La sculpture et les mots
Sculpture and Words
Numéro 78, hiver 2006–2007

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/8840ac

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.

At Mount Orford as artist in residence, Andrew Chartier set up the chalet where he stayed as a pseudo-scientific base of operations. Decamped on site meant exploring local flora and fauna and integrating his public art process into a nature art process—nature being the public more often than not here, aside from the occasional tourist.

With ten to twenty visitors to day, who dropped by to ask questions about the natural and artificial in the modern environment, and questioned Chartier’s approach to artmaking, the project stimulated debate about the ongoing threat of development at Orford and selling off of land for condominium development near to Orford’s ski lift area.

Chartier’s summer of 2006 Orford experiment plays with the role of animator. In this case his art becomes a pretext for engaging in a dialogue on the nature/culture divide and environmental issues but equally on the nature making us aware of our places planet earth plays in our lives.

Chartier’s art activity 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 place planet 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 landscape climate subcultures and sometimes providing our consciousness of the contaminated landscape, my goal is to work with these phenomena in the present time in order to show the urgency of acting now. My work is not new aimed in changing the world and having the pretext to hold the truth but simply to act as a reminder that something his happening here and now. The idea is being far away from the city can lead to delusion concerning the actual state of health of nature. Actually witnessing that acid rain is acting in what seems wild and natural instantly directs our attention on the idea of nature becoming an artefact...like any other man-made object.

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

Chartier’s mount Orford experience ignites controversy and hopefully 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 artist] must work towards an art, 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. Charlier’s art has a wholesome sense of the irony of its own undertaking. The subjects he deals with involve what we cannot see as much as what we can see—environmental pollution, the result of over-production and state-enforced economies of scale as well, inadverently, as environmental destruction...the effects of so-called globalization.

Interview with Environmental Artists (SUNY Press, 1999), 35.