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

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Body, Technology & Environment
ANDREW CHARTIER's Mount Orford Autopsy Odyssey

John K. GRANDE

Denaturized, 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 falling, this sculpture moves a series of wheels, causing them to turn. The water from several funnels was collected to pass through a pipe. The 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.

At Mount Orford as artist in residence, Andrew Chartier set up the chalet where he stayed as a pseudo-animator. In this case his art becomes a pretext for engaging in 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.

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