reich had excitedly identified expansion/contraction in the universe at large as pulsation, and this led him into a grandiose vision of the entire cosmos pulsating with 'orgone energy.' But the universe does not pulsate. Only living organisms do. Nevertheless, I propose, there is a relation between the non-living pulse waves of the universe at large and the living pulsation of organisms: in organisms the pulse waves are enclosed in a membrane whose resistance to the universal pulse waves forms pulsation. Reich approached this in a distinction between 'closed orgone' and 'open orgone', but still assumed universal pulsation.

Reich's huge claims for 'orgone energy' and his terminology, arrived at in a period when he was adapting to English after forty years of German, can be off-putting for the modern reader. His 'orgone accumulators' are now, following a parody of them by Woody Allen as 'the orgasmotron' in a 1970s film, *The Sleeper*, merely a subject of ridicule. The faithful publisher of most of Reich's books, Farrar Straus & Giroux, has in 2011 published the journalist Christopher Turner's *Adventures in the Orgasmotron*. This may horrify orthodox Reichians but perhaps it means Reich is now out of the box of 'orgonomy' and in the mainstream where his work can be discussed freely, even mocked, as well as appreciated for its radicalism. Reich's work still has a long way to run.

I reject Reich's theory of 'cosmic orgone energy'. However there are many unexplained field phenomena in living organisms and the atmosphere, and I discuss some of them in this book. Above all I am grateful to Reich for identifying pulsation as the basic life function. I agree with him that an understanding of this function opens new ways to work with human health and illness, and to discover the relation of us humans with the world. I also agree with the philosopher Robert Orrington that Reich was above all a great naturalist. Since reading his books and having trained in and practised his methods of therapy, I think I see *nature* more clearly. This study of pulsation would be impossible without constant reference to Reich, as well as to other scientists, philosophers and, dare I say it, poets. And since I owe my subject to Reich, I am going to start this book with a brief autobiographical history of my involvement with

his work. The book will also end with Reich, as developments from his therapy will be discussed in the final chapter, 'Working with Pulsation.'

I first came across references to Reich in 1969 in the novels and essays of Norman Mailer whose focus on total orgasm as a sign of freedom and independence chimed in with my own rather rebellious attitude. This had never been a political rebellion, since growing up in Northern Ireland then going to Oxford during the Cuban missile crisis which was met with hysterical demonstrations for nuclear disarmament, had disillusioned me with any kind of politics. For me independence was linked to my experience of an intensely physical sexual relationship in my teens against the background of hypocritically Puritan but violent Belfast, with a girl of German Jewish origin most of whose family had been killed in the concentration camps. I had been brought up with what Reich would have called a 'sex positive' attitude. My mother came from an Anglo-European family of humanists, she was an agnostic, and she was always ready, although never stickily, to talk to me openly about love and sex. I had been born in Sussex during the war and I did not meet my father until he came back from the army when I was 2 ½. Until then I lived in a benign matriarchy: my mother (who was aged 19 when I was born), my unconventional painter grandmother, and my gentle grandfather who taught me boys' things like playing cricket. My mother had read Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa*, so I was allowed to run naked in the sun. Like many other war babies during a shortage of food, I was breast-fed for a year. When my father arrived he was at first something of a nervous wreck ('shell-shock') and a disciplinarian, having commanded hundreds of soldiers, and my idyll was interrupted for the first time by authority, especially when we went to live in Northern Ireland close to his much more conventional family. I suppose this set a pattern in me of feeling securely loved and rebelling against any constriction. But eventually my father reverted to his normal cheerful attitude of 'live and let live.' Although he occasionally went to church he thought for himself and he never forced religion on his family. When I was 17 and my girlfriend's father came to him indignantly complaining about our relationship, my father politely told him that I was old enough to look after my own life. I also realised at about that time, from the poems that sprung out of the relationship, that I was – unavoidably – a poet. I studied English at Oxford (it was then heavily linguistic, and luckily avoided mention of any literature after 1900), where Robert Graves who was then Professor of Poetry gave me his blessing, as it were, in a crucial and very open conversation about poetry. He was, with Hardy, one of the great love poets in English of the 20th century, and I lost some of my instinctive shyness about the celebration of sexual love in my poems. By the time I read Mailer I was aged 26 and after a few turbulent years in America and Europe I was living with my second wife, her daughter, and our baby daughter, on a farm in Ladysmith, Quebec. I was teaching English reluctantly, part time, at Carleton University in Ottawa, 50 miles away mainly via dirt roads. We were doing some 'back-to-the-land' farming (we had a huge

