

LISTEN, LITTLE MAN!

**A presentation for the Wilhelm Reich Congress, Belgrade, Sept 1997¹
By Courtenay Young**

First of all, thank you very much for inviting me here. I feel very privileged. This is the first time I have ever been to Yugoslavia². I regret that I cannot speak to you in your language and we have tried to make arrangements for a good translation. So I hope you find my little talk interesting.

Wilhelm Reich, whose birth was 100 years ago, which is why we are celebrating here this week, wrote a book in the summer of 1945 entitled ***Listen, Little Man!*** It is a bitter, angry, caustic book and was not originally written for publication. It is written emotionally, and feelingly, about topics such as power & dominance, politics, and “us & them” relationships, about people with little, narrow minds and their resistance to and longing for expansive feelings for life, and much more directly about the dynamics of the leader-follower relationship. It is also a sad and prophetic book. It shows, with frightful clarity, that Reich was in some way almost aware of what lay close around the corner for him: the bitterness, rejections and betrayals that filled so much of his last years.

Much of the book is about polarised opposites. If we (the little men & women in society) feel ourselves to be little, and dislike this feeling, then we will try to make ourselves bigger. We will pull in our stomachs and push out our chests. We tighten our buttocks and tuck our chins in, and then we can think that we are bigger and better than we really are. However, what we do not realise, and what this book so plainly and painfully tells us, is that by these very actions we will also diminish ourselves, because we will cut ourselves off from the free flow of the vegetative energy within our bodies.

This flow of energy is our life force. So we will be restricting, holding back, our life force in these ways. We therefore actually diminish ourselves, instead of making ourselves bigger. The various ways of restricting our life force is mainly what Reich was writing about throughout his life; in therapy, in society, in beliefs and religion, and in science. And in ***Listen, Little Man*** he also relates this restriction directly to what he calls the “emotional plague”. In the introduction to the book, Reich wrote:

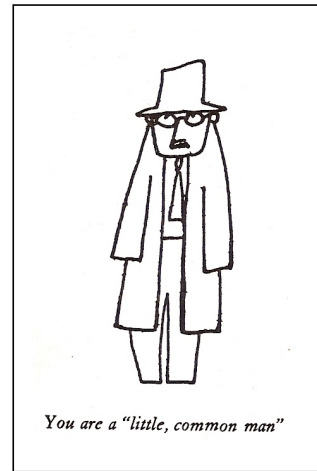
Listen, Little Man is a human and not a scientific document. It was the result of the inner storms and conflicts of a natural scientist and physician (himself) who watched, over decades, first naively, then with amazement, and finally with horror, what the Little Man in the street does to himself; how he suffers and rebels, how he esteems his enemies and murders his friends; how, wherever he gains power and makes it into something more cruel than the power which previously he had to suffer ...

¹ This presentation has been edited and upgraded from its original presentation.

² This was after the first set of wars that ‘split’ the former Yugoslavia up into various different countries, but before the war against Serbia, when it was still calling itself ‘Yugoslavia’.

Whilst he continues in this manner, trying over and over again to illustrate how the Little Man (in everyone) kills himself and others by his pettiness, with hindsight we can see a number of other things going on. Also, with hindsight, we can see that the world of the eve of the twentieth century is slightly different, just slightly, from the world that had just emerged out of a horrendous five years of global war. It is these observations and differences that I want to discuss a little in my talk today.

Before I do this, let us look a little at what he actually wrote in this book and how he chose to have this illustrated by the artist William Steig, with his needle-sharp drawings. The first of these shows a “little, common man” and the opening paragraphs of the book condemn the “common man’s” lack of both hindsight and foresight. **(1)**

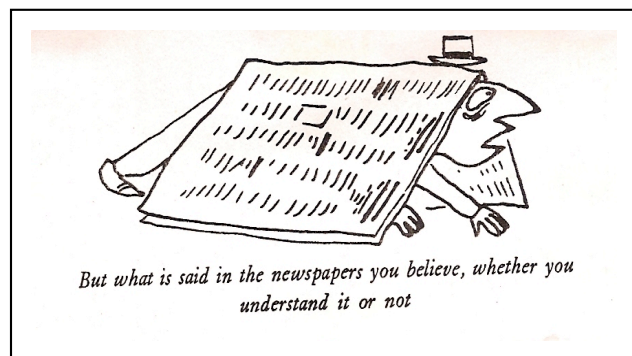


Reich thinks and says that the ‘little man’ (that we all are) is both “*little*” and “*common*” and he invites us to have the courage to look at ourselves. Whilst he is quite contemptuous of this “little man”, he is also quite fond of him as he is writing this book ‘for’ him.



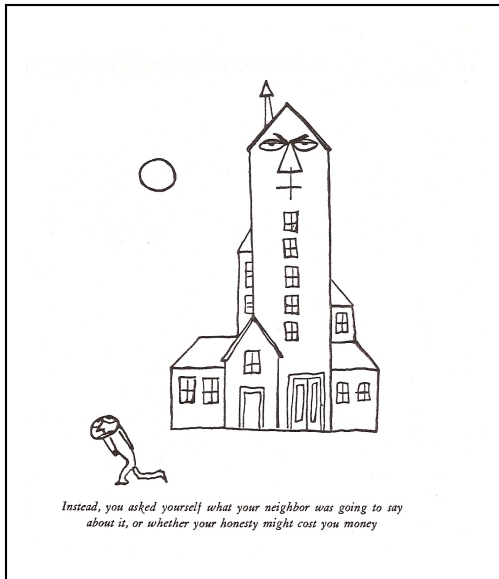
However let us take this invitation seriously today and see if there is something valuable that we can see in this ‘little man’ of ourselves – if we have the courage. Reich calls him “anybody’s slave” and the illustration by Steig is damning – a fawning dog with many leads just waiting for a ‘master’. **(2)**

And from this “Untermensch” or underdog position, that Reich says that you will believe everything you are told, whether you fully understand it or not. He was – of course – affected by the events of the rise of National Socialism and the 2nd World War, where the ‘masses’ just did what they were told and followed their leaders. **(3)**



Reich’s ‘rage’ at the little man is really because he wants the little man to ‘grow up’, be bigger, express his own opinions and achieve his full potential. However he fears, or it seems, that the “little man” in you can’t do that.

“Instead you asked yourself what your neighbor was going to say about it, or whether your honesty might cost you money.” (4)



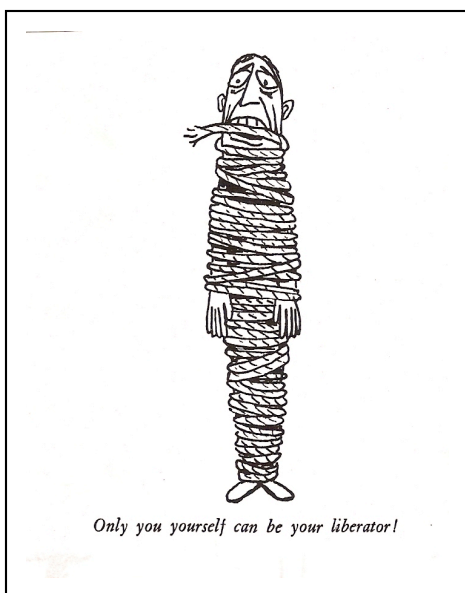
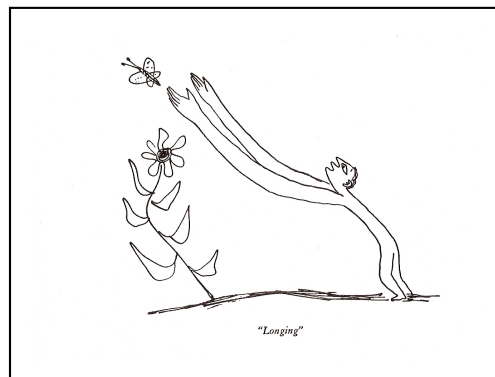
Meanwhile the Church and State look on disapprovingly.

There is quite a dichotomy of opinions around, as the “little man” in us probably thinks he is quite a lot bigger and better than he is, and may be capable of rising to the challenge. However Reich is bitter and does not let him, or us, get away with this hopeful view of humanity.

Whilst Reich is aware that there is a great longing in this “little man” for the sweet things in life, this “longing” is also a trap. It keeps us in an essentially dependent position, and we may ignore that which really benefits us. (5)

Reich was writing before the advent of the consumer society and mass marketing, but maybe he is aware of the ephemeral nature and the power of these.

