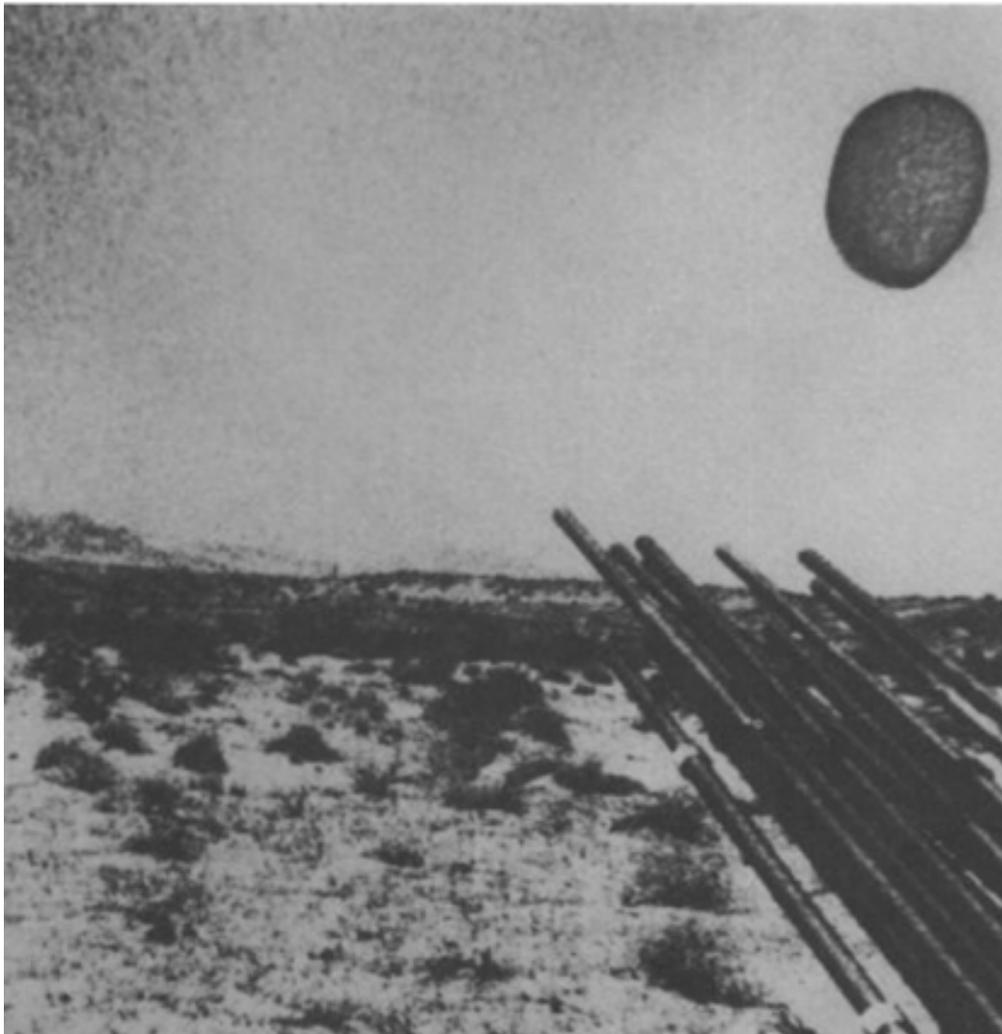


In this chapter, Hugo Reinert examines the lifelong efforts of ufologist Trevor James Constable to document an ecology of ethereal beings that lived in the clouds, invisible to the naked eye.

THE INHABITED SKY: NOTES ON A CELESTIAL ZOOLOGY

Hugo Reinert



*"Diana's Critter" in Trevor James Constable, *The Cosmic Pulse of Life*.*

A Photograph

Picture a desert landscape—along the lower edge of the image, set against the low vegetation and the sloping line of the horizon, an array of metallic tubes juts into the frame. Overhead and to the right, in the grayscale sky, hovers a sort of amorphous blob—an oddly textured mark, egg-shaped and discoloured. The image itself is moderately famous. It was taken in 1975, in California, by an 11-year old girl, using an Olympus camera with a Wratten 18A photographic filter¹³⁴ and high-speed infrared film. Just out of view, tinkering with the tube array, is her father, a man named Trevor James Constable: radio officer in the US merchant marine, amateur aviation historian, “etheric rain engineer”, pioneer ufologist. The image was included in the revised editions of Constable’s 1976 book, *The Cosmic Pulse of Life*¹³⁵—an intellectual autobiography that also laid out the theories, the evidence and the simple, replicable methods by which he had arrived at an epochal finding: the discovery of an entire planetary ecology, vast and dynamic, that swirled unseen through the skies of Earth—“living unseen beings,” as he later put it, “living in an ocean of living energy.”¹³⁶