vegetable garden, we tapped maples, I felled trees, planted new ones, and sold lumber, I mowed fields and ran cattle on them) and we had started a small poetry press. Our love relationship was, at the time, intense. When I turned to Reich's *Character Analysis* and *The Function of the Orgasm* I found it easy to accept their views. Reich's description of the orgasm pulsation broadly matched my own experience, but I realised one crucial thing: I tended to control my breathing by tightening my abdominal muscles at the moment of climax. I was able to stop doing this, once I was aware of it, and to 'surrender', as Reich put it, to the 'orgasm reflex', a repeated convulsion of the whole body with the out-breaths at climax. My sensations intensified. I had always, I suppose because of my 'sex positive' upbringing and the extreme excitement and intensity of my first sexual relationships, been able to rejoice in what Reich called the 'streaming' sensations in sex, which can cause anxiety in some people and are suppressed by the 'character armour' anchored in their musculature, or by cutting contact as excitement mounts. Without much critical analysis I accepted easily enough Reich's idea that the 'streamings' were the flow of life energy in the body, although I disliked his term for this energy, 'orgone', which made me think of hormones. It was an example of a major problem with Reich, which for then I was able to sideline since I could read *Character Analysis* in German: the problem being that most of Reich's work is translated into English where it sounds unnatural and ponderous compared to the German.

Similarly, the English speaking world is condemned to a version of Freud derived from Ernest Jones's absurd pseudo-scholastic translations of Freud's down to earth *Es (It)*, *Ich (I or, in effect, Self)* and *Ueber-Ich (Over-I or Over-Self)* into the *Id*, *Ego*, and *Superego*. When Reich came to America in 1937 he felt scorched by his experiences in Europe where colleagues had let him down, and his relationships even with supporters became formal. I suppose no-one dared to sit him down and say 'Look, Willy, your terminology sounds un-English, and we don't like acronyms except for names of organisations. Furthermore your translator isn't a native English speaker. A "plague" is something external, like a plague of mosquitoes, or when it's internal it usually kills you: the word can't be used for a chronic condition.' So Reich's followers were saddled with OR (orgone) DOR (deadly orgone), ORANUR (orgone in contact with nuclear radiation), EP (emotional plague), and eventually such monstrosities as HIG (hooligan in government) which even the (genuinely) loyal 'orgonomists' leave on one side. But they seldom question Reich's basic terms as translated into English by Theodore Wolfe. As Graves wrote in a poem: 'Little children, parasites, and God may flatter me with complete agreement.' Reich did not deserve such agreement from his followers, but he abused them if they disagreed. (Bernard Grad, a professor of biology at McGill University, Montreal, who worked with Reich remembered being accused of having 'emotional plague' if he dared to argue.)

For a while my Reichian reading (though not the acronyms!) influenced my poems – e.g. in a sequence called 'The Ocean Everywhere' – to the extent that an astute friend said they were becoming

didactic: I was putting across a message. I also discussed Reich in a short book of essays, *What Poetry Is*. But something was going wrong. First in my marriage (but I am not going to discuss this here), then in my working life. I had stopped teaching at Carleton in 1970. Luckily I had been able to avoid teaching poetry there (I didn't believe in teaching poetry), but English 101 with the ignorant but patronising students was a farce. ('A very perceptive analysis', a student politician once remarked condescendingly in one of my classes.) And the place was rife with a new Canadian nationalism, meaning that teachers from the UK or especially the US, were given a hard time, and this nationalism was also creating something called 'Canlit' ('Canadian Literature') which meant the Ladysmith Press, which published poets we liked irrespective of nationality, was being squeezed out by other presses which took government grants for publishing Canadians. We didn't take grants, on principle, and just about broke even. My poems, also, were becoming more rare and somewhat prosaic – drying up, in fact. Always restless, I began to feel impatient with poetry for the fact that I was dependent on waiting for it to occur, with what I now saw as a kind of Keatsian passivity. I wanted to *do*! I was liking the world and people around me less and less and I wanted to change them! I began to think of studying medicine then training to become a Reichian psychiatrist. Then a bookseller in Montreal who had read *What Poetry Is* said there were some 'Reichians' in Montreal, and put me onto a Professor of Physics at Sir George Williams University (now Concordia) called Adolph Smith.