I would just like to remind you here that Reich also said that the salvation lies in your own hands. *“Only you yourself can be your own liberator!”* Again, Steig has illustrated this brilliantly. (6)



Reich is raging at the lack of self-empowerment and the way people enslave themselves to generals and politicians, bind themselves into workaholic patterns and ‘cold’ marriages, limit their views and perspectives for petty reasons – as we see over and over again throughout the book.

Mind you, given the history he had just lived through and given the ecological and economic and sociological and political disasters of this present era, the book is strangely insightful and even prophetic. But the point that Reich is really trying to make is about the general lack of self-criticism and self-awareness in people and

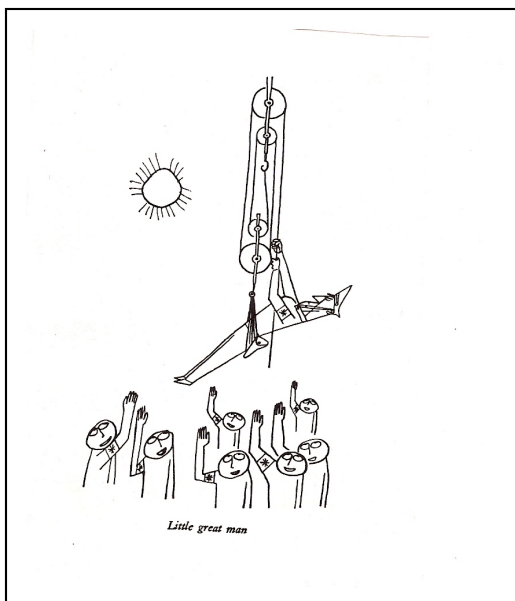
in society. He writes:

You are heir to a dreadful past. Your heritage is a burning diamond in your hand. ... Every physician, shoemaker, mechanic or educator must know his shortcomings if he is to do his work and make his living. For some decades, you have begun to play a governing role on this earth. It is on your thinking and your actions that the future of humanity depends. But your teachers and masters do not tell you how you really think and are; nobody dares voice the one criticism of you which could make you capable of governing your own fate. You are "free" only in one sense ... free from self-criticism."

It would be all too easy to illustrate the prophetic truth of this book and the way it goes on in an incredible diatribe against passivity, thus allowing the leaders and the rulers power to wage war and to control our lives – and our morality: the banner reads: "Love is against the law. F ***** is allowed." (7)

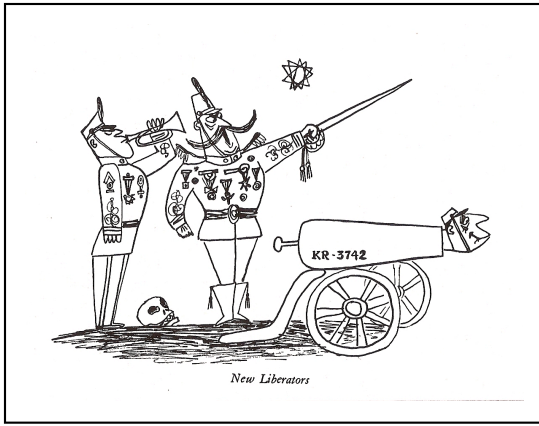
I quote Reich again: "He (the little man) is proud of his great generals but not proud of himself." It appears that it is easier to admire our idols – film stars, pop heroes, politicians, and generals – than it is to work on improving our fragile self-esteem.

However, given the recent tragic events in this part of the world (in Yugoslavia), it would be insulting for me, a visitor, to say anything much more about this. Instead, I just ask you to remember Reich's basic message. He is trying to encourage self-criticism, self-empowerment, and self-awareness. The solution is not, repeat not, to have another leader - however charismatic. Any leader – however benign they seem initially – is just another little man.



After a while, he elevates himself and yet, even with our adulation, he just becomes a "little great man". (8)

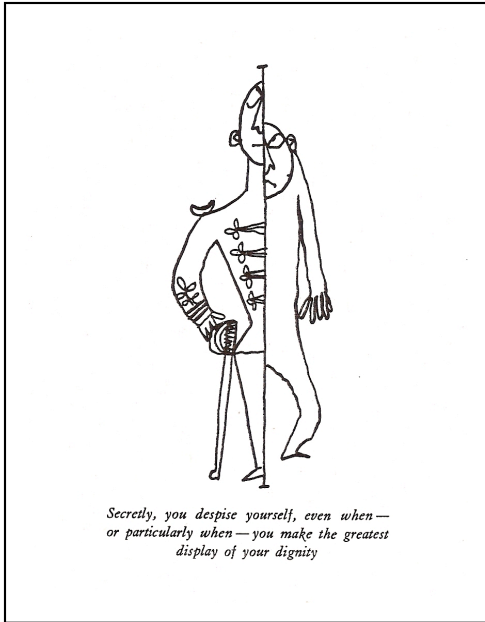
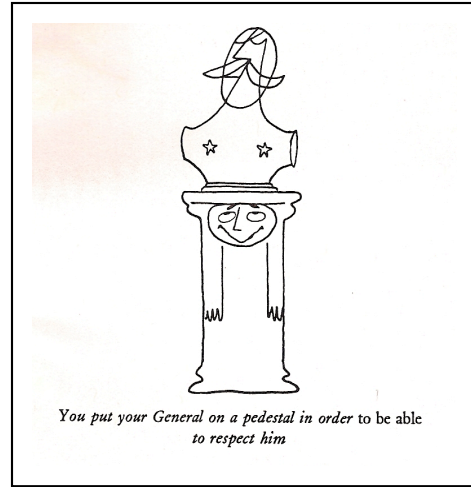
We have seen this again and again and again throughout history. And we, the little men, allow it and cheer. The ancient Greeks spoke strongly against overweening pride, arrogant self-confidence, superciliousness, or, as they called it, "hubris", often self-defeating at our own hands, or resulting in fatal retribution from the Gods.



More often than not, the “new Liberators” becomes the next despots, dictators, or Emperors. **(9)** It is the little man who always suffers – even to the extent of becoming “cannon fodder”.

We put our “General on a pedestal in order to be able to respect him” **(11)** because we don’t respect ourselves. It is much safer and easier to have someone else ‘rule’ us or dominate us.

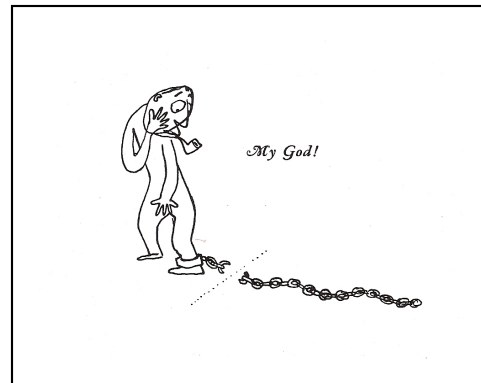
This is because secretly, inside, Reich says, we all despise ourselves ... even when, or particularly when, we make the greatest display of our dignity or when we make ourselves grandiose. **(10)**



This seems very paradoxical. Reich was one of the first psychoanalysts, a pupil of Freud, although he split from Freud (or Freud disowned him) fairly early on, disagreeing with him about sexuality, politics and a number of other issues. Freud, for all his genius, did not want to go against the culture of the time – we wanted psychoanalysis to be accepted. Reich wanted to ‘use’ this new tool to help people.

