

ANNALS OF RADICALISM

Wilhelm Reich: A Harbinger of Ecosocialism? Introduction to Bennett¹

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Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) is chiefly remembered, first, as the Marxist psychoanalyst with the unique distinction of having been drummed out of both the Communist Party and the International Psychoanalytic Association; and, second, as the infamous originator of a modality of therapy and bio-physical research based upon a kind of vital energy he claimed to discover, and which he called the “Orgone.” All of this got Reich into a lot of trouble with the United States government and led to his imprisonment and early death.

But Reich was not simply a curiosity of the 20th century. His life and work are full of lessons for the present and cast light upon its prime challenge: the building of ecosocialism in response to the ecological crisis and the collapse of existing capitalism. Needless to say, Reich was no conscious ecosocialist: the word did not exist in his day, nor for that matter, did a notion of ecological crisis as such. But no other major thinker of the 20th century looked as deeply into the estrangement from nature which forms the root of capitalism, and none were more aware of the need to reconstruct society along the lines of a humanly worthwhile relationship to nature. This placed him far, far ahead of his times. Indeed, the extremity of Reich’s views and the profound isolation that became his lot led Reich to wander, err, and eventually stray into episodes of delusional paranoia. We need accordingly to assume a twofold attitude toward Reich—as a genius, but also a fallen genius. He was, one might say, a kind of *magus*, a latter day Paracelsus who can be seen, as many have, as a practitioner of a kind of dark magic. But he can also be seen—and more authentically, in my view—as a prophet who discerned the profound illness of our civilization as an estrangement from nature and journeyed through the world to give people the gift of his knowledge and the hope for a cure.²

Lucifer

¹ Philip W. Bennett, “Wilhelm Reich’s Early Writings on Work Democracy: A Theoretical Basis for Challenging Fascism Then and Now,” *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol. 21, No. 1, March 2010, pp. 53-73.

² It deserves mention that as a medical student and young doctor I went through an extensive and given the tenor of the times, clandestine, Reichian phase. It began, oddly enough, with being impressed by Reich’s obituary in 1957, eventuated in years of therapy with his close friend and associate, Dr. Simeon Tropp, and included study of Reich’s books, which, being banned in the United States, had to be smuggled in from abroad. During my psychiatric residency I moonlighted a course of training as a Reichian therapist under the supervision of Dr. Ellsworth Baker. However, I grew dissatisfied with the practice and lost touch with the Reichian movement in 1964, hence, do not claim an adequate knowledge of recent developments within orgonomy.

For Reich’s chief works, see references in Bennett. No decent bibliography of Reich has existed until quite recently, this being a function of his hectic and persecuted life. We are indebted to scholars like Philip Bennett not just for a needed revival of interest in Reich but for placing this on a scholarly foundation for the first time. I am also grateful to Bennett for help with this article.

In 1930 Sigmund Freud wrote a brief speculative essay, *Civilization and its Discontents*, which has become perhaps the most widely read of his works and a staple of innumerable college curricula. In it Freud gives the following definition of “civilization”:

countries have attained a high level of civilization if we find that in them everything which can assist in the exploitation of the earth by man and in his protection against the forces of nature—everything, in short, which is of use to him—is attended to and effectively carried out.³

Civilization and Its Discontents is grounded in a radical sense of opposition between civilization and nature. This is developed by Freud in a twofold way: *externally*, “man”⁴ must oppose nature’s forces, which seek to destroy him and his works; and *internally*, man must contend with the fact that nature has been implanted inside us as a relentless biological drive toward aggression, destruction, and indeed, Death. In Freud’s words: “the inclination to aggression is an original, self-subsisting instinctual disposition in man . . . that . . . constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization.” Going further, Freud claims that this instinct, “when it is directed toward objects [must] provide the ego with the satisfaction of its vital needs and with control over nature.”⁵ Thus an instinct toward destruction is fundamental within humankind, and control *over* nature becomes more basic than harmonization *with* nature. We are trapped in our alienation; there is no way out save mitigation. To be sure, Eros, the Instinct of love, counters this tendency in Freud’s final synthesis. But love grows weaker as the group it brings together grows larger. As civilization advances, guilt increasingly becomes the dominant way of holding humankind together—thus the ubiquity of “discontent,” or unhappiness in the contemporary world.