Sky-Fish

The surface of the blob displayed “vacuoles,” Constable noted, “in the best biological tradition.”¹³⁷ It was, in other words, alive: not an artifact of the developing process—not dirt, not a fingerprint, not a chemical effect or discoloration—but a creature, a life-form of the upper atmosphere; a being made of living plasma, invisible to the

134 An optical filter manufactured by Kodak, used for infrared and ultraviolet photography.

135 First published as Trevor James Constable, *The Cosmic Pulse of Life*, Santa Ana, Merlin Press, 1976. The book underwent significant changes between editions. References in the following are to the unpaginated Kindle edition (2013) of the fourth revised print edition (2008), published by The Book Tree, San Diego.

136 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Preface.

137 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Preface, Appendix 1, “Diana’s Critter”

naked human eye but representable using simple, commonly available technologies that Constable happily shared with his readers: a 35mm camera with a good lens, “the simpler the better”¹³⁸; an infrared filter, a Wratten 87 for example, and some infrared film, such as the Kodak IR-35 or HIE 421; and finally, not least, a “dauntless heart.”¹³⁹

Constable referred to the beings he photographed as “critters”, “bioforms”, “macrobacteria”, sometimes “sky fish” and over the years he caught them in their hundreds and thousands, documenting his “plasmatic fauna” across America and the world.¹⁴⁰ Using a combination of observation and psychic methods, he determined that the beings possessed varying degrees of sentience—from darting shoals of light that were “on about the same plane as fish”, to the vastly superior nonhuman intelligences that constructed and piloted the invisible etheric crafts which sometimes also appeared in his photographs.¹⁴¹ Constable was not the first to entertain the existence of an invisible aerial biosphere. Writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle and Charles Fort¹⁴² had speculated along similar lines before, extrapolating from reports of strange lights and jelly rains¹⁴³—but Constable was, in his own words, the first to *scientifically* document the existence of this realm and its invisible lifeforms;¹⁴⁴ the first to deploy the new technologies of the age to capture it and present it to the public.

138 Constable himself reported using the Praktica FX2, Praktiflex, Leica G and Bolsey.

139 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Chapter 5.

140 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Chapters 6 and 9.

141 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Chapter 16.

142 Fort, *Book of the Damned*.

143 Shuker, *Dr Shuker's Casebook*. See also <http://karlshuker.blogspot.com/2011/12/sky-beasts-not-space-craft-unmasking.html>

144 Years later, Fortean researcher Larry Arnold christened these invisible sky creatures with the cryptozoological nomen “amoebae constablea”, in honor of Constable: Arnold, *Ablaze!*

Reich's Influence

The tubular array in the lower right quadrant of the image also warrants explanation. It is a *cloudbuster*—a device invented by the late, rogue psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, in the final stage of his career. Its primary function was to manipulate atmospheric energy flows in a kind of meteorological acupuncture that Reich claimed could, among other things, produce rain.¹⁴⁵ Constable referred to the cloudbuster in the image as his “weather gun.”¹⁴⁶

Reich was a complex, polarizing and problematic figure: a gifted student of Freud who broke (spectacularly) with the orthodoxies of his teacher—fusing psychotherapy with revolutionary Marxism,¹⁴⁷ developing therapies based on massaging the bodies of his patients, advocating for a sexual politics that he enacted in his personal life through a continuous succession of extramarital affairs.¹⁴⁸ Psychoanalysts disapproved, as did the Nazis. Fleeing the latter, Reich spent the 1930s passing through a number of European countries before setting sail for America in 1939. Within a short time of landing, Reich had set up a clinic—and had also, not insignificantly, discovered a new universal energy: a kind of ambient, encompassing life force that he called *orgone*. The story of orgone is too strange and convoluted to tell here¹⁴⁹—but for Reich, the various permutations of this energy (and the devices that it led him to build) were to be the central focus of his work from that point until he died, in 1957: in prison, of a heart condition, fighting accusations of fraud while threatening to conjure storms against the federal government.¹⁵⁰

145 See for example DeMeo, *The Orgone Accumulator Handbook*.

146 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Appendix 1, “Diana’s Critter”.

