



Exhibition: 'return' Prema Arts Centre, Uley, Glos

Catalogue: 'afterimages' a re-presentation of selected works by Annie Lovejoy 1993-8  
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Catalogue Text by Martin Lister

The work represented here was made between 1993 and 1998. A retrospective catalogue looks back and across a series of works; a way of offering a view of change, development, or perhaps difference, in how an artist has worked over a period of time. In this sense, a catalogue may promise to give us a view of process - the work of transformation over time. Yet, the form of the catalogue, in fact the form of books in general, can encourage something quite different. Publications tend to privilege and reinforce the singularity and discreteness of the images that appear on their pages. Each image is framed by the edges of the page, each one is placed in considered isolation and held apart from the other (invisible) images sitting on the other closed pages. Each one is individuated by title and date. Of course, we turn the pages and make the mental effort to carry one set of impressions to the next, but the pressure of the form continually works to obscure the relationships.

It is true that before their photographic re-presentation, the works shown here were somewhere in a particular place or site, for a certain amount of time: in a specific room or a particular field, for a month or a morning. The work re-presented here was, after all, never experienced together in one synchronous set of relationships. Each work, typically involving a synthesis of different media, often a deliberate mix of high and low technology, or of technology and organic 'nature', is site specific or an intervention within other social activities and routines. For these reasons, each work has, as art needs to have, a presence, an aesthetic power, they must be resolved pieces of work with which an audience can engage, sense, enjoy and contemplate. But this is not the same as the work being fixed, object-like, in time and space. It is, perhaps, this kind of recognition that can begin to let in the fuller sense of process that catalogues can suppress.

History has left us with several versions of art as 'process'. There is the traditional and classical sense in which the process in question is that of how ideas are given material form - become embodied as artifacts, and there is a romantic version in which the stress shifts to how feelings and experiences are expressed. Perhaps these are still the predominant meanings of the 'creative process'.

A modernist, or 'formalist' version, stresses the intimate and sensual dialogue an artist has with his or her materials - the process of 'making'; the traces and record of which are the work of art itself. This is the artist's sheer interest in how a colour, an element or a material quality touches, joins, or overlays another or how a form or an object inhabits a space, how the viewer's body approaches and then stands in relation to the object.

There is a conceptual version of process in which the artist makes us a proposition, often having the most minimal material existence, and thereby generates a mental process of reflection in the viewer - a process that exists outside or beyond any physical 'work'.

There are also distinctly 'postmodern' concepts of what an artist does which embody yet other ideas about 'process'. Now, we can also understand the artist as cultural conduit through whom many voices speak, a skilled juggler of the clashing meanings which are abroad within a culture, a virtuoso of bricolage. Here, the process is decentred from the individual artist as an omnipotent author, and art is seen as a fully cultural process; a game in which the artist is an adept player.

Each of these versions has had its historical moment; its point of cultural dominance in ways of thinking about the processes of art. The art market, the mediating industry of art criticism and the stress on theory in art education, have all fuelled intense debate and a rapidly spinning cycle of fashions in what is judged to be the process of art. Yet, beyond fashion, all of these versions of 'process' constitute something like a conceptual toolbox for thinking about the processes of art and they can all be used in thinking about Annie's work. Yet, there is another sense of art as process which her work represents. This is art as a social process. It is there in the way that she asks questions about her audiences, about locations and places, about the uses of technology, and about modes of production.

Who is the work for? What are the meanings of places? What does it mean to place work here? What do visual technologies help us see/not see? How do they mediate our experiences? What is the meaning of an artist's mode of production?

Some of Annie's work literally grew (pause 1995 and watermark 1996). Such work was always changing, never fixed; small changes everyday, whole cycles of change took place over weeks. Other work was mass-produced and distributed (stirring 1996) or digitally reproduced and electronically transmitted (Point and Click 1993/4) - they were in many places at once, met and experienced in different contexts. Some are hybrid works - they have been growing, now they are here (comfort 1998) - or they did grow before they were 'somewhere' (she describes a circle 1993, our daily bread 1994).

Annie typically works on several projects simultaneously. In this sense each piece of work is part of a larger and concurrent exploration of themes, ideas and methods. Over the same period she may be working on a lo-tech, environmental piece which poses questions about the contemporary meaning of media technology while, elsewhere, she is driving technology as hard as she can, as in her digital, screen-based multimedia work.

For instance, in 1995, Annie worked intensively with image, text and sound for the CD Rom project *From Silver to Silicon*. At the same time she worked on the landwork *pause*. By coaxing grass to form an icon of domestic leisure technology in a rural Somerset field, she drew attention to the ubiquitous reach of electronic technology as it pervades rural places and communities. In 1996 she made a large scale landwork watermark on the banks of a river in Co. Durham. Over the same period she coordinated her intervention stirring within Bristol's International Festival of the Sea. This project involved designing and producing 'multiples'; mass produced sachets of sugar to accompany the tea and coffee consumed in Bristol's dockside restaurants. The visitors were presented with an icon of Bristol's historical maritime trade in slaves and sugar, in the midst of a depoliticised festival which suppressed history.

#### Location.

*Pass* (1993) worked in a pedestrian underpass in central Bristol, watermark (1996) worked on a river bank in Chester le-Street, Co, Durham, *pause* (1995) a field in Somerset, *Blue* (1996), exhibited as part of the curated group show 'Swinging the Lead' worked in a derelict warehouse, and *Point and Click* (1993/4) was destined for the electronic space of the computer and the private places in which people use them. These were not simply sites or places in which work was exhibited (as accessible alternatives to galleries, although they were also just that) but they were places (known and defined spaces which were active and constituent parts of the work). In this way Annie works with the social nature of place. In a public underpass where the homeless ask for spare change, passers-by were asked to consider the meanings of 'pass' and 'change' in the physical presence of political and economic inequality. In the award-winning multimedia piece *Point and Click* she entered into a one to one relationship with each 'user' as they individually interact with her representation of a tragic and intimate event.

Annie is no luddite who works with the land, bread, glass and other tactile materials as a rejection of late 20th century technology. But her attitude toward technology is ambivalent and volatile as she refuses any easy identification with techno-culture. The intensity with which she sets herself to learn to use and then apply technology also leads her to set it aside. When she fears that technology may use her, she sidesteps it