This represented a darkening of vision. Once Freud had been, if not a liberator (he would never tolerate a change in class relations), at least a reformer. This was based on his original insight that neurosis is set into motion by the traumatic interruption of sexual gratification. Originally, he saw human beings as capable of seeking a degree of happiness and society as repressively arrayed against their efforts to attain happiness. Thus, it followed that a conscientious person should work toward the improvement of society. Freud foresaw in the sexual unhappiness of humankind (or to be more exact, that Eurocentric and bourgeois fraction of it he knew at first hand and whose money was paying his fees) a prime obstacle to general happiness, yet one that could be overcome. By the 1920s, however, ill with a vicious cancer of the mouth⁶ and witness to the gathering collapse of traditional European society, a grim pessimism mitigated by stoicism had set in. It is fair to say that the theoretical changes noted above were more the effect than the cause of this gathering despair. As Freud lost hope for the possibilities for social amelioration, so did the role played by actual gratification diminish in the theory and practice of psychoanalysis. What began in the 1890s as a notion of the *libido* as the mental representation of the sex drive and the energetic core of the psyche, became adulterated with the later notions of an aggressive

³ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, translated and edited by James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961), p. 39.

⁴ The inverted commas to call attention to the florid and pervasive patriarchal attitude in this, as in all of Freud’s work. He goes so far as to claim that women are fundamentally opposed to the project of civilization, an astoundingly ill-informed as well as pernicious remark.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 68.

⁶ Brought on by insatiable cigar smoking, an addiction he could not conquer even after the cancer that would kill him was diagnosed.

instinct and the internal repressive power of the ego. The erstwhile advocate of sexual reform could only find the “still, small voice of reason” to counter the untamed “id.” All significant social goals eschewed, the profession of psychoanalysis had become tooled for the reproduction of bourgeois hegemony. The model of “civilization” advanced in *Civilization and its Discontents* was perfectly suited for this. By postulating humanity opposed to a nature raging within and without our being, Freud was also reinforcing the legitimacy of repressive society. He had granted us a modicum of unhappiness in a tradeoff for surviving the Hobbesian war of all against all.

The storms afflicting society at large were also felt within the ranks of psychoanalysis, which Freud, like the jealous patriarch of his Oedipal theory, treated throughout his career as a potentially hostile “Primal Horde” waiting to slay and devour him.⁷ All of Freud’s *oeuvre* is suffused with this theme, which became directed in *Civilization and its Discontents* toward a defense of bourgeois ideology as a kind of “third way” between fascism and communism. There was little fascism within psychoanalysis at the time (though Jung, who was already well removed from Freud’s camp, had tendencies in that direction). However, left-wing tendencies were widespread, including some members who were distinctly Communist. Of these, none stood out more than the young lion of the psychoanalytic movement, Wilhelm Reich. Of all Freud’s followers, Reich was the most active on the far left—and the least suited to following anyone. Many years later, in a reflection on his relationship with Freud, Reich opined that *Civilization* was specifically aimed at him.⁸

Phenomenally gifted, Reich had joined the Vienna Institute as a medical student⁹ and soon rose to the rank of clinical director. He brought to this role an uncommon and original attention to social and community problems,¹⁰ which he addressed with radical-left political zeal and a fascination with biology stemming from his boyhood spent on a farm. Reich had been drawn to psychoanalysis by Freud’s audacious breakthrough in which the roots of neurosis were traced to repression of the sexual drive. By the mid-twenties he had become appalled by Freud’s turning away from the actual, material ground of his discovery and his

⁷ See, for example, *Totem and Taboo*, written in 1912 and concerned with insurgencies from Jung and Adler.

⁸ Wilhelm Reich, *Reich Speaks of Freud*, edited by Mary Higgins and Chester M. Raphael (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975). The book mainly consists of two long interviews Reich did with Dr. Kurt Eissler at his laboratory, Orgonon, in Rangeley, Maine, in October, 1952 (along with miscellaneous correspondence and other material). Eissler, a well-known analyst and chief keeper of the Freud archives, visited Reich to add to Freud’s intellectual history, and in the process disclosed much of Reich’s. The date is noteworthy: 1952 was a high-water mark of Reich’s American period. His views expressed to Eissler, including those on Marx (see below, note 15), may come as a shock to those familiar with the very hostile turn taken between Reich and the communist movement since the 1930s. In that regard I might add a personal communication with the late Myron Sharaf, disciple of Reich, author of a major biography (*Fury on Earth* [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983]), and the person accompanying Reich to the gates of the Federal Penitentiary in Lewisburg, PA. As he entered the prison where he was to die within the year, Reich left Sharaf with the *envoi*: “Remember! I am still a Marxist!”

