

Wilhelm Reich, Biologist
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Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957) gained fame and notoriety in the course of an unusually adventurous career. Psychoanalyst, political theorist, pioneer of body therapies, prophet of the sexual revolution—all fitting titles, but Reich has never been recognized as a serious laboratory scientist, despite his experimentation with bioelectricity and unicellular organisms. *Wilhelm Reich, Biologist* is an eye-opening reappraisal of one of twentieth-century science's most controversial figures. Refuting allegations of "pseudoscience" that have long dogged Reich's research, James Strick argues that Reich's lab experiments in the mid-1930s represented the cutting-edge of light microscopy and time-lapse micro-cinematography and deserve to be taken seriously as legitimate scientific contributions. Strick also sets Reich's work in the context of other 1930's work on origin of life, such as Herrera, Oparin and others, including the influence of dialectical materialism.

Trained in medicine and a student of Sigmund Freud, Reich took to the laboratory in 1934 to determine if Freud's concept of libido was a quantitatively measureable substance. His electrophysiological experiments confirmed Reich's concept of biological pulsation and his tension-charge formula. This work became the conceptual basis for experiments in which Reich discovered microscopic vesicles (he called these "bions"), which Reich hypothesized were transitional stages in originating life from nonliving matter. Studying Reich's laboratory notes from recently opened archives, Strick offers a detailed account of the bion experiments, tracing how Reich eventually concluded he had discovered an unknown type of biological radiation he called "orgone." The bion experiments were foundational to Reich's theory of cancer and later investigations of orgone energy.

Reich's experimental findings and interpretations were discredited, but not because of shoddy lab technique, as has often been claimed. Scientific opposition to Reich's experiments, Strick argues, was based largely on resistance to Reich's unorthodox sexual theories and his Marxist political leanings.