147 Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*.

148 See for example the biographies by his ex-wife Ilse Ollendorff Reich (Reich, *Wilhelm Reich: A personal biography*) and by his son, Peter Reich (Reich, *A Book of Dreams*).

149 Turner, *Adventures in the Orgasmatron*. For practical instructions on how to build an orgone accumulator, see DeMeo, *Orgone Accumulator Handbook*.

150 Greenfield, *Wilhelm Reich vs The USA*.

While controversial, Reich's work was also enormously influential: in no small part, through his adoption by the counterculture.¹⁵¹ His teachings on sexuality helped catalyze the sexual revolutions of the 60s and 70s, and his "orgone accumulator" cabinets were, for decades, an iconic fixture of hip photoshoots and autobiographies. Today, his theories on orgone and atmospheric energy control circulate alike in scientific journals and the more conspiratorial reaches of the Internet. His work remains contested, often dismissed—but for Constable, the truth was uncomplicated: Reich was, quite simply, "the most gifted natural scientist of the 20th century," and one of "humanity's greatest benefactors."¹⁵²

The Desert

The desert backdrop is not incidental. Reich himself had undertaken some of his strangest and most legendary experiments in the desert¹⁵³—placing himself in a lineage of American mystics and inventors who availed themselves of the desert as a kind of unclaimed space, available for experimentation.¹⁵⁴ For Reich the desert was also a problem that needed to be solved: desertification was a planetary symptom, resulting from an obstruction of invisible energy currents that mirrored the advancing lifelessness of the modern human soul, trapped within the suffocating structure of its own psychological armoring.¹⁵⁵

For Constable, the desert was where he had first made contact, in the 1950s, with another "strange experimenter": the medium and contactee George Van Tassel, who channeled the telepathic commu-

151 Turner, *Adventures in the Orgasmatron*.

152 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Preface.

153 Most of this work is documented in Reich's final book *Contact with Space: ORANUR Second Report*—in which he describes, among other things, his ongoing battles with extraterrestrial crafts in the sky over his research facility.

154 And destruction. See particularly Kuletz, *The Tainted Desert*.

155 See the collected volume Reich, *CORE: Publications of the Orgone Institute Vol VI*, which also details his desert operations in the 1950s.

nications of extraterrestrial beings to humanity from a cave under an enormous boulder in the Mojave desert.¹⁵⁶ Through Van Tassel and his Ministry of Universal Wisdom, Constable encountered and interviewed a number of these discarnate beings, including the inter-dimensional entity known as Ashtar.¹⁵⁷ To his own surprise (and consternation), Constable also learned to channel their telepathic communications and became, for a short time, “the ‘loudspeaker’ used by these strange intelligences.”¹⁵⁸

Down here, the lifeless desert; overhead, the teeming, invisible host.

A Love for Cats

Trevor James Constable passed on March 31 2016, at the age of 90. From his brief obituary we learn that he was known for his “great understanding of homeopathy and good health, a love for cats, a remarkable vocabulary, and a wonderful sense of humor.”¹⁵⁹ He left us with a body of work—several books, his writings and letters, the strange blurred images he spent decades collecting—that is, in some ways, eerily prefigurative. Like mirages on the horizon, larger than life, the massive celestial macrobacteria he described foreshadow by decades the discovery of atmospheric bacterial fauna: entire high-altitude ecosystems of cloud organisms whose metabolism may well, in fact, be implicated in the formation of rain.¹⁶⁰ The plasmatic

156 See for example Stringfellow, Kim. “Giant Rock, Space People and the Integration.” *KCET*, 15 May 2018. <https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/giant-rock-space-people-and-the-integratron> (accessed 13 December 2018).

157 Many of these conversations are transcribed in Constable’s earlier book *They Live in the Sky*, which he wrote under the pseudonym Trevor James. For more on Ashtar, Van Tassel and the Ministry of Universal Wisdom, see for example Helland, “From Extraterrestrials to Ultraterrestrials.”