⁹ Quite unthinkable in today’s circumstances, in which the typical analyst is over 40 and burdened with debt and family by the time she or he is fledged.

¹⁰ Reich’s essential role in initiating this dimension of psychological practice is rarely recognized, in part because he approached it in so radical a spirit. Most disconcerting was the “Sex-Pol” movement, a set of clinics he organized in the 1920s to help working class youth deal with sexual problems imposed by the repressive patriarchal-capitalist system. This drew him into the Communist movement itself. See, Wilhelm Reich, *Sex-Pol Essays 1929-1934*, edited by Lee Baxandall; Introduction, Bertell Ollman (New York: Random House, 1971).

replacement of it by notions that, to Reich's eyes, regressed toward a bourgeois world-view incompatible with his own emancipatory goals.¹¹ He had become a psychoanalyst because of Freud's core insight into sexuality and neurosis and was not about to turn away from it. The libido theory was no theoretical gesture for Reich, therefore, but a way of articulating his most deeply held beliefs about human existence. Freud's rightward turn became for Reich the opportunity to strike out in an audacious breakthrough of his own. We may follow his steps schematically:

- The key to neurosis did indeed reside in sexual gratification and its repression. Freud's retreat from the libido theory obliged Reich to assume the mantle of his achievement;
- The immediate feature of his revision was "orgastic potency." This entailed a major modification of Freudian theory, which had emphasized the power of immature somatic landmarks of the libido: the well-known oral, anal and phallic stages of development, and their numerous sub-categories. To these phases, Reich counterposed the integration of the full sexual functioning of the person. This Reich called genitality, and its signpost was orgastic fulfillment through copulation.¹² What Reich had in mind bears little resemblance to the commodified and fetishized sexuality that has become integral to late capitalism, and which underlies the fashion industry, mass culture, pornography, and militarism. These phenomena he saw as perversions of the authentic pathway of the libido. As he put it in *Reich Speaks*, and on countless other occasions: "I don't speak about impotence or frigidity. No. What I mean is the emotional, the primary emotional experience of the merger of two organisms. . . . It's not just to fuck, you understand, not the embrace in itself, not the intercourse. It is the real emotional experience of the loss of your ego, of your whole *spiritual self*."¹³

¹¹ In *Reich Speaks of Freud* he saw Freud as at heart still attached to the libido theory, and himself as the one psychoanalyst capable of restoring the Founder to the glory of his original insight. There is little evidence for this interpretation of Freud, though it does demonstrate a flaw in Reich's own character, namely, a grandiose and authoritarian streak which was to play a major role in his downfall. A quote from *Reich Speaks* gives a hint: "Do you [Kurt Eissler] know who has kept the libido theory alive and working today? And who developed it? I regard myself as the only one who did it. Is that clear?" [p. 107]. We cannot take up here Reich's relations with the rest of the psychoanalytic movement, which at the time had a left faction that has long since drained into the sands of bourgeois culture. See Russell Jacoby *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the Political Freudians* (New York: Basic Books, 1983). Generally speaking, the psychoanalytic left, along with the rest of the "psy" world, found Reich unassimilable. As he saw it: "they all left me. They all abandoned me." [*Reich Speaks*, p. 107]. Each succeeding generation of the professionalized discourses of psychology has paid less and less attention to the sexual origins of Freud's discourse.

¹² Heterosexual, it must be added. Any full reassessment of Reich will have to take up his marked heterosexism, indeed, homophobia. Perhaps correlated with this was the tendency of Reich's prescriptions about sexual conduct to lose the playful, comical, and fantastic moments that a more generous and tolerant spirit might have granted. Reich never descended into the rigidities of "sexual hygiene," but his discourse may be said to have wandered on its edges. Not that he himself lacked a sense of humor. My chief connection with Reich and the Reichian movement, Dr. Simeon Tropp, recalled Reich wandering through his laboratory chiding his associates: "Ladies and Gentlemen, we've got to get Orgonized!"