Adolph had been born in Lower East side New York in 1928 – a few years before Hitler gave 'Adolph' a bad name. Adolph's Jewish immigrant parents had not yet heard of Hitler... In Montreal he had been in therapy with a French psychoanalyst, Jean Ambrosi, who had been trained by Jacques Lacan in France but since coming to Montreal had trained in Gestalt therapy and 'Bioenergetics', an athletic form of Reichian therapy (it used pre-set exercises and 'stress positions') devised by a gym teacher turned psychiatrist, Alexander Lowen, who had trained in Reich's 'orgonomic therapy', then moved on. Everyone moved on in the 1970s, from one thing to another. The orgonomists were centred in New York, were all psychiatrists and were not open to training non-medical therapists. I now realised that a broadly Reichian training could be obtained from various sources, and that I could become a semi-regulated 'psychotherapist' or possibly a regulated clinical psychologist.

Adolph had completed therapy in New York with one of Reich's most orthodox colleagues, Chester Raphael. (But they were all orthodox and it was clear from their *Journal of Orgonomy* that they tolerated not the tiniest disagreement with Reich's findings. Given Reich's fate their embattled 'with us or against us' stance was partially comprehensible.) Adolph assured me that Ambrosi's Reichian 'body-work' (a phrase that always makes me think of car repair workshops) was not very different from Raphael's and more sensitive since he brought in other methods. I began weekly therapy with Ambrosi, in French, and although his methods were indeed eclectic (linguistic analysis from Lacan, 'owning your projections' from

Perls's Gestalt therapy, bioenergetic exercises, hypnotism), he was a very sensitive worker with the breathing, expression of emotions, and the systematic working through the 'segments' of 'body armour' until spontaneous pulsation occurred. And he did not back off from sexual issues. Interestingly, he thought that since I was obviously at ease with the Reichian work, I shouldn't be afraid of using my brains on good old fashioned psychoanalysis. But I didn't buy into this, having a prejudice against Freud since reading his ridiculous attempt at anthropology *Totem and Taboo* from my father's bookshelves. Furthermore my deepest experiences in therapy with Ambrosi were through the 'bodywork'. At one point I relived my circumcision, even, at the age of about one. More systematically, Ambrosi helped me work through a degree of 'eye blocking': I found it hard to feel or express fear or anxiety through my eyes. Imaginatively (but I think I had mentioned I was afraid of fire), he decided to light a candle on a shelf in a darkened room and have me breathe in fully opening my eyes wide. I flipped into a terrified re-living of an incident when I was aged about two (I later checked the details with my mother). In our ancient country house during the war we had no flush lavatories, only a chemical lavatory in a room with no electricity. My mother would take me in there, setting a candle on a wall shelf. On one occasion as she bent down to wipe my bottom her golden hair caught alight in the flame of the candle. She shrieked and beat the flames out. There was a strong smell of singeing. I relived all this – an example of the kind of memory which seems locked into the body (it is probably locked into traces in parts of the brain which mediate bodily movement in emotional expression) and which is often released in Reichian therapy. It is a sort of exorcism, but it can help open a person up. The way I looked at the world changed somewhat: the muscles around my eyes were more mobile. There had, I realised, been a dead area of my cheeks below my eyes, giving a slightly sad expression which now disappeared. I felt my gaze was more focused.

When I breathed out fully in therapy my body would convulse in the pulsations of the 'orgasm reflex', but this does not mean I had an orgasm, although I occasionally felt an undirected sexual excitement in the therapy, along with 'streamings.' Luckily my 'armour' against the reflex was minimal. The orgasm reflex – in the presence of contact (i.e. the person is aware of the therapist's presence and not cutting off) – is the 'test' that the therapy is working. No wonder Reich's methods cause anxiety – even talk of them. In the usual jungle-drums process, by the time the orgasm reflex is explained along a chain of a few people it has become clear that Reichian therapists give people orgasms...