158 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Chapter 3.

159 “Trevor James Constable”, *Daily Breeze Obituaries*, <https://www.legacy.com/obituaries/dailybreeze/obituary.aspx?pid=179529075> (accessed 13 December 2019).

160 Shen, Helen. “High-flying bacteria spark interest in possible climate effects”. *Nature News*, 28 January 2013. <https://www.nature.com/news/high-flying-bacteria-spark-interest-in-possible-climate-effects-1.12310> (accessed 13 December 2019).

cloud ecology of his bioforms ran parallel to the life of the surface but distinct, unconnected, like an early iteration of the shadow biosphere¹⁶¹—a realm that intersected the human-visible world only in brief shimmers, strange moving lights, things seen in the skies.

There is also a sort of irrepressible optimism in Constable's work: an expansive and luminous certainty about things to come. Freed from confusion and guided by their new machines, the men and women of the future would rise from the darkness of the past like a new dawn, changing everything. A rational and healthy humanity would open itself not just to the wider life of the cosmos, but to an Earth that also brimmed with unseen intelligence. Cold war technologies like radar had reached into the sky like "a long, electromagnetic finger,"¹⁶² enabling humanity to touch the heavens. New forms of machinic vision were augmenting the capabilities of the human eye, revealing things (like the bioforms) that the eye could not discern unaided—expanding the field of the visible, creating a new "optical unconscious"¹⁶³ in which new and unfamiliar energies were at play, energies that brought with them a sort of democratizing, radical poetics. Things were happening not just *in* the visual field of the image, but *to it*. For Constable, the electrifying ferment of these new technologies articulated directly, inevitably, with the esoteric knowledge and occult cosmologies that his own teachers had revealed to him.¹⁶⁴ Finally and for the first time, the hidden life and higher intelligences of the unseen world would be revealed not just to initiates, but to the public at large—a revelation that would usher in a new, cosmic era in the history of humanity.

161 Scoles, Sarah. "Earth's Aliens". *Aeon*. 9 July 2015. <https://aeon.co/essays/does-earth-have-a-shadow-biosphere> (accessed 13 December 2019).

162 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Chapter 1.

163 Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography".

164 Constable, *They Live in the Sky*.

Refusing Emptiness

Here in the 21st century, my own work traffics in imaginaries of emptiness—drawn, often, to the various forms of violence by which spaces are rendered as empty, available, disposable.¹⁶⁵ Empty space offers little resistance, after all; by emptying space, you make it easier to destroy.¹⁶⁶ Constable’s photograph fascinates me, here, because of the way it refuses emptiness—and not just any emptiness but that of the skies overhead, an emptiness that seems so obvious, so established, so apparent, even self-evident. And yet . . . What did it mean, at the end of the 20th century, to look up, “with a camera around your neck, facing the empty heavens at dawn in some remote locale,”¹⁶⁷ and to see those heavens not just as alive, but as *inhabited*—as home to unseen beings, whose lives might even stake claims, demand attention, warrant care? What does it mean now?

Constable’s blob hovers in that grayscale desert sky of 1975 like an unresolved problem: a glitch in the field of the visible, ghostly snapshot of an alien inhabited sky that revealed itself, briefly, to the infrared eye of his camera. Against the celestial solitude of a clockwork universe, which was also the impoverished cosmos of the moderns—mechanized and disenchanting, pliable, stripped of sentience or companionship¹⁶⁸—the photograph set the image of an Earth vibrating with hidden intelligence, as if gesturing towards the radical possibility of an otherwise, of a world remade in coexistence with the unseen. Among the many skies already gathered in this volume, therefore, I would like to add one more: that late 20th-century sky in which Constable’s sky-fish floats like a sign, set against the blazing cosmic solitude it refuses—as a limit, and a promise: foreshadowing of some radiant, more-than-human Earth that never quite materialized—but which might perhaps yet rise, still, over the sloping line of the horizon.

165 Reinert, “On the Shore”, “Notes from a Projected Sacrifice Zone”.

166 Reinert, “The Midwife and the Poet” and “Sacrifice”.

167 Constable, *Cosmic Pulse*, Chapter 5

168 Reinert, “About a Stone”.