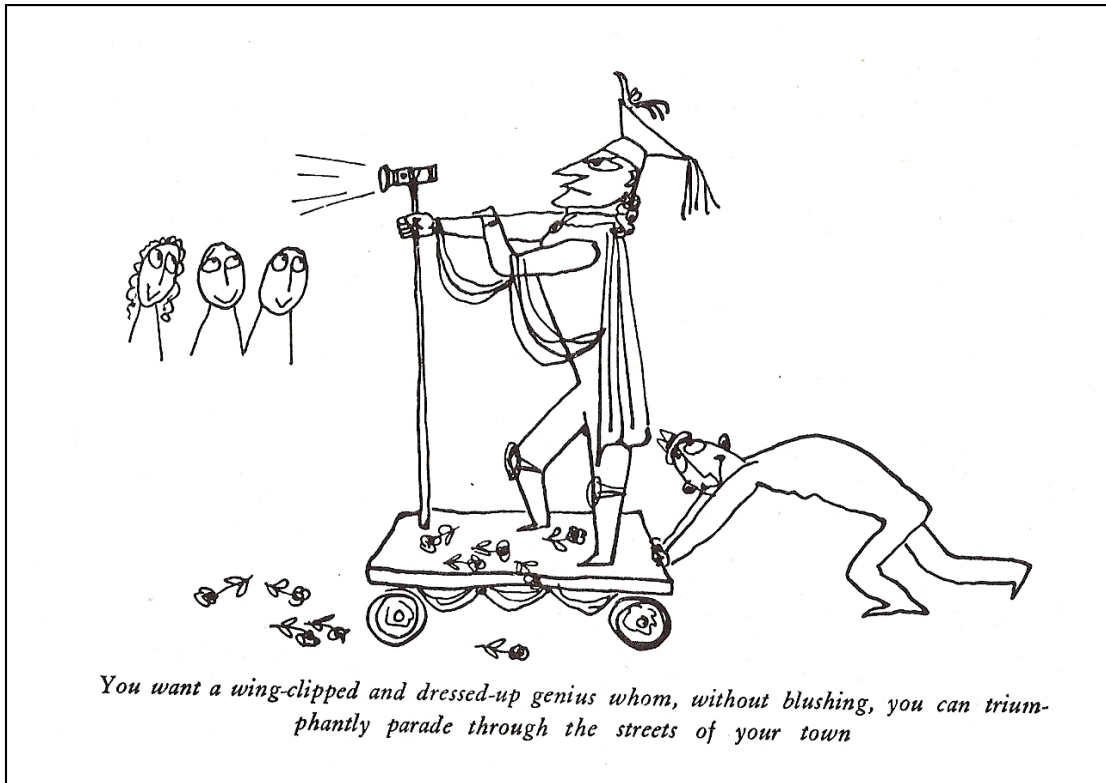
We are actually very scared of freedom. **(12)**

We are terrified of the responsibility, the power, the lack of boundaries definition, or rules that goes with freedom. But freedom does not breed anarchy. What Reich did not clearly state was that we have been made this way. We have been conditioned; it was necessary in order for us to survive. Our parents wanted us to be accepted, to be socialised, to be nice and not to worry them too much.



Over and over again, we want someone to do 'it' for us – we are also very scared to speak up for ourselves and be open and honest, so we ...

“want a wing-clipped and dressed-up genius whom, without blushing, you can triumphantly parade through the streets of your town.” (13)



These are not the solutions. And just pointing out the problems is not particularly productive, but increasingly caustic and acidic – this is a major fault of the book: there is very little compassion in the book. The truth bites deep. We don't like it and we try and avoid it. So all this seems quite hopeless. Especially if we look, as he asks us to, at what happens if there is a truly great man. He is writing here, of course, about himself – as well as others like Giordano Bruno, or Jesus Christ. He sees himself as a “truly great man”. Now is this grandiosity and pride, an inflated ego, or (perhaps) self-knowledge. Given that we are here to celebrate 100 years since his birth, perhaps it is the last of these. I quote:

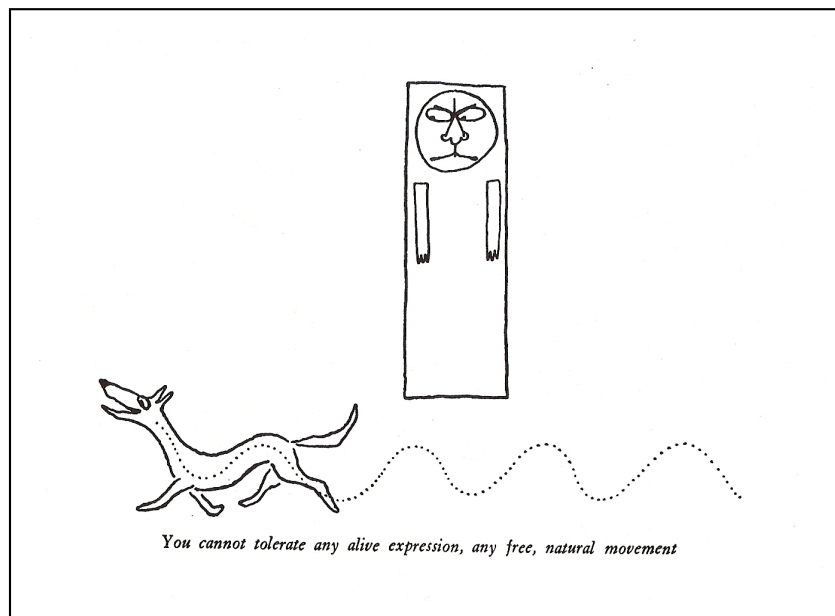
“.... the truly, great man has to sacrifice piece after piece of his greatness which he was able to attain only in the deepest intellectual loneliness ... In order to be able to lead you he has to tolerate your transforming him into an inaccessible God. You would have no confidence in him if he had remained the simple man that he was, a man who, say, can love a woman even though he has no marriage certificate. ... Promoted to the role of a new master, the great man loses his greatness because this greatness consisted in his straightforwardness, simplicity, courage and real contact with life.”

Here we begin to see more of Reich himself. He felt that he really did know 'The Truth' – that he had found it. At other points in the book he makes it more and

more personal and describes how he has been betrayed over and over again in various ways, by various people: a laboratory assistant who gives evidence against him; getting expelled from his professional association and various countries; people condemning him through the courts or through the pages of a newspaper campaign (as happened in Norway). Many of you know this history: what is not so well known is some of the fuel behind his bitterness.

Reich, as a boy, witnessed his mother's infidelity when she had an affair with his tutor and went and told his father. When confronted with her adultery, his mother eventually committed suicide (after two attempts), horrendously, by swallowing bleach. His father soon afterwards went and "caught" pneumonia when fishing in the lake all day in the rain and also died. These were some of his childhood experiences in the Ukrainian part of Austria/Hungary, as it was then. Now it is inconceivable that these events did not affect Reich. It is also fairly pointless to try to psychoanalyse him "in absentia" over the distance of many years.

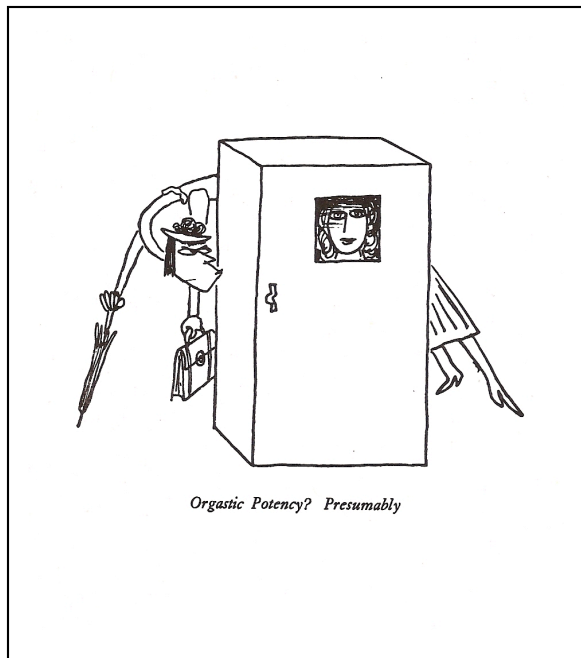
What we do know about him is his almost inexhaustible drive – for Life Energy; his declared passion for truth; his bitterness and contempt for petty little minds, narrow opinions, the people who tell stories about other people; his own hatred and rigidity (despite his protestations) towards those who "*cannot any tolerate any alive expressions, any free, natural movement*". **(14)**



Now some of these beliefs may be fuelled by self-hate, shame and attempts at redemption. They are also certainly major aspects in Reich's character and must not be overlooked. However, they are also true for many – or most – of us.