This being the 70s, individual therapy every week was accompanied by monthly or fortnightly group sessions. As in almost all therapy groups I ever attended (or ran in my later work) most participants were 'therapists' of all stripes – psychologists, medical doctors, clinical social workers, counsellors. There was much public expression of emotion, many new relationships were formed (and consummated off-stage, as it were), and there was a lot of discussion of how one perpetuated society's oppression by oppressing oneself. Personal liberation would become social/ political liberation.

Although Ambrosi used Reich's methods, he had formulated a strong critique of all emotionally cathartic therapy as 'exorcism'. He thought it was easy enough to cast out a devil through emotional abreaction – but the devil would come back next day. (He eventually spelled this out in a book, *L'analyse psycho-énergétique* in which there is a description of how he performed just such a temporary exorcism on a Corsican villager.).

While working with Ambrosi I did an 'internship' at a psychotherapy centre 'Associates for Human Resources', AHR, in Boston. There I worked with various other psychotherapists. I had also started a private practice part time in 'counselling' in Ottawa, so I had 'clients' to discuss. I wrote a paper on a spontaneous exorcism of a client, and curiously the AHR faculty member who was most helpful and sensitive in understanding it was not a Reichian at all, but a Buddhist therapist, Jack Kornfield, who went on to become one of the founders of modern 'Mindfulness' therapies (now popular even in the British NHS). Kornfield was doing an external doctorate in psychology at Saybrook Institute (then Humanistic Psychology Institute, and later to become Saybrook University) in San Francisco, and he put me onto this. Between 1974 and 1977 I shuttled back and forth to San Francisco and worked under 'field faculty' in various settings, including the Child Study Centre of Ottawa University (to learn about childhood development) and its nursing faculty (to learn anatomy and physiology), to complete my dissertation on *Human Pulsation*. My main supervisor was Richard Farson, at Saybrook, a hard-nosed and rigorous but unconventional psychologist who had founded Western Behavioural Sciences Institute in San Diego. He was something of a rebel and wrote a book, *Birthrights*, on children's liberation, but he eventually became an organisational psychologist and witty promoter of paradox. My other supervisors were Adolph Smith to help with the biophysics and physiology, and Myron Sharaf, a professor of psychology and psychiatry at Tuft's university in Boston who had studied with Reich and eventually wrote his biography, *Fury on Earth*. (My external examiner was Michael Kahn, a social psychologist at the University of Southern California).

During most of this period I travelled down to Boston one weekend a month to do seminars on orgonomy with Sharaf and to discuss my dissertation. The seminars were the usual 1970s therapy groups – about a dozen people in their bathing suits or underwear subjecting each other to various bodily therapy sessions. (Even now I sometimes pick up a journal article by some distinguished and respectable psychiatrist or psychologist and my mind flashes back to Boston and the person in their underwear shaking their fists at the ceiling or calling for Mommy). This free-for-all would have had Reich turning in his grave, and in fact Sharaf's ambivalence towards Reich was all too evident. He liked to quote Jung to the effect that the therapist was 'the wounded wounder', and there was always a sense of wallowing in pain and struggle in his work. He was a brilliant expounder of Reich's ideas while undermining them at every turn.

Sharaf's ambivalence was understandable. His first wife, Grethe Hoff, had at one point left him for Reich. In the madness of Reich's later years, as revealed in the later publication of his journals, his love for Grethe shines out as the last bastion of sanity and love.

Although having worked with Sharaf I can claim the magic laying on of hands that is so often treated with reverence in psychoanalytic circles – 'I worked with Myron, and he worked with Reich' – and although he was supportive of me in his own way (i.e. he understood and undermined me at the same time, as with Reich), I cannot say I was deeply affected by him, as I was by my work with Ambrosi (who had his own faults of Corsican rhodomontade). Not that I am eager to claim another magic laying on of hands from Lacan via Ambrosi...

