



Fig. 2. Achim Mohné, *Fireflies* at El Mirage Lake, California, mobile closed-circuit, light and video installation: cinema spotlight, video camera, beamer, 2000. (© Achim Mohné) Stillshot: insects and dust particles in light beam.

FIREFLIES: AN ENERGY-AUTARCHIC LAND MEDIA SCULPTURE

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Modern art generally reflects sociological phenomena. Therefore media art, a constituent within modern art, could become engaged with audiovisual distribution processes and their influence on the social system.

Media art, however, mostly restricts itself to the pure application of machines. The specific semantics of a medium remain irrelevant, and the works seldom go beyond machine fetishism. Thus we should perhaps speak more appropriately of the myth of media art [1].

Sooner or later technological development leaves all media apparatuses behind as “entr’actes in history” [2]. Inventions disappear before we have even caught on to them. The replacement of photo-mechanic film by electronic projection, despite their semantic disparity, has been accepted almost without commentary from either art or science.

In my works I reflect on media appa-

ratues and subject them to an artistic autopsy. What interests me here, above all, is the materials that support the new media. They are at the mechanical heart of the matter in that they transport, store and make the coded information visible and thus also have a role to play in the interaction between media syntax and human perception: the videotape, the hard drive, the monitor, etc.

A poetic reflection on the medial process of projection—the interface between apparatus and observation—is built into the series *Fireflies*, which sees the projection beam as sculpture. Since the invention of the camera obscura and the *laterna magica*, the first picture projector, the projection beam has been the foundation of all visual devices: the entry of light waves into the camera or out of the projector. *Fireflies* was carried out with various visual projection apparatuses: film projector, cinema spotlight and laser beam.

In 2000 *Fireflies* was set up as a mobile closed-circuit light and video installation at several sites in southern California. A narrow and high-powered beam of light was projected out onto the countryside. The dust from the dry desert air, drops of rain and fog, pollen, or insects drawn to the light were lit up on entering the beam. Their movement in the light beam, whether windblown

or, in the case of insects, self-powered, was documented photographically and on video, blown up and simultaneously projected onto a screen. The videos show the rhythmic movements of the objects within the cone of light in long takes. The photographic stills bundle time and track the course of all the movements as tracings and paths.

This experimental setup generates the most varied of images. These are essentially determined by the following parameters: topography, meteorology and observation standpoint.

The angle of the video shows us that light is not detectable until it is reflected onto a volume, otherwise remaining invisible. The still camera, set up at right angles to the light, does not at first detect the bundled light beam. Not until particles such as dust clouds turn up as reflective objects within the column of light does the existence of light become manifest (a flurry of wind causes momentary flashes of light, often wrongly interpreted by viewers as a blinking light source). In other words, the reflected particles are indexical to the light source, much as smoke indicates the presence of a fire.

Microscopic camera adjustments record the smallest particles, even those invisible under normal lighting conditions, such as fog droplets and pollen. In their rhythmically mutable movements, they appear as iconographic electronic flashes or quasi-shooting stars (see Fig. 2).

In the spring of 2005 *Fireflies* will be installed as a permanent solar-powered sculpture on a remote piece of land at the Newfoundland Evaporation Basin (Great Salt Lake, Utah), which Robert Smithson (creator of *Spiral Jetty*) purchased in 1968. For the realization of this project and in collaboration with the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Los Angeles and North Rhine-Westphalia’s office of cultural promotion, I would be glad of any contact with specialists in the sectors of solar and wind energy or solar research, who would be interested in the input of ideas and technical advice. For further information go to <www.achimmohne.de>.

References

1. Hans Ulrich Reck, *Mythos Medienkunst*, Christian Posthofen, ed. (Cologne, Germany: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002).
2. Siegfried Zielinski, *Cinema and Television as Entr’actes in History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, Amsterdam, 1999).