
“Man’s Right to Know”
The Trust’s Introductory Documentary
about Wilhelm Reich, M.D.

Remarks at the first screening
of *Man’s Right to Know* at the
2002 Summer Conference at Orgonon

Rangeley, Maine
July 15, 2002

Twenty-eight minutes and thirty seconds is barely enough time to even begin to grasp the life and work of Wilhelm Reich, M.D. And that’s all this video purports to do: provide a beginning. It is not a definitive documentary.

Neither is it, nor was it ever intended to be, a substitute for reading Reich’s literature or spending several hours at Orgonon which I believe are essential to educating one’s self about Reich. Ideally the video will serve as a preliminary first step in a larger process: the video introduces ideas; the Museum amplifies them; and Reich’s literature elucidates them.

Man’s Right to Know was produced primarily to replace the existing slide show, which was essentially the first exhibit in the visitors tour of the Museum. When Mary Higgins and I began to discuss the project, we asked ourselves, “Who is our audience?” This question proved to be a springboard for a much broader conversation about the purpose of the Museum, an analysis of its visitors, and how we might enrich the experience of those visitors.

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For visitors with little or no knowledge of Reich, the exhibits in the Museum can be difficult to comprehend. After all, orgonomy is a young and largely unknown science, and there’s little in a typical visitor’s experience to prepare them for the range and epic quality of Reich’s life and work. And in a short period of time, even the best informed tour guide simply cannot convey the magnitude of Reich’s work nor sufficiently explain the connectivity from depth psychology to biology to physics—what Reich called the crucial “red thread.”

Consequently, for many visitors, their image of Reich remains disjointed and they’re only able to focus and respond to isolated fragments of his legacy. Sometimes, if we’re lucky, this response will translate into the purchase of books or other items at the bookstore. Sometimes it will translate into a life-long exploration into Reich’s work. And sometimes visitors simply leave Orgonon to take in the other sights of Rangeley.

It seemed logical, then, that if the Museum could provide every visitor—from the uninitiated to the more knowledgeable—with a coherent and compelling image of Reich from the start of their tour in the screening room, then perhaps their response would translate into more book sales, increased membership and greater support of the Museum, more involvement with its programs, and more people personally committed to further exploring Reich's work.

As a result, our ambitions and expectations for the video began to expand, as we asked ourselves: “Could we present a concise overview of Reich's life and work that would be relatively easy to understand; that would quickly bring the viewer to a much higher level of understanding; that would touch the viewer emotionally; that would acclimate them in a practical way to the Museum exhibits; and that would introduce them to some of Reich's quotations and literature?”

And so, for visitors with little or no knowledge of Reich, this video is designed to be a compressed, concise introduction. It is intended to quickly and succinctly provide a rudimentary understanding of Reich that will better orient visitors to the Museum's exhibits and the offerings at the bookstore. Hopefully, visitors will recognize the parallels between the chronological organization of the material in the video and in the Museum, so that their tour becomes richer and more meaningful. After watching the video and taking the tour, we hope that visitors will be intrigued by the breadth of Reich's life, outraged by its tragedy, and inspired to learn more.

For those with more than a cursory knowledge of Reich, hopefully the video will confirm what the viewers already know, clarify certain areas of confusion, and perhaps fill in some gaps. For viewers well-versed in Reich's life and work, it's unlikely that this video will provide any new knowledge or insights. But at the very least I hope that its visual elements—many of them never before seen—will deepen the viewers' appreciation of Reich and his achievements.

Man's Right to Know was also deliberately designed to serve a broader mission of the Museum and Trust, to be used beyond the confines of Orgonon as a means of reaching and educating an even wider audience. In addition to being on sale in the bookstore, it will be available as an educational tool for lectures, seminars, classrooms, fund-raisers, open houses, and other events, providing audiences with a background and a context in which to further explore Reich's life and work.

From the inception of this project, the structure of the video was self-evident: follow “the red thread.” The red thread itself provides a lean, muscular, logical storyline by which we can follow the chronology of Reich's life and the evolution of his work.