¹³ p. 37. Italics added. The distinction with Freud is worth noting. Freud describes the primary spiritual experience of ego-dissolution in a famous passage on the "oceanic experience" in the first chapter of *Civilization and Its Discontents*. This is virtually the only serious treatment of the matter in the whole of his work—although it can be seen hovering over the Thanatos of Freud's later instinct theory (and was developed as such by Norman O. Brown in influential texts of the sixties). The subject appears awkwardly in Freud's *Civilization*. Characteristically, Freud tries to explain it away, as a vestige of the satiated infant falling asleep at the breast. This, of course, is something that a mature and sensible person will outgrow. Nowhere—and certainly not in

- With this move, Reich lifted sexual life beyond the realm of psychology. Increasingly, biological discourse moves front and center in his work. This is not the biology of normal science, however, in which sexuality is subsumed into reproduction. For Reich, science is ancillary to the motion toward fulfillment, and not the accretion of facts for the purpose of control over nature. And so, sexuality defines the great stage of existence. It is the conduit between the person and the universe—nature itself.

- It was also the foundation of our social existence. Reich was something of an Aristotelian for whom the human being was the social animal, hence, in the case of our species, biology and society were differentiated parts of a whole and not realms split apart from each other. He regarded the capacity for genital, orgasmic fulfillment as the *sine qua non* of being fully human, and measured society by the degree to which it was faithful to this. He valorized the lives of First Peoples and was actively supportive of anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and his studies of the erotically free Trobriand Islanders.¹⁴ Marxism became a glass through which this insight became refracted. For Reich, it was both logically impossible and politically pernicious to sever the psyche from real social determinants, as the psychoanalytic movement was in the process of doing under the impetus of Freud's rightward shift. As he developed his insight, Reich discovered Marx—and Marx reshaped his work: "And here, there was another man [besides Freud], another genius, Marx. I began to be interested in Marx and Engels in 1927. I had to, of course. They were very great men and they all [sic] were right."¹⁵

Reich's accomplishments were shaped by Marxism into pathbreaking achievements in group and family therapy, and the extraordinary effort to found clinics for working class youth under the rubric of "Sex-Pol." This engaged him with the German Communist Party, whose bureaucratic character led him to a rupture with Stalinism, and indeed, with conventional politics as such. Beginning in 1937 and continuing after his move to the United States in 1939, this matured into the notion of "Work Democracy," the theme of Philip Bennett's essay.¹⁶

As Bennett shows, Work Democracy bears more than a passing resemblance to Council Communism and numerous anarcho-communitarian movements. Like them, it was shaped by a desire to preserve the core of emancipatory Marxism, with its notion of "freely associated labor," from the repressive elements endemic to "actually existing" Marxism. Along with the break from psychoanalysis and Stalinism, Reich became increasingly at odds with all state authority. Utterly rejecting normal political activity, Reich offered the

orgasmic release--does Freud grant to ego-dissolution the ontological significance which became central for Reich as mediated by sexuality.

¹⁴ Cf. "The Imposition of Sexual Morality," in *Sex-Pol Essays*, pp. 89-249.

¹⁵ Reich, *Reich Speaks*, p. 51.

¹⁶ After the break with official psychoanalysis and Stalinist communism, Reich spent time in Denmark and Norway before settling in the United States in 1939. The remainder of his life before imprisonment was spent as the charismatic leader of a movement organized around his theories and therapeutic practice. It became headquartered with a research lab, in northwestern Maine, and chiefly consisted of a core of medical doctors, and various followers often drawn from Bohemian folk. The Reichians proved a kind of seed-bed for the New Age movements of the sixties and afterward. However, a core group continues to explore the scientific terrain opened by Reich.

substitution of an organic community of the elect, from which he emerged as a prophetic figure who would lead his disciples into a New World freed from the constraints of bourgeois civilization. In this period Reich's social doctrine was organized chiefly around the goal of undermining the influences that had led, in his view, to the kinds of twisted characters who bring down the emancipatory potentials of doctrines such as psychoanalysis and communism. He saw this as an "emotional plague," though a better term might be, "pandemic," as the disease took shape across history through reproduction of the "life-negative" character patterns whose monstrous outcome is fascism and the propagation of war.¹⁷ Accordingly a centerpiece of his later social theory became the protection of children from the plague through life-affirmative child-rearing patterns and education.¹⁸

- The final step was to re-affirm nature as compatible with these goals. This took place with the notion of "Orgone," which raised the virtually forgotten libido of Freud's instinct theory to the level of a cosmic principle.