Sharaf, the wounded wounder, was conspicuously neurotic and indeed he would emphasise his flaws in a rather masochistic way – although, confirming Reich's concept of masochism as containing sadism, this emphasis was used to provoke others to reveal *their* flaws. As Reich wrote, masochism is 'suffering used as a weapon.' Obviously, I found myself thinking, Reich had not cured Myron. Perhaps this was the source of Myron's ambivalence. Actually Reich in his later years wrote that it was impossible to straighten a tree that had grown crooked. He knew his own therapy had its limits, and even in his early 'Sexpol' work in Germany had focused on prevention of the armour forming, before it was too late. But his therapy aroused expectations. How about 'orgastic potency' as a goal?

I had seen Dusan Makewejew's film on Reich, *W.R. Mysteries of the Organism*, in the Black Cat pornographic cinema in Hull, Quebec (across the river from Puritan Ontario where the film was banned.) Sharaf appears in it, showing an orgone accumulator to his son. 'Fuck freely', a woman's voice intones to a background of slides ostensibly (but not) from Reich's Sexpol movement in 1930s Germany. Reich had prophesied gloomily that misinterpretation of his work would lead to 'an epidemic of free fucking'. To my mind, having grown up in Belfast where sex was a secret vice, peeping Toms were rampant as young people attempted to find privacy in alleyways or in the hills around the town, and the place seethed with an almost tribal fear and hatred exploited by politicians, Sexpol was one of Reich's greatest achievements. 'Make love, not war!' would be an oversimplified slogan of the 1970s, but before this in my second serious love relationship my girlfriend was from a Catholic background, and of course we found there were no psycho-social barriers between us at all. Reich had hoped that providing contraception and sexual encouragement and advice to young people would stop them getting sucked into fascism. (His book *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* is still valid in 2013, allowing for changes in context).

As for the orgone accumulator (known in yet another acronym as an ORAC) I had been doing some experiments with one I had constructed, out of layers of sheet metal and fibre glass, in a barn in a gloomy November. After a few days of building it, even before I put the walls together, I felt a warm glow in my

face and had developed a suntan. There was ‘something in it’. For a year or so Adolph visited regularly from Montreal and we replicated some of Reich’s experiments.

Adolph was another person who had not been ‘cured’ by orgonomic therapy – or not totally. His breathing was often obstructed by chronic asthma. But he was one of the most sparkling and alive people I had met. A New York Jew, he had triumphantly married a blonde blue-eyed German nurse and they had sons whom they were bringing up ‘free’, along A S Neill’s Summerhill School principles. (Neill was one of only a few friends of Reich who had been able to speak to him fearlessly). Adolph had done a PhD in the biophysics of electromagnetism so as to ascertain whether it was identical with the orgone. It wasn’t. But Adolph was no more certain than I – and a lot less certain than Reich – about what orgone actually was. As a true experimentalist, he was a sceptic – even about the work of his colleague Bernard Grad who had lost his position as a biology professor at McGill (although he retained tenure) for experimenting with mice in accumulators. Adolph and I found it hard to replicate the famous T – To experiment which Reich had demonstrated to Einstein who seemed at first impressed but who cut contact with Reich. In T – To a thermometer suspended above an accumulator shows almost 1 degree C higher temperature than a thermometer inside the accumulator, defying the second law of thermodynamics. Given temperature variation in a room, this experiment is almost impossible to control, and various attempts at replication have been inconclusive, even those by orgonomists. (Their own worst enemies, they reject double-blind controlled experiments because these don’t allow for the character structure of the observer). We did however consistently find that our own and others’ body temperatures rose by about 0.5 C after a period sitting in the accumulator. ‘Suggestion’, perhaps. If ‘suggestion’ produces the thousands of unexpected results in parapsychological and other non-mechanistic research, it is a powerful force indeed. But in fact, as acknowledged even by the most orthodox proponents of scientific method, consistency of observations among different observers is a valid scientific tool.