A number of significant things have changed since the formative years of his childhood at the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In place of the incredible hypocrisy and denial about sexuality, we have had a sexual revolution in the West during the Nineteen Sixties and Seventies. We can be sure that the man

who started the Sexpol movement that brought sexual education to hundreds and thousands of people in the 1920s would have supported the increased openness and available information that exists nowadays. Steig's drawing of the envious attack against the orgone accumulator is particularly apt here. "*Organic Potency? Presumably.*" (15)

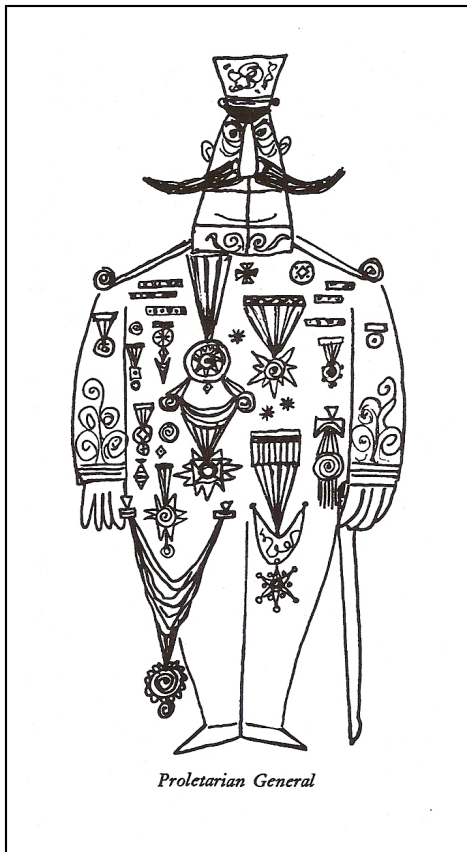


Now the world has also changed geo-politically. At the time of Reich's birth, 100 years ago, the "civilised" world was divided into a number of very large Empires. This period ended when he was about 17 years old, with the horrors of the First World War, when people were sacrificed "en masse" to try to maintain the 'old order' and to prevent the new economic growths and socio-political freedoms. This tyranny of the Empires fell with the end of that war and the almost inevitable world-wide economic collapse afterwards. Empires just didn't work any longer. They ignored the interests of whole peoples. Politicians and diplomats do not think about people – so we should "*send them packing.*" (16)

And whilst individual people were becoming more self-aware and capable of speaking out - unlike the sheepishly complacent-looking character in the background of this picture – this did not last long.

Instead the national powers-that-be invented something that the 'Little Man' could identify with a little better. The 'Nation State' with a "Leader" of the people, and supposedly *for* the people – and, this was psychologically much more acceptable – as we have seen. So we saw a series of these 'nation states' spring up in the Nineteen Twenties and Thirties. But there was very little change in the general level of tyranny, weapons of war had got even nastier, and there was even greater oppression of the individual – though now on different grounds: race, rather than class.





Oh dear! Reich was quite unequivocal. The “Proletarian General” of the Nation State looked identical to the aristocratic General of the Empires. **(17)**

Patriotism, following the ‘patros’, the people, is not a solution for our problems, even though much of the promise of the Nation State is for economic benefits for its masses. He wrote:

“Take a look at your patriots: They do not walk; they march. They do not hate the enemy; instead they have hereditary enemies. They do not sing songs; they yell martial airs. They do not embrace their women; they “lay” them and “do” so and so many “numbers” a night.”

We cannot, he says, find true freedom from people who yell:

“Down with him ! He sullies the honor of the nation and of the avant-guard of the revolutionary proletariat! Down! Against the wall!”

He also writes;

“Don’t get excited, little Führer of all democrats and all proletarians of the world. I believe that your real freedom of the future depends more on the answer to this one question than on tens of thousands of resolutions of your Party Congresses. You have been believing that your freedom is secured when you ‘put people against the wall.’ For once, put yourself in front of a mirror!”

Later he writes (a little unfairly and even naively perhaps?):

“You had the choice between the Nietzsche’s elevation to the Übermensch and Hitler’s degradation into the Untermensch! You cried, Heil! and chose the Untermensch. You had the choice between the genuinely democratic constitution of Lenin and the dictatorship of Stalin. You chose the dictatorship of Stalin.”

He continues to show us the ‘choices’ that we have made:

“You had the choice between Jesus and Paul.” ... “You had the choice between Marx’s realisation of the productivity of labour and the idea of the state. You forgot about living in your work and chose the state.” ... “During the French Revolution, you had the choice between the cruel Robespierre and the great Danton.” ... “You had the choice between the cruel Inquisition and the truth of Galileo.” ... “You have the choice between an understanding of mental disease and shock therapy. You chose shock therapy, in order not to have to realize the gigantic dimensions of your own misery, in order to continue to remain blind where only open clear eyes can help.”

This is a pretty damning criticism.

Perhaps as he is speaking to us Little Men, I should be saying now “we chose ... we chose” and we continue to choose, as long as we don’t want to look: as long as we don’t want to look at ourselves. He is preaching self-awareness over and over again. It is an age-old message. The Ancient Greeks, in the miraculous oracle at Delphi, where people travelled from all over the known world to hear the voice of the God Apollo, wrote above the entrance to the cave, “*Know Thyself*”. This was the most significant thing they could think of to help prepare one to hear God’s Truth. “*Know Thyself*”.

So, what has happened since the end of that war, around the time in 1945 when he wrote the book, *Listen Little Man*? What has changed? What is similar? How is it still relevant? I would like to try and answer some of these questions.

Sticking to the historical perspective for the moment, these choices that Reich illustrated above ended inevitably again in the Second World War, and again and again and again in the multitude of wars that have happened since then. But the size of the canvas has changed now. For whilst we still promote the Nation State, in some areas like the United Nations, we are now actually fighting not nation against nation, but region against region; minority against minority; in Korea, between North & South; in Vietnam, between North & South; in Biafra; in Northern Ireland; in Ruanda; in Cambodia; in Azerbaijan; the Israelis versus the Palestinians; Serbia versus Bosnia; the Iranians fight the Kurds; the Turks fight the Kurds; the Kurds fight for their “freedom”; the East Timors fight the Philippines; the Basque separatists want autonomy from Spain; and so it goes on and on. We can’t say things are getting any better. But they may just be getting a little smaller. Most recently, last week, the Anjouan Islanders tried to get freedom from the Comoros Islanders: and you can’t get much smaller than that.

One other thing that has changed is the incredible economic boom and especially in the West, the first world, the vast differences in material wealth: ... “every home can have one”, the advertisers tell us today as they promise us washing machines and so on. They do not tell us what we have to go through to get one. Reich wrote:

“You listen on the radio to the announcements of laxatives, dental creams and deodorants. But you fail to hear the music of propaganda. You fail to perceive the bottomless stupidity and the disgustingly bad taste of these things which are designed to catch your ear.”

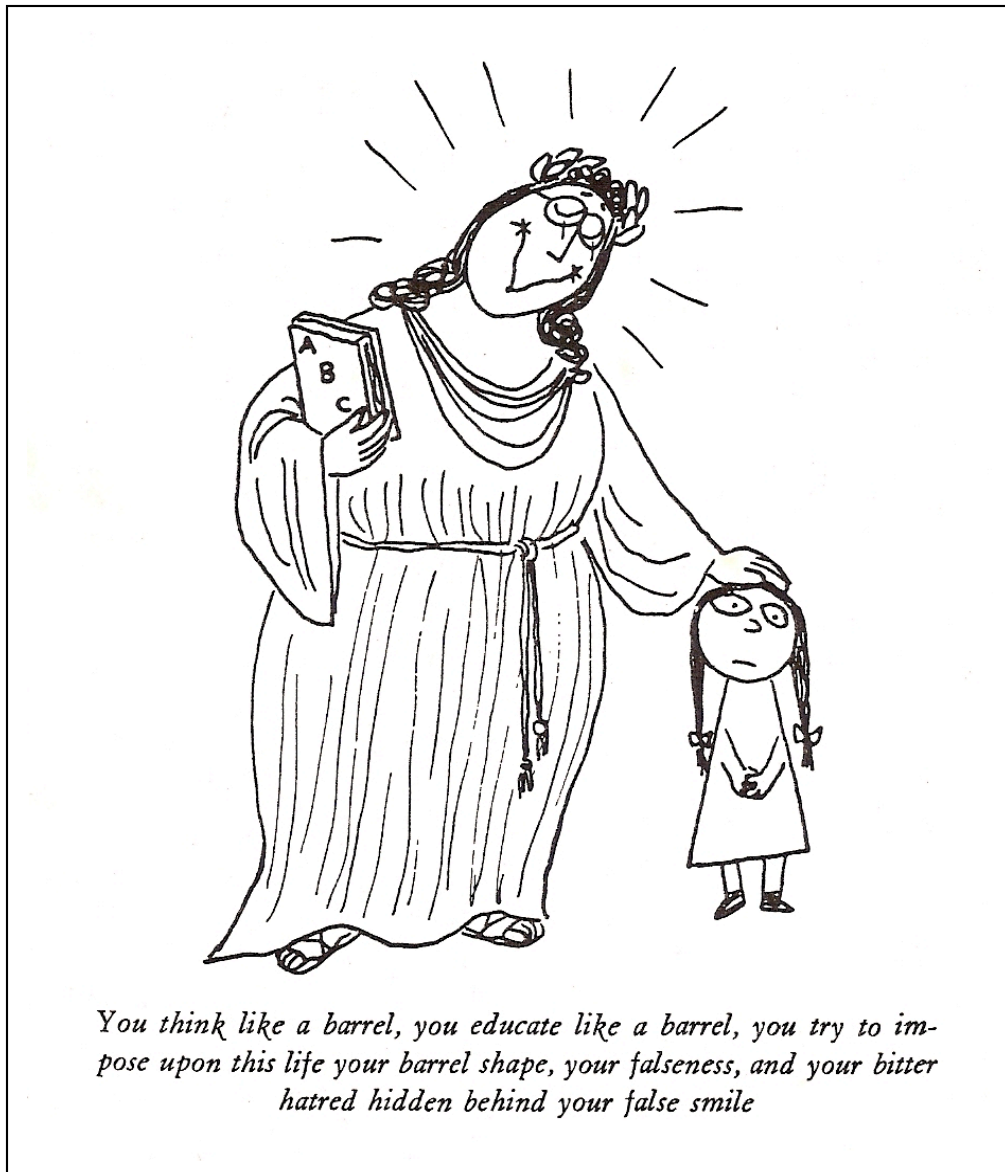
Not much difference there.