The Rethinking of Nature

As he broke with psychoanalysis and the Communist movement, Reich turned to biological investigation of the sources of illness.¹⁹ From this emerged a notion of a kind of universal energy that entered into living processes and which could be mobilized for therapeutic purposes: the Orgone. Investigation of Orgone energy became the focus of his later years and the project of the movement that coalesced around his name. It also became the occasion of Reich's downfall. This occurred as the Federal authorities ramped up a longstanding campaign by taking advantage of false and malicious charges that he was using the energy for fraudulent purposes as a cancer cure; it culminated in a nightmarish sequence of legal proceedings and Reich's imprisonment for Contempt of Court when he refused to cooperate with an investigation that he understandably though self-destructively regarded as incompetent to pass judgment on him.²⁰

This is not the place to fully assess the concept of Orgone energy, the notion of which is still being investigated by a group dedicated to Reich's legacy. However, as one

¹⁷ Reich's most influential book was *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (many editions), in which his ideas about patriarchal family structure were applied in a highly original contribution as to the foundations of Nazism. This preceded and influenced the later work of the Frankfurt School, in particular, Theodor Adorno and Erich Fromm, on the authoritarian character structure, neither of whom properly credits Reich.

¹⁸ Reich greatly influenced A.S. Neill, whose Summerhill school became a kind of bellwether for the radical education movement.

¹⁹ Wilhelm Reich, *The Cancer Biopathy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

²⁰ For a summary of the earlier phase of the government's vendetta, see Philip W. Bennett, "The Persecution of Dr. Wilhelm Reich by the Government of the United States," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, forthcoming, 2010. One may also follow its outlines in Sharaf, *Fury on Earth*. The Orgone was held by Reich as capable of being measured and used through an instrument called the "accumulator." Sometimes derisively called the "Orgone Box," the accumulator was constructed according to the principle that alternating layers of organic and non-organic matter would attract and concentrate Orgone energy. The Food and Drug Administration focused upon this for the purpose of its drive to bring Reich down, in one of the more appalling episodes in the annals of modern state repression. A newsreel showing mid-century America reverting to medieval levels of inquisition appears in Dusan Makaveyev's great film of 1972, *WR: Mysteries of the Organism*. In it we see federal marshalls shoveling great heaps of Reich's books into a furnace. It is a scene worthy of Goya.

reason for my leaving the Reichian movement was dissatisfaction with this concept, a few words may be in order on the subject.

One of the central problems with the Orgone hypothesis, it seemed to me, was its dependence on immediate perception, which in turn could become a function of one's "health." This, then could be seen as one's "orgastic potency," and in other words, fidelity to Reich. The result tends to induce cultism, which did neither the Reichians nor Reich himself any good, and at the least, made scientific progress difficult.²¹

It also seemed to me that this way of looking at the world vitiated the therapy, reducing all events within it to the flow of "energy," which process became the desideratum of treatment, overriding considerations of the relationship between therapist and patient, and indeed, the entire play of language and the meaning of things.

On a larger scale I came to feel that with the dominance of the Orgone concept, Reich had diminished the dialectics of life itself: specifically, language in the instance of humans; and generally for all living beings, the interplay between energy and form that enables life to exist at the edge of the Entropy principle of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Erwin Schrödinger was exploring these matters from the energetic perspective of quantum theory while Reich was still alive; the same applies to Watson and Crick, as they developed the notion of the Double Helix. But to the founder and proprietor of the Orgone concept, these momentous turns within normal science were of little interest.²²

