

**July 15-20, 2002**

Michael Mannion of The Mindshift Institute spoke at **Orgonon: The Wilhelm Reich Museum** in Rangeley, Maine on **Thursday, July 18, 2002**, as part of a week-long conference (July 15-20, 2002) on **“Reich’s Concept of Self-Regulation...”** Below is a brief description of his talk.

“...free, self-regulated behavior fills people with enthusiasm but at the same time terrifies them.”  
—Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*

The late 1960s and early 1970s were a time of great experimentation in education. All across America, parents, students and educators—from small co-operative kindergartens to major universities—were exploring new ways of teaching and learning. One such attempt at a new form of education led to the creation of **Bensalem, The Experimental College**. Although it was founded by an Oxford scholar and a Jesuit priest, and was a full college at conservative, Catholic Fordham University, Bensalem was called by *LOOK Magazine* “the farthest out college in the U.S. today.”

The founders of Bensalem envisaged “a little Oxford” in The Bronx where the atmosphere of the ancient Greek polis and colloquia would be recreated. However, the founders of the experiment understood neither the nature of American adolescents circa 1967 nor the depth of the social upheaval at that time. Students and faculty had equal votes in deciding such important issues as the governing structure of the school, the faculty to be hired and the students to be admitted.

The contemporary school that the young people at Bensalem created bore little resemblance to the classical dreams of its founders. Word spread quickly in the educational community about the unique experiment underway. Although the students and faculty were unaware of it, daily life in Bensalem became a living example of what Reich called “self-regulation.” This crucial biological function often was evident as much by its absence as by its presence.

Each person in Bensalem had an opportunity to help create the school, actively shape his or her educational experience, and become his or her authentic self. For example, each person in Bensalem found himself or herself in an environment where it was possible to live an active sexual life openly, whether one was 17 or 70, single or married, heterosexual or homosexual. It was also possible for a student’s educational experience to consist of traveling around the world, making a movie, forming a theater company or starting a magazine instead of attending conventional classes.

Some embraced these opportunities; others turned from them, taking a more conventional route. Still others angrily tried to deny these possibilities to fellow members of the experiment. The experimental college was a living example of Reich’s observation that “...free, self-regulated behavior fills people with enthusiasm but at the same time terrifies them.” A large percentage of those who came to Bensalem experienced deep, unexpected anxiety while at the school because they did not have the capacity to function in an open environment. Many could not admit this to themselves and sought scapegoats whom they could blame for their difficulties.

Educators, students and journalists came from all over the country and the world—Europe, Asia, India, South America—to see for themselves if what they had heard about Bensalem was true. And what had they heard? Stories of the sexual openness that existed at the school; the radical politics of the students and faculty; and the innovative educational approaches being tried.

And what did they find? Young people living sexually active lives that differed greatly from monogamous marriage; adults and children living in new family structures that were the antithesis of the authoritarian family; students and teachers forming communes and living in an economic structure that contrasted sharply with our capitalist consumer society. And they found a social institution in which no person had power over any other person. At Bensalem, each student was responsible for evaluating his or her education. There were no requirements, test or grades. No one could be expelled, except for committing crimes that violated the laws of the larger society.

Join author, and Bensalem graduate, Michael Mannion, for an exciting look at a tumultuous time for American life in general and for an American educational experiment in particular, one in which much was revealed about the possibilities and limits of self-regulation in our authoritarian society.