Reich himself had emphasised that orgone is a *slow* force – unlike electricity. We could demonstrate nothing dramatic about the accumulator. On the other hand, we and most people who sat in it for half an hour or so did feel vagotonic effects (sensations of warmth, relaxation, and sometimes tingling). One woman walking through the room where the accumulator stood (it looked like a cupboard), not knowing what it was, idly stuck her hand in as she went by and withdrew it abruptly exclaiming, ‘I got an electric shock!’ (She had not touched the accumulator wall, which might have produced a mild shock from static electricity, but there appears to be a relation between static electricity and the field effects Reich ascribed to ‘orgone.’)

Perhaps Reich’s most dramatic work was with ‘cloud-busters’, racks of hollow pipes grounded in running water, directed at the sky to draw off (or in a later theory to shoot) ‘energy’ in stuck weather such as droughts and to cause rain. Adolph and I improvised a cloud-buster from some old basement jack poles

and grounded them in the River Quyon, at that point a creek meandering across my fields. The weather was sweltering, and eventually it showered. No way of proving we had caused it. But I have a Super-8 movie, a few minutes long, showing clouds actually rotating in the sky above the pipes. Do clouds sometimes naturally rotate in this way? I think not. But establishing cause/effect in weather modification is made difficult by rapidly changing conditions. A simple example is the idea, promoted by a mystic called Ivan Saunderson, that if a person stares for a few minutes at a small cumulus cloud, the cloud will dissolve. True. But all small cumulus clouds dissolve after a few minutes: they are transitory phenomena.

I bought myself a high resolution microscope and trained myself to use it. I replicated some of Reich's 'bion experiments' in which life seems to emerge as vesicles, then protozoa, from decaying vegetable matter which has been sterilised by boiling under pressure (autoclavation). This is conventionally assumed to be due to 'spores', but how do these survive autoclavation? Whatever their origin, protozoa pulsate.

Adolph and I had, if nothing else, sharpened our powers of observation of nature. As Reich himself noted, seeing and feeling the 'orgone' required practice, a sort of adaptation. This was not self-hypnosis, however. If you open your eyes to seeing light around people you may eventually begin to see it: you are not hurrying along in the everyday whirl. But although Adolph and I were both 'Reichians', and acknowledged that Reich had not been fabricating his data, much of which we could replicate, and we both deduced that there was 'something in' the orgone theory, we remained sceptical enough not to accept it as Reich had proposed it.

Our scepticism was added to in conversations with Bernd Laska, who visited us from Germany. He was publishing a Reichian magazine (*WR Blätter* or *WRB*) in which I had published an article on dowsing, another phenomenon which is dismissed by official science but which is easily experienced: I had dowsed for a well on a hilltop in Quebec with a local dowser and the dowsing fork (cut from a nearby hazel bush) moved so sharply of its own accord as I walked over what turned out to be a vein of water 200 feet below, that it twisted my elbows. Adolph and I had also written a joint article for *WRB* about evidence that the sexual experience of rats could change their endocrine system.

Bernd was not very interested in Reich's physics but he had studied the Sexpol movement and Reich's socio-political work. (He once remarked grimly, about *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, that in the last analysis Hitler had turned out to be a greater social psychologist than Reich.) By that time, my marriage had broken up, and I was living in Ottawa with my new companion / wife and our baby daughter. My new wife was a sociologist, she had read much of Reich's work, and the four of us had discussions I still remember with a feeling of loss: I would say that we all had a respect for Reich's work, a fascination with it, and (except for my wife) a sense of gratitude for it. But none of us was a *follower*. Unfortunately I

was to find that as I became a full time Reichian therapist, I was drawn into the ‘for or against’ position Reich himself had adopted (with some justification given his own life).

Some years later I corresponded briefly with Gerd Bergerson, whom I had known when a boy in Northern Ireland: she was a Norwegian textile designer of tweeds, with a workshop in the Mourne mountains, an attractive woman with red-brown hair who was flirtatious with my father, to my mother’s irritation. The English occultist Colin Wilson had published a mainly inaccurate book about Reich in which he mentioned that Gerd Bergerson had been Reich’s love before he left Norway in 1937. I wrote to her (she was then over 80) and she replied warmly, stating among other things: ‘I could never have married Reich. He was a fanatic.’