In my view, isolation, persecution, and cultish adoration reinforced Reich's tendency toward grandiosity and hastened his demise. Fidelity to the Orgone became a sign of loyalty and of belonging to the initiated: a shibboleth demarcating the chosen insiders from the great mass of plague-ridden outsiders. Reich's last works, indeed their very titles, speak to this disintegration, despite their often brilliant insights: *Listen Little Man!*—a scathing and mean-spirited condemnation of all the lesser folk who had betrayed him; *The Murder of Christ*—a heartbreaking identification with the dying god; and *Cosmic Superimposition*—a fantastic rendering of the Orgone on the largest scale possible: the very movement of the cosmos.²³

²¹ For example, in the pages of *Reich Speaks* he proclaims that the Orgone is Blue: blue as the sky, blue as thunder clouds, blue as water in deep lakes and the ocean. "Protoplasm of any kind, in every cell or bacterium, is blue. It is generally mistaken as 'refraction' of light which is wrong, since the same cell under the same conditions of light loses its blueness when it dies." [110] Of course, it also loses the structure that would cause it to refract light of a certain wavelength. Tropp evidently drew upon the same way of thinking when he showed me, through his accumulator, how wave-like phenomena appeared in the air above the ocean near his home, and said this was the direct observation of the Orgone. When I wondered whether this could be due to refraction of light through water vapors differentially heated, Tropp dismissed my doubts as the workings of an as-yet-unenlightened mind.

²² Erwin Schrödinger, *What is Life?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992 [1944]). A more fruitful association could be drawn between Reich's notion of Orgone flow and the Ayurvedic tradition of medicine rooted in Hindu cosmology, as well as with other Eastern systems. All of these, it seems to me, appropriated to a greater degree than Reich the dialectic between form and energy—though he may have been moving in this direction toward the end.

²³ Bennett views Reich's later writings quite differently and believes, contrary to the views presented here, that there are solid empirical data supporting Reich's orgone energy hypothesis.

Reich and the Future

Today, the ecological crisis has made a focus on energetics a matter of survival. As part of this, the notion of “renewables” in the energy sphere now moves toward the center. More deeply and within the emerging discourse of ecosocialism, Daniel Tanuro has written: “The challenge of climate change cannot be met without a revolution in energy involving a significant reduction in energy consumption and therefore in the transformation of matter.”²⁴ But there is more here than the transformation of matter, just as ecosocialism is not a matter of technological or economic fixes. What is at stake, rather, is the entirety of *how we live and how, therefore, our life relates to energy*. Here is where the lessons of Wilhelm Reich demand to be rethought within an ecosocialism of, by and for living human beings and the living universe in which we participate.

Cast down like Lucifer into Hell, Wilhelm Reich remains largely forgotten. But his example is, or should be, unforgettable, as it condenses into itself our whole predicament on the edge of the abyss. Sigmund Freud died an honored man; and while the profession of psychoanalysis is nowhere what he envisioned, he remains secure in the Pantheon of the leading thinkers of modernity. Not just a name, but a whole climate of opinion, W.H. Auden called him. And yet the notion of “civilization” propounded from within this climate is beyond bleak. At the far side of Freud’s view of civilization as “exploitation of the earth by man and ... his protection against the forces of nature” lies the ruin effected by an ecological crisis that is its unexamined but iron implication. Freud offers an image of estranged nature; and nature estranged is the seedbed of capitalism whose accumulation sets into motion the hammers that smash the integrity of ecosystems, including those inhabited by the self.

Ecosocialism entails the vision of a different order of civilization. Reich died alone and in disgrace. We do not need to rehearse the saga of his errors. But consider what he got right, how far ahead he was of his time—and ask whether the principles to which he dedicated his life would comprise the ground of an ecosocialist civilization.

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- He recognized that murderous aggression was a manifestation of estrangement from nature and not of a fixed instinct; he saw, too, that estrangement-as-aggression led to endless war and the stunting of human potential, and that it would bring civilization down;
 - He recognized, too, that this fate was worked out through class struggle, in other words, Reich was a true “Marxist,” albeit highly unorthodox. Following his path he realized that a radically different mode of the organization of work, reconstructed beyond the grip of the bourgeoisie, will have to be created if we are to survive and flourish;
 - He saw in “First Peoples” an image of the human that was not split from nature but differentiated within it, who lived along a moving boundary

²⁴ Daniel Tanuro, “Marxism, Energy and Ecology: The Moment of Truth,” 2009, unpublished.

between the human and non-human, and who did not wall themselves off from their impulses;

- He insisted that the sphere of personal life would have to be foregrounded; and that it could not be severed from production, nor could economism guide the transformation;
- He realized the centrality of childhood and therefore, of infancy as well, as the mode of existence in which the human being most directly encounters the realm of nature; and he was emphatic that a good society needed to be built around the needs of children;
- And most famously, he foregrounded Eros, and held the encounter with sexuality to be the *sine qua non* for a fulfilled life.