Another major change in the post-war years has been the emancipation of women and the changing roles in society. Reich here got left behind. Whilst he mentions women’s roles in “*Listen, Little Man*”, they are very, very stereotyped. At one point he addresses the “Little Woman”.

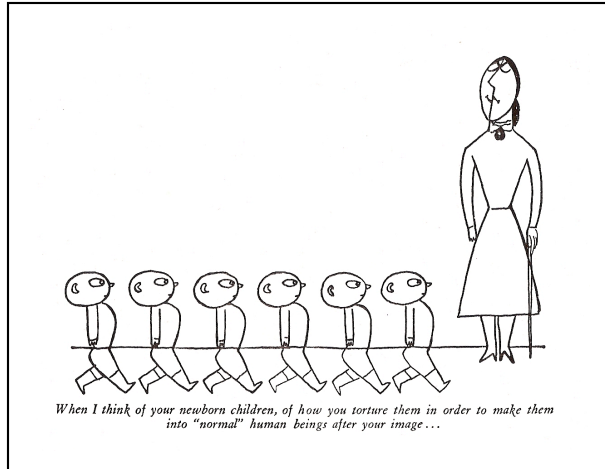
Before I quote him, let me remind you that Reich’s relationships with women were: (a) conditioned by his very severe stereotypical upbringing in this area; (b) not very successful in the long term (he had four marriages and several affairs);

(c) possibly conditioned by his damaging early experiences; and (d) whilst he professed to be able to love them, he must have also been a very difficult man to love. Listen to the contempt and bitterness in this passage:

“If you, Little Woman, by mere chance, without any special qualifications, have become a teacher, simply because you did not have children of your own, you do untold damage. In order to handle the children’s sexuality, one must oneself have experienced what love is. But you are fat, awkward and unattractive. That alone is enough to make you hate every charming, alive body with deep and bitter hatred. What I am blaming you for is not that you are fat and unattractive; (it) is that you make a virtue out of your unattractiveness and your incapacity for love, and that, with your bitter hatred, you strangle the love in children, This is a crime, ugly Little Woman. It consists of your being barrel-shaped, your going around like a barrel, your thinking like a barrel, your educating like a barrel; (and) in trying to impose upon this life your barrel shape, your falseness, and your bitter hatred hidden behind your false smile.” **(19)**

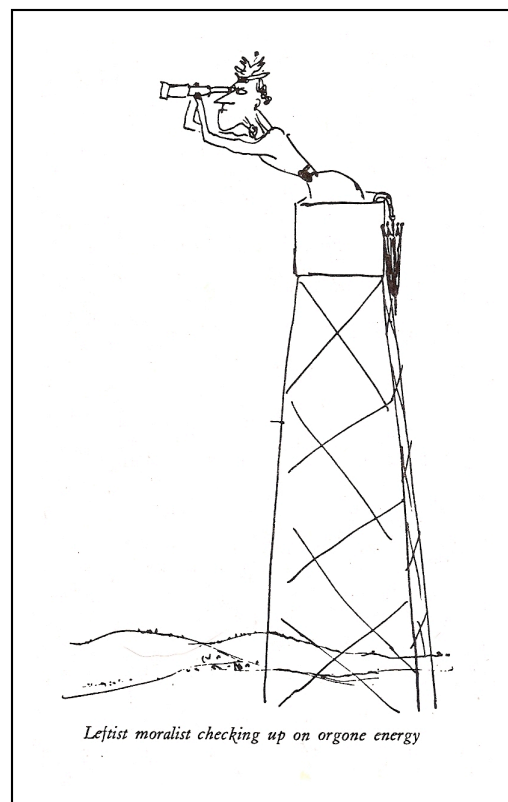
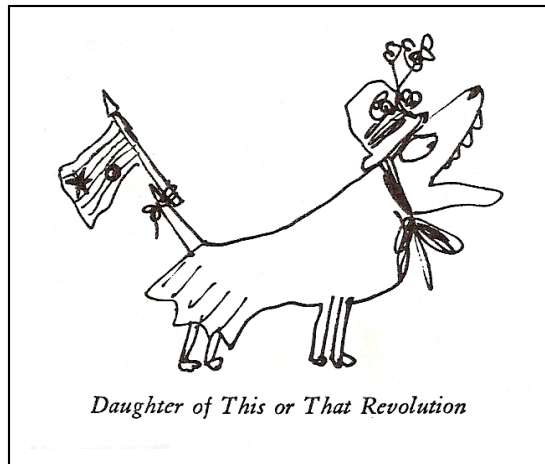


This cannot be acceptable today. Even though he does not refer directly to women in the next picture; the drawing shows another stereotype: “When I think of your newborn children, of how you torture them in order to make them into “normal” human beings after your image ...” (20)



And this negative stereotype of women is repeated in one of the earlier pictures (15) concerning “orgastic potency” and in the image of “Leftist morality checking up on orgone energy.” (21)

and further again in the “Daughter of This or That Revolution” (22)

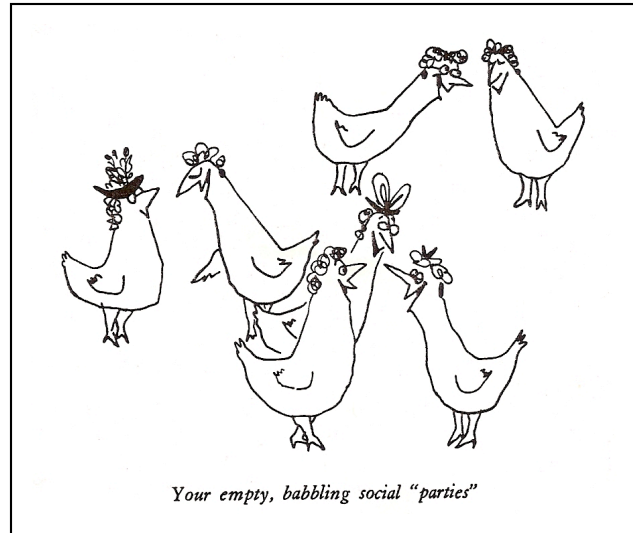


The third view that we have of Reich’s view of women is as objects of man’s pleasure, where “You devour your happiness.” (see below) (23) There is an extraordinary level of hedonism and debauchery displayed here that was not any part of Reich’s sexuality.

He much preferred holidays on beaches or in woods where he and his partner and daughters could dance or swim naked; he advocated healthy, open sexuality and supported many towards this goal in his working-class ‘Sexpol’ clinics and pamphlets.



