Body, Technology & Environment
Andrew Chartier's Mount Orford Autopsy Odyssey

John K. Grande

Citer ce document
Body, Technology & Environment

ANDREW CHARTIER’s Mount Orford Autopsy Odyssey

John K. GRANDE

Denaturalized, we think of nature as something distant from us, whereas the environment we live in, and depend upon for what sustains us, is nature. Water is a precious resource, and one that carries traces of industrial contaminants within it. Production. Among these were the Anemometer and the Pluviophone. Chartier’s Pluviophone is an on-site sculpture that registers and responds to rain and can measure acidity in water. Using the natural effect of rain following gravity, this sculpture moves a series of wheels, causing them to turn. The water from several funnels was collected to pass through a plastic pH level was then measured, and during a few days in June, due to consistent rain and provincial smog abnormal pH levels (below 5.6) was found to exist in this nature setting. The Pluviophone is a measurement device on wheels that has an electroacoustic and synthetic voice accompaniment integrated into its various functions. As water passes through a series of funnels that act as rain catchers, sensors measure the flow of the water. This causes various tones or sounds to be emitted according to the intensity of the rainfall. The water then falls in a container at the bottom of the machine where its pH level is measured. A synthetic voice then announces any contamination and/or if the water is normal.

Andrew’s backpack Anemometer was equipped with its wind catching propellers confected out of soup spoons was attached to a bridge beside a pond near his chalet. The Anemometer measures wind strength by remote control, and this activated a pendulum-like drawing mechanism in the chalet, just as Chartier’s device activated a window display at Galerie Horsace in Sherbrooke in 2005. The wind is caught by the anemometer and sends electric signals to a pendulum that moves in a semi-circular fashion over large sheets of paper, measuring and drawing semi-circular marks in ink. The markings are cumulative and more or less severe according to the strength of the wind at a particular time. A smaller hand-held version of Chartier’s art активе plays on the ambiguity of his public/nature practice at Orford and raises aesthetic questioning making us aware of our civilization’s misdirected desire: art history’s incredible oversight of the plane earth plays in our sustenance regardless of how pretty a picture our genius artists (There are SO MANY of them) could have, did and do paint. As Chartier states: “Sometimes invested in interpreting local climate subtle changes and sometimes providing us a consciousness on the continued landscape, my goal is to work with these phenomena in the present time in order to show the urgency of acting now. For my work is not a way aimed in changing the world and having the pretext to hold the truth but simply to act as a reminder that something is happening here and now! The idea of being far away from the city can lead to delusion concerning the actual state-health of nature. Actually witnessing that acid rain is falling in what seems wild and natural instantly directs our attention on the idea of nature becoming an endangered... like any other man-made object.”

Chartier makes us realize what an invisible tragedy we as society are participating in. His works are often every bit as, if not more, effective, ecological and efficient, than the technological artifacts and tools whose pollution effects they record.

Chartier’s Orford experience ignited a controversy and helpfully generates discussion about current social, ecological and public issues. He is an amicable provocateur who hopes to raise public awareness of increasingly critical ecological issues that affect our lives. The machine is a pretext for renewing a dialogue with the public on nature, its processes, and the great gap between humanity and the natural environment. As Allan Kaprow, one of the originators of the Happening, a 1960s forerunner to today’s public art intervention has commented, “Deprived... of imaginary ideals, [the artists] must work towards that which [he] sees functioning neither for church nor state nor individual, but in a subtle social complex whose terms [he] is only beginning to understand.”

Chartier’s artistic practice demonstrates that one of the areas for future growth in artmaking activity is precisely an art that is socially, ecologically and publicly engaged. Chartier’s art has a wholesome sense of the irony of its own undertaking. The subjects he deals with involve as much as we can see — environmental damage, the result of overproduction and state-enforced economies of scale as well, inadvertently, as a environmental destruction... the effects of so-called globalization. —

John GRANDE is author of Balance: Art and Nature (Black Rose, 2005) and several monographs on artists including Patrick Dougherty, Alan Sonfist and Niki-Udo. His latest book of poetry, Memory of the Worlds was recently published by Go 4 Press.

NOTE 1. Allan Kaprow, “Should the Artist be a Man or the Work,” ArtNews (1964), 35.