He was not the first member of the Marxist tradition to take such a step.

It is not known whether Reich was acquainted with the following passage from Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*:

The direct, natural, and necessary relation of person to person is the relation of man to woman. In this natural relationship of the sexes, man's relation to nature is immediately his relation to man, just as his relation to man is immediately his relation to nature—his own natural function. In this relationship, therefore, is sensuously manifested, reduced to an observable fact, the extent to which the human essence has become nature to man, or to which nature has to him become the human essence of man. From this relationship one can therefore judge man's whole level of development.²⁵

But it is unlikely, as the *Manuscripts* were only released in 1932, and formed no part of the Marxist movements to which Reich had been exposed; nor were they cited in the major contribution he made to a Marx-Freud synthesis, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis."²⁶ But in any case, the association is remarkable: here, in the rough draft of a 26-year-old genius at work in Paris, we see the layout of the essential program adopted by another genius the same age, at work in Vienna a century later. And because Marx's notion was never worked out by him, nor, except in rudimentary ways, by the movements Marx originated, it befell to Reich to become Marx's true heir in this dimension, and to develop a side of Marxism that largely remains fallow and unrecognized within socialism.

The ecological crisis makes this lack of recognition a major flaw for Marxism and—because the ecosocialist transformation of capitalism is necessary for survival, while a Marxism for the present epoch is essential to ecosocialism—devastating for humanity as well. Either we regard this passage from Marx as a trivial digression and drop the subject, or we accord to it the seminal status we grant to the *Manuscripts* as a whole and set about to

²⁵ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Robert Tucker (ed.), *The Marx-Engels Reader* 2nd edition (New York: Norton, 1978), p. 83.

²⁶ First written in 1929 and revised in 1934. Reprinted in *Sex-Pol Essays*, pp. 1-74. Reich's Marxism at the time was preoccupied with the version official to the U.S.S.R. under Stalin; and eventually became subsumed into his intense hostility to Stalinism, which led him to eschew politics altogether. See Bennett.

incorporate the theme into the building of ecosocialism—in other words, set before ourselves the same basic problem that Reich himself assumed: a civilization no longer estranged from nature—one centered around *being* instead of *having*.²⁷ It goes without saying that we would resume this project in a way that avoids the pitfalls into which Reich fell, for which it will suffice to say for the moment: stay away from whatever inculcates the lonely megalomania of the scorned genius, in science, and all social practices.

Among the many reasons why this project needs to be resumed within ecosocialism, one stands out here. I think its necessity is intuitively grasped by many ecosocialists, and, if my memory is working properly has already been announced in a poster I recall seeing recently, the gist of which was, that if we wanted to spare the planet of our so-called civilization, it would be far better to spend our time making love rather than toiling in the Dark Satanic Mills of capital. To be sure, the necessity of such an idea includes providing the material conditions for doing so, else it becomes a cruel joke on the great mass of humanity.²⁸ But none of this requires accepting the terms of capital. And the principle itself contains the germ of a way of living that breaks down the cycle of accumulation. What could reside more lightly on the earth? What better way to stop the train of productivism and consumerism? Michael Löwy, following Walter Benjamin, redefines the revolutionary project as pulling the emergency brakes on the locomotive of history. How remarkable that Wilhelm Reich, this outcast man, should have taken this idea the furthest of any figure within the Marxist tradition. How necessary that we pick up the thread where he left off.

“Love, work and knowledge are the well-springs of our life.
They should also govern it.”²⁹

²⁷ Also an insight of the *1844 Manuscripts*.

²⁸ Exactly what led Reich into trying to build the Sex-Pol movement. The prescription also includes other activities non-accumulative in essence: play, singing, story-telling, etc.

²⁹ Reich’s motto.