I decided to establish at the very beginning the historic concept of “Life Energy,” then follow Reich's investigation of the energy principle from the libido, with its psychological and social implications, to his biological experiments that led to the discovery of orgone energy, to his medical work, and on into the area of orgone bio-physics.

To me, this is the only way to grasp the immensity of Reich's achievements; whether it's in a twenty-eight minute video, a two-hour documentary, or a Hollywood movie, this is the structure to follow.

With the red thread as the structural backbone, I wanted to emphasize from the start, both narratively and visually, that *Wilhelm Reich was a scientist*. Toward that end, I relied heavily on movie footage and photographs of Reich and his co-workers in the laboratory, visuals of scientific equipment, select quotations about his energy work, and titles that conveyed the documentation of that work.

It is unfortunate today that Reich's detractors fail or refuse to recognize the disciplined, rigorous, empirical nature of his experiments. It is equally regrettable that many of Reich's admirers mysticize his work or rush to lump it together with all kinds of pseudo-sciences. Consequently, I felt that suffusing this video with scientific imagery was thematically appropriate.

Given the time constraints in terms of the length of the video and my desire to maintain a terse muscular storyline, I decided to omit any references to Reich's personal life except for the segment devoted to his early years. I felt that any discussion about his wives, children and friends in the body of the program would disrupt the flow, and was not essential to understanding his work. Furthermore, a curious viewer could always get that information from a museum tour guide.

I also saw *Man's Right to Know* as an opportunity to clarify and correct some common misconceptions. Even among those favorably disposed to Reich, we constantly find inaccuracies, untruths, misstatements, and carelessness with facts. Obviously it would take a presentation several hours to begin to address all the rumors, slanders, and vilifications during Reich's life and afterwards. But I felt it was essential to set the record straight on several key issues: the orgone energy accumulator, for example, so pivotal to Reich's work, so central to the ultimate tragedy of his life, and the subject of so much slander and honest misunderstanding. Without a basic scientific understanding of the accumulator, a person simply cannot grasp all that follows in Reich's life.

Since the essence of orgone energy is movement and pulsation, I didn't feel that static drawings would convey the scientific principles which govern the orgone accumulator. And so I opted for some rather basic computer animation to illustrate these concepts. And wherever appropriate, I tried to reinforce our discussion of the accumulator's experimental and medical usage with titles from Reich's bulletins and journals.

The notion that the orgone accumulator is a sexual device used to enhance one's orgasmic potency is a common misconception that one hears even today, and often from people who genuinely admire Reich's work. Because this notion proved so destructive to Reich, I felt it was crucial to pinpoint its origin to a specific quotation in a specific article by Mildred Edie Brady.

Similarly, the cloudbuster is an object of much fascination and misunderstanding, among those for Reich and against him. For example, many people think that the cloudbuster emanates orgone energy into the atmosphere during weather operations. So, again, I felt a brief and basic explanation was necessary for a fuller appreciation of Reich's work.

Let me paraphrase what I said at the beginning: *none of the content here, none of these brief illustrations of the accumulator and the cloudbuster can substitute for the fuller explanations found in Reich's literature.* Again, I hope that viewers—whether they're Museum visitors or attendees at a lecture, in a classroom, or at some other event—will be sufficiently intrigued so that they'll want to read Reich's literature and learn more about his life and work.

While there's certainly no way to evade the tragedy and sadness of Reich's death in prison, Mary and I didn't want to end the video on that note. We felt that after we mention Reich's death might be a good opportunity to do what we hadn't done in the body of the program: focus on the human side of Reich. This is how the final montage evolved, with photographs of Reich with his wives, children, and friends, away from work and the laboratory.

Early on, Mary and I knew that we wanted to hear Reich's voice somewhere during the program. We felt that for those who have never heard him speak, his voice would confer an added dimension to our portrayal of Reich. But where would his voice be appropriate? What would be the specific sound-bite? And how would it integrate into the overall content?

After spending hours listening to tapes and poring over transcripts, we finally came across a few sentences which we felt provided a moving summation of Reich's commitment to his work. And, as such, was the most fitting way to conclude *Man's Right to Know*.

*Kevin Hinchey,
Writer/Director of
Man's Right to Know*