Back to Ottawa. By the time I got my PhD I was calling myself a Reichian therapist. I held back from pursuing registration (‘licensing’) as a clinical psychologist because I was working in Ontario which did not recognise non-residential doctorates (although mine ticked all the boxes in terms of areas covered), and because I did not want to conform to the requirements of a professional association. I was based in a psychotherapy centre called ‘Uvannik’ – another typically 1970s entity – the word being Inuktituk (Inuit – ‘Eskimo’) for something like ‘togetherness.’ The various therapists based there fought and intrigued against each other for clients.

Towards the end of my time in Ottawa, while completing my PhD dissertation (for the third time: Farson had high standards), I did a study of my first 100 clients in therapy. I concluded that 20% made huge improvements, there was a middle 60% who had made some movement but not necessarily achieved any lasting change, and 20% had probably been harmed by the therapy.

In 1979 we moved to British Columbia, Vancouver at first, then Victoria. The West Coast was the place to be for psychotherapy of all sorts. In Vancouver I opened an elegant office and announced my arrival with a pamphlet about Reichian therapy to which I attached a short paper about how the therapy worked to enable a more full pulsation of the breathing, via emotional expression, and that one measure of this pulsation was what Reich had called the orgasm reflex. I was immediately visited by two detectives from the Vancouver police who asked ‘How do you give your patients orgasms?’ Interestingly, they accepted my explanation about the therapy and I had no more trouble. On the bright side, I had a rush of referrals from the University of BC Sexual Dysfunction clinic of their hopeless or unappetising cases – for example a civil servant who was a coprophiliac. I also rapidly built up the usual caseload of psychiatrists and psychologists looking at first for new methods they could use – what Reich called ‘picking the cherries from the pie’ – in their more conventional practices, then settling in to do some work on themselves. I also began giving courses for UBC on another idea of Reich’s, ‘Emotional First Aid.’

I didn’t want to pick the cherries from Reich’s pie and only continue the safe side of his work, and I tend to go to the extremes of any activity, so I eventually entered into correspondence with Jerome Eden,

a peripheral writer for the psychiatric *Journal of Orgonomy*, originally from New York, but now based in Idaho where he engaged in cloud-busting and according to his books and newsletters waged a ceaseless one man battle against UFOs who were trying to take over the planet. The orgonomists helped finance him, and I suppose it added to their own sense of loyalty to Reich's ideas, but in fact they kept a safe distance, and Gerry, an ex-primary school teacher, had to scrounge a living playing his guitar in Idaho bars and at dances. I visited him and his wife Desiree several times. Gerry was partly an imitation Reich: stocky, dark, Jewish, uncompromising. He would repeat proudly that he had never known Reich but when he started cloud-busting Reich remarked to an 'orgonomist' with whom Jerry was in therapy, 'This is someone who sticks his neck out.' Jerry was living in a part of Idaho known for its back-to-the land hippies and its Nazis, or at least right-wingers. He made some of his living rain-making. He felt he was a poet and he was close. Once, on a winter night, he pointed out to me that it was already 'snowing' in the room we were in: if I defocused my eyes I could see what appeared like slanted snowflakes in the air. We went outside. Sure enough, it was beginning to snow. Gerry quoted one of his own poems:

Long before it rains it rains,
It snows before it snows,
Long before we die we die,
And this the body knows.

He was super-sensitive to changes in air and atmosphere. I learned a lot from him about how to *see*. For him, cloud-busting was restoring 'atmospheric pulsation'. By which he meant a sparkle in the air, ripples in the sky, puffing clouds. He was also entirely dogmatic about Reich, taking every word for true, and about UFOs, believing every report of cattle maiming or abduction, supposedly by UFO people, as reported in the *National Enquirer* on sale in his local supermarket. In Reich's last possibly crazy years before being imprisoned because a colleague had transported accumulators across state lines, and having all his books, including psychoanalytic and sociological studies, burned by the Food and Drug Administration in an 'auto da fê' (he died in prison), he had engaged in a battle, using cloud-busters, against a UFO invasion. Jerry was continuing the battle. Reich had proposed that all people concerned by the UFO threat should get together in a 'Planetary Professional Citizens Committee' or PPCC, in which they could exchange information about local atmospheric conditions. I was of course sceptical about UFOs, but with my previous wife in Quebec I had seen unexplained green lights moving oddly in the sky, and I was inclined to believe, as usual, that 'something' was happening. To support Gerry, I got together with a Swiss-American psychologist from California, Roland Frauchiger, who was also a friend of Gerry's, to set up a PPCC in the form of a typed journal (no computers then). But our weather reports respectively from Vancouver Island and California were too mild for Gerry: we were not reporting enough UFO sightings or effects. We both withdrew from the PPCC, and in my case from friendship with Gerry. I had gone too far.