The last perspective on women that I want to highlight is as “empty babbling social parties”. (24)



But there are also many, many people who still today that conform to these types of stereotypes. So his views of women, whilst biased and outdated, are not completely irrelevant.

Society’s views are thankfully changing to make these stereotypes less acceptable, but it is a very long job.

Reich is also fairly rampant and iconoclastic about children and education. We have just heard some of his views towards teachers, in the “barrel-shaped” passage (19). This was specifically addressed to one particular woman teacher “in a progressive school”. I also remind you of the more traditional view of children in school as a regulated file. (20) In the book, he writes:

When I think of your newborn children, of how you torture them in order to make them into ‘normal’ human beings after your image, then I am tempted to come close to you again, in order to prevent your crime. But ... you have taken care to protect yourself well by your institution of a Department of Education.”

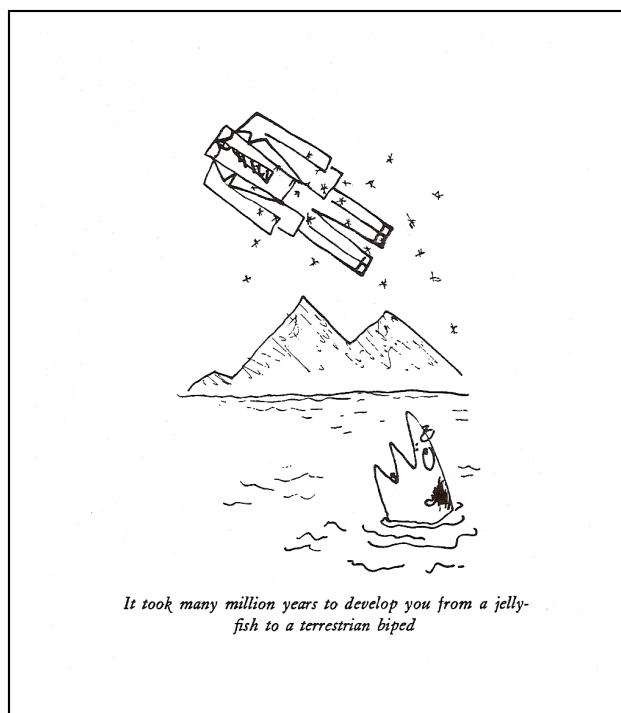
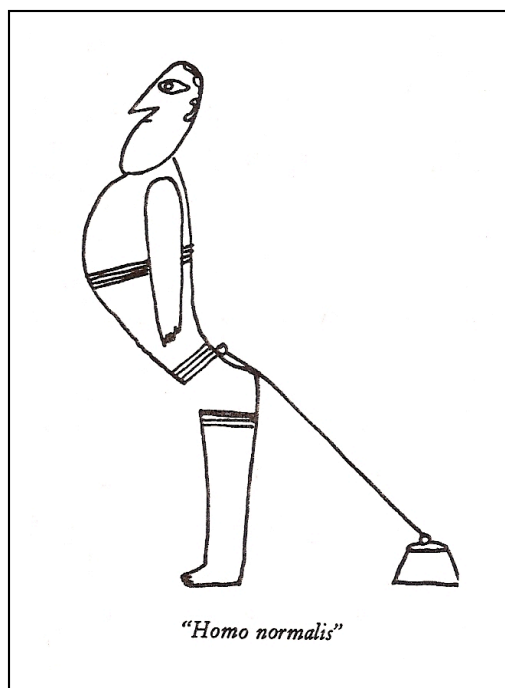
Compare this picture for a moment to the drawing we saw earlier about something (a picture of a dog) being alive and free. (14) Again, he sees education of children in very back-and-white terms.

Now Reich was a very close friend of A.S. Neill, the founder of Summerhill School, whose progressive views on children and education and how they are repressed early on in life fitted his own views, derived from therapy, very closely indeed and he eventually dedicated all his work and royalties to the Wilhelm Reich Infant Trust Fund. His son Peter, the only child he had a very tender and

close relationship with, was born in 1942, three years before this book was written. In his own book, "A Book of Dreams", Peter Reich writes very tenderly about his father, so something presumably went right there.

He is actually here showing the process by which something free (the natural animal or the newborn child) becomes so repressed and bound up that it becomes that which is rigid and destroys life. This he refers to a "*Homo normalis*". (25)

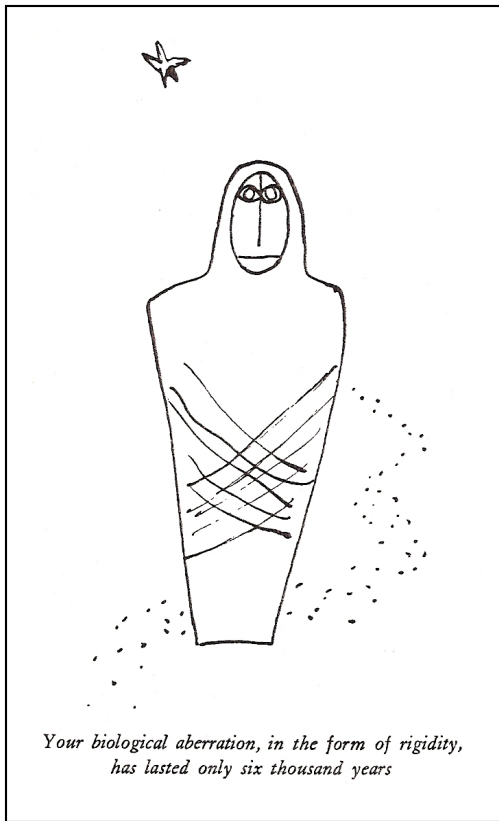
Have things changed? I think that there is much more awareness now in countries (like Britain and America) of the benefits of freedom in education and child-rearing, thanks to such pioneers as A.S. Neill. However there are many more subtle levels of repression. The rest of Europe consider the British as terribly repressive as they don't allow children up late at night into the cafes as valid members of the family, and they send them to private boarding schools, but the French educational system is also repressive as well.



Another radical change that has happened in the intervening years since Reich wrote this book is our view of our evolution, and our views of the world, the planet. Human beings have been into space and – surprisingly – this helped us to realise how small and vulnerable a planet we stand on, and how fragile it is. The astronaut's view of the world has changed the world and this was pretty alien and inconceivable in 1945. The children of the Nineteen Seventies and Eighties have fuelled the Green Party and environmental concerns and these issues are now talked about openly in society. Reich thus had little to say on this topic, though he almost certainly would have been a powerful supporter of such movements.

The closest he gets to this sort of concept was: (26 above)

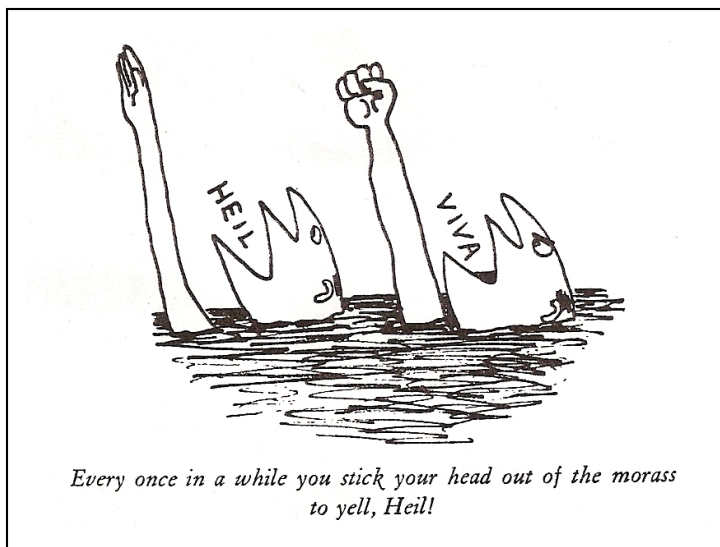
“It took many millions of year to develop you from a jelly-fish to a terrestrial biped. Your biological aberration, in the form of rigidity, has only lasted six thousand years. It will take a hundred or five hundred or maybe five thousand years before you rediscover nature in you, before you find the jelly-fish in yourself again.”



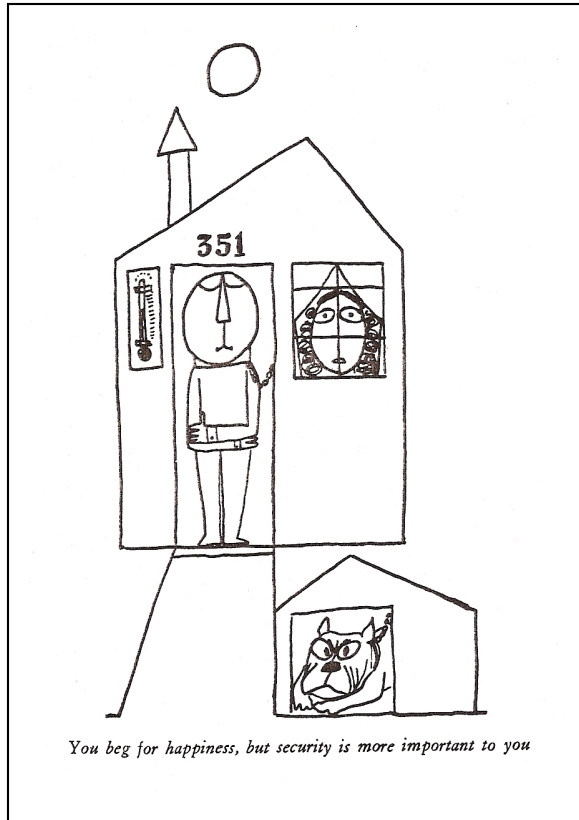
He also states: “Your biological aberration, in the form of rigidity, has lasted only six thousand years.” **(27)** This indicates that he sees it closely connected with the rise of patriarchy or patrilineal heredity, though he probably did not go quite that far, as these views were not really common until the 1970s.

His concerns were mainly socio-political, sexual and therapeutic. He didn’t really see the global picture - how could he? Events such as the televised Apollo moon pictures, World Cup matches, the Olympics, Band Aid & Live Aid, and similar fund-raising events for famine and for Children in Need, have all helped us only recently to realise a new consciousness; that we are indeed all one family, the family of humans. The United Nations, the European Community, NATO, are all post-World War Two, geopolitical reflections of this consciousness. This was not part of the world in 1945. Neither was television.

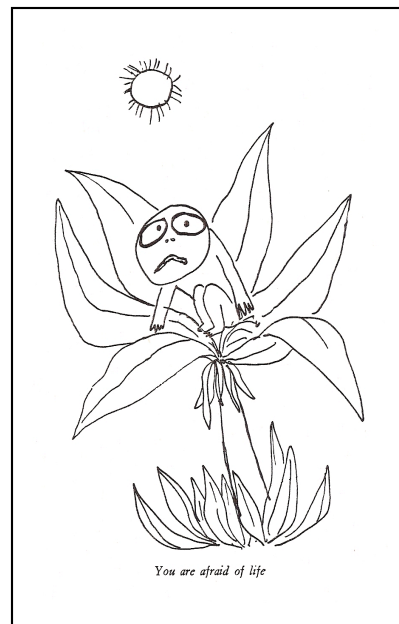
What is relevant in the socio-political sphere, still today however, is his view of the masses of the people; the moral majority; one of the binding, motivating forces in society. We make such a great thing about “Vox Populi”, the voice of the people in advocating democracies as the answer to tyranny, Reich was much less idealistic and much more condemning. **(28)**



“You cling to your stupidities, such as your ‘race,’ ‘class,’ ‘nation,’ religious compulsion and suppression of love as a louse clings to a fur. You do not dare to see how deeply you stick in the morass of your misery. Every once in a while, you stick your head out of the morass to yell, Heil! The croaking of a marsh frog is closer to life.”

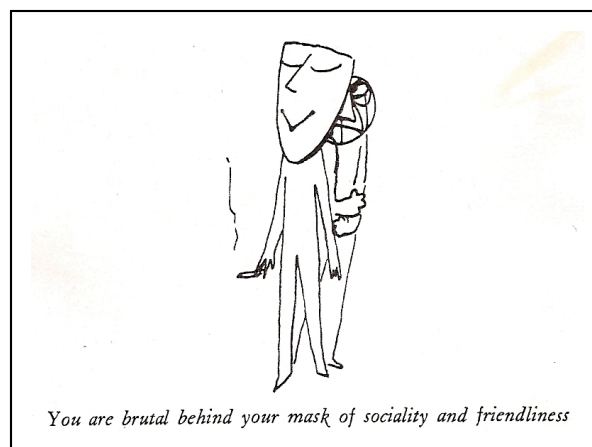


He saw the compliant masses, the middle classes, the populations of suburbia, who are hide bound by their fears, who only seek security, as being essentially very, very destructive. These views come out again and again in the needle-sharp drawing of Steig, and the captions: “*You beg for happiness, but security is more important to you.*” (29)



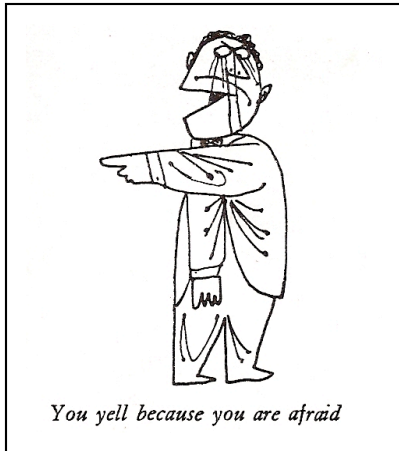
And “*You are afraid of life.*” (30)

Now, there is an interesting contrast, with the next passage, but it basically says the same.



“You are afraid of Life, Little Man, deadly afraid. You will murder it, in the belief of doing it for the sake of “socialism”, or “the state,” or “national honour,” or “the glory of God.” There is one thing you do not know nor want to know: That you yourself created all your misery, hour after hour, day after day; that you do not understand your children

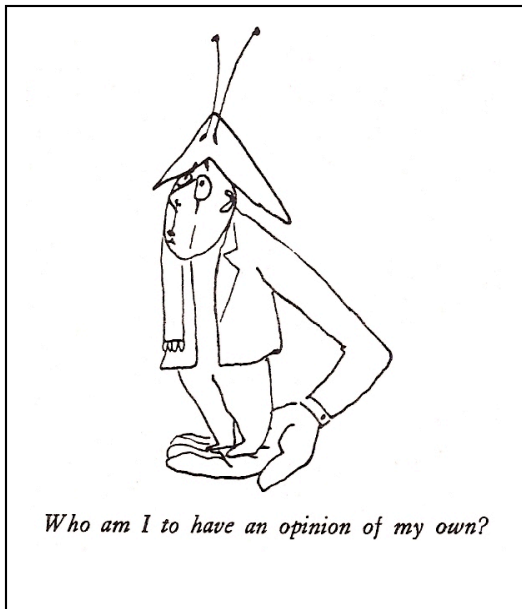
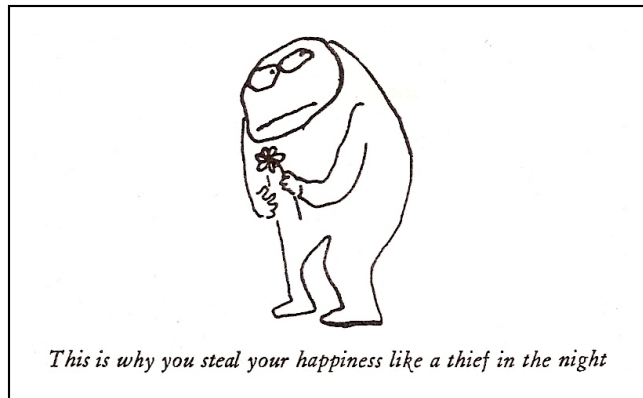
You are brutal behind your mask of sociality and friendliness, Little Man. **(31 above)**



“You yell because you are afraid.”

“I know how you defend yourself against straightforwardness, I know the terror that strikes you when you are asked to follow your true, genuine being. ... I know you have your ‘big moments’ in life, moments of ‘rapture’ and ‘elation,’ of ‘soaring up.’ But you don’t have the stamina to soar higher and higher, to let your elation carry you up and up. You are afraid of soaring, afraid of height and depth. Nietzsche has told you this much better, long ago.” **(33)**

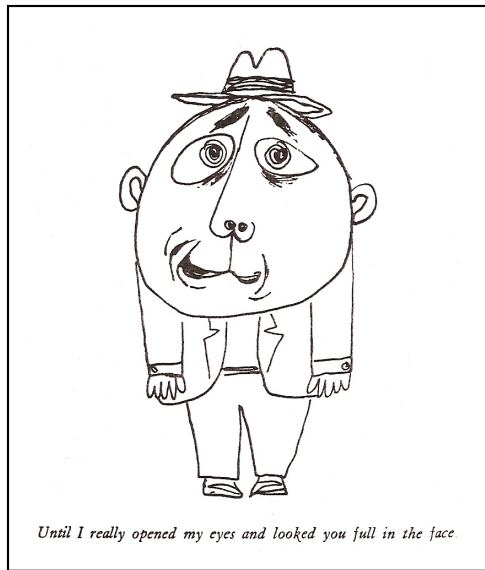
“You are afraid of genuine love, afraid of your responsibility for your own work, afraid of knowledge. This is why you can only exploit the love, work and knowledge of others but can never create yourself. This is why you steal happiness like a thief in the night; this is why you cannot see happiness in others without getting green with envy.”**(34)**



Reich sees this fear as one of the destructive forces in society and in the individual.

“When the (enemy) of this nation or that nation attacks you, you will have to grab your rifle. But what you don’t see is that the (enemies) of all nations are nothing but millions of other little men who keep yelling Heil! when (their leader), who does not work, calls them to the colors; that they, like you, believe that they don’t count and say, ‘Who am I to have an opinion of my own?’” **(35)**

Yet there is ever present, behind the attack on fear and the bitterness behind this attack, a message of genuine hope. That is why this book, this little book, is still relevant today. We cannot do without hope.



Reich goes on to say: **(36)**

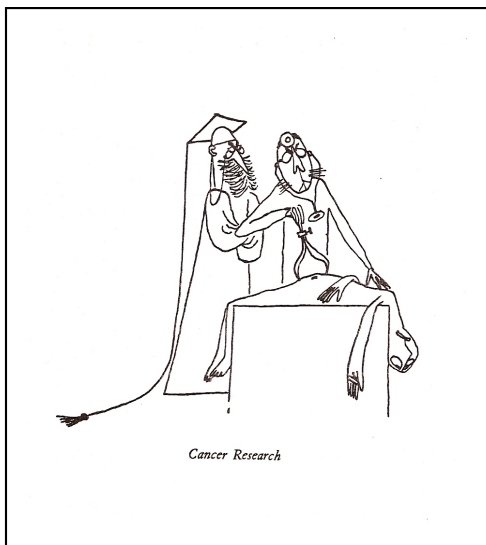
“Thousands of times I had forgotten what you had done to me when I had helped you, and thousands of times you reminded me of your sickness. *Until I really opened my eyes and looked you in the face.* At first I felt contempt and hatred come up in me. But gradually I learned to let my understanding of your sickness take effect

This is a message to us here today. The solution however lies with the Little Man in all of us. It is we who have to change. It is we who have to look ourselves in the face. It is we who have to overcome our fears and to feel ourselves and to reclaim our own power:

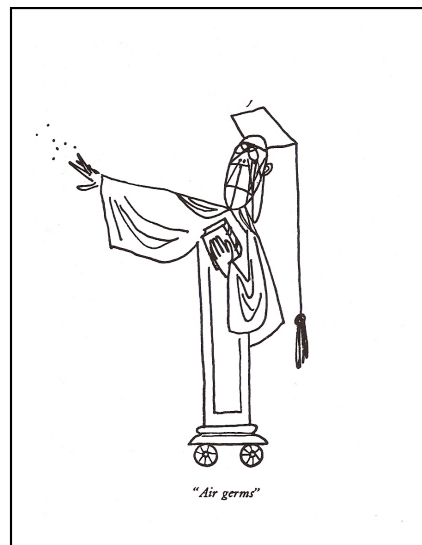
“Once you know that you are somebody, and that you have a correct opinion of your own, and that your field or factory have to serve life not death, then you will be able to answer that question for yourself. You will not need any diplomats for that.”

This is Reich’s answer. Again it can be paraphrased as “*Know Thyself*”. He went on to write at the end of the book a fundamental message of extraordinary simplicity:

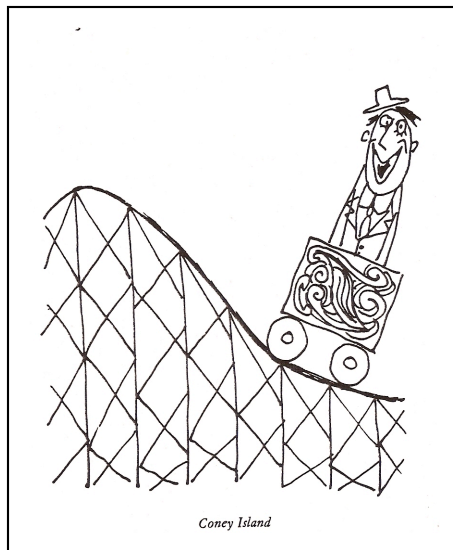
“You don’t have to do anything special or new. All you have to do is to continue what you are doing: plough your fields, wield your hammer, examine your patients, take your children to the school or to the playground, report on the events of the day, penetrate ever more deeply into the secrets of nature. All these things you do already. But you think all this is unimportant ... All you have to do is to continue what you have always done and always want to do: your work, to let your children grow up happily, to love your wife. If you did this clearly and unflinchingly, there would be no war.”



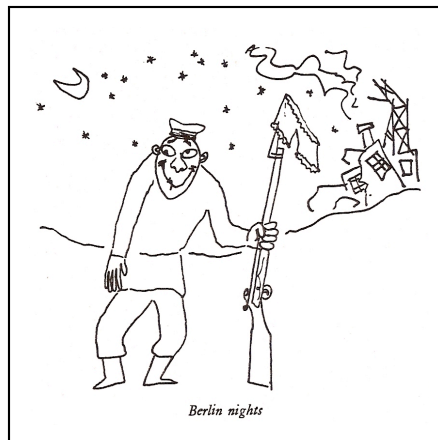
This is Reich’s essential message – not a particularly easy one to communicate – which is why he (perhaps) he chose this rather acerbic route. Maybe this sort of simplicity is still true today. Is that it? It seems much too simple.



Does this answer all the questions we have? What about science? Or education? Do these have an answer? Not according to Reich. (see **(37)** and **(38)** above)



Much nowadays is made of the pursuit of happiness? Again, according to Reich, this sort of hedonism – depicted by *Coney Island* and *Berlin Nights* = is a dead end. It just adds to the problems of the ordinary little man. **(39) & (40)**



We cannot, I repeat cannot, force these issues. The answer really is that simple. But it is qualified: and it is this that is the crucial point. We have to continue to do these things, according to Reich, without fear, but with love; without pettiness, but with care; without ignorance, or blind slavishness, but with awareness. Reich did not talk of spirituality as, in common with many Freudians, he rejected religion. But the essence of religion is a human search for spirituality. Behind the strictures of Islam are the flexibilities and the mysteries of the Sufis. Behind the pedanticism of the Orthodox or Catholic Church is a fundamental belief of hope, of greatness, and of human endeavour. Our salvation, and the resurrection of the human spirit, is a message of awareness and of hope. **(41)**



Love, work and knowledge are the wellsprings of life.
They should also govern it.

Reich finishes the book almost with a poem, a litany or a chant:

“You are great, Little Man, when you are not small and petty. Your greatness, Little Man, is the only hope left. You are great when you carry on your trade lovingly, when you enjoy carving and building and painting and decorating and sowing, when you enjoy the blue sky and the deer and the dew and music and dancing, your growing children. ... You are great when, as a grandfather, you hold your grandchild on your knees and tell him about times long past, when you look into an uncertain future with his trusting childlike curiosity. You are great, as a mother, when you lull your newborn to sleep, when, with tears in your eyes, you hope out of your full heart, for his future happiness, when, every hour, through the years, you build this future in him.

You are great, Little Man, when you sing the good old folk songs, or when you dance to the tune of an accordion, for the folk songs are warm and soothing, and are the same all over the world. And you are great when you say to your friend: ‘There is only one thing that counts: to live one’s life well and happily. Follow the voice of your heart, even if it leads you off the path of timid souls. Do not become hard and embittered, even if life tortures you at times.’”

*Courtenay Young
Findhorn, Sept 1997, Edinburgh 2009*