Since I owed so much to Reich, as I saw it, I had been willing to go all the way with his ideas. But I was now in a very paranoid place. I broke up with my wife and was ready to cast my life to the winds. But suddenly, in this crisis, I began writing poems again. Apart from a brief spurt of poems when I had met my wife, poetry had gone dead for me. I had, I thought, abandoned it. But as an old friend in England, Martin Seymour-Smith, with whom I began a new correspondence at this time, wrote: 'You may have abandoned poetry, but it didn't abandon you.' Martin, as it happened, had written sympathetically but sceptically about Reich, among others, in a now neglected book, *Sex and Society*. Corresponding with him, and more crucially, re-uniting with my wife, put me back on track.

I began to wind down my psychotherapy practice. I wrote two published books, *Emotional First Aid* and *Couple Dynamics* in which I took what I could from Reichian therapy and gave it back to the ordinary person for him or herself to use. The intensity of doing Reichian therapy had been too much for me. The 'transference' issues were too strong. Reich himself had affairs with clients and ex-clients. I didn't but was tormented by the emotional closeness – often spurious – of the therapy. I also became too close to a few clinicians who did training therapies with me. As Reich wrote agonisingly at one point, 'isn't transference the same as love?' In those cases where the therapy did work it was almost too moving for the therapist and could lead to entanglement. And where it did not work it was too disappointing and could lead to bitterness on both sides. The therapy was not very effective in changing people, as my Ottawa study had showed, unless they were already on the way to change. So now I proposed, in *Emotional First Aid* (a phrase I owed to Reich who suggested that it would be useful with children) that people could help each other in emotional emergencies by understanding and encouraging a safe emotional expression. In *Couple Dynamics* I proposed a series of exercises that a couple could do together to move towards emotional openness and, yes, shared orgasm. Neither book was a great seller. Both were bought by counsellors and therapists, not the ordinary citizens I was writing for.

I studied Reich's works again, with a more critical eye than ever, subjecting them to whatever scientific analysis I was capable of. Some of this book derives from my notes at that time.

I also realised that my research for *Human Pulsation*, and my work with Adolph were so physiologically grounded that I was ready to become a neuropsychologist. Neuropsychology is not only about the brain and behaviour, it is about the body and mind. I decided to become an orthodox clinical psychologist / neuropsychologist, and studied for the North American post-doctoral licensing exams (the Examination for the Practice of Professional Psychology or EPPP) which I passed in Vancouver in 1986. It must have wiped me out, since as I was walking back into the city centre from the examination site a 'hooker' called out to me from an alleyway, 'How would you like me to make you feel like a new man?' But I was already a new man. I became registered in British Columbia and in the Canadian Register of

Professional Health Service Providers. I worked in Prince Edward Island for 3 years, learning more about community psychology and practical neuropsychology than ever since, then in BC again, then at the end of 1994 I moved back to England to work in the NHS.

I had re-grounded myself in poetry, in my wife and family, and in clinical psychology. But I have never stopped seeing some of the things I saw in my Reichian years, and I still feel I have a debt to pay to Reich – Reich the naturalist.

Adolph, despairing of the rise of Quebec nationalism (which included anti-Semitism) in Montreal, moved to California to work for NASA on their exobiology project, inventing ways of detecting life in soil samples on Mars (and keeping the bions in mind).

In 1990 I was passing through Idaho, on a move from the East Coast back to BC. I stopped in Coeur d'Alene and rang Gerry's number. Desiree answered. 'Gerry's dead. He got skin cancer. He turned black all over. He kept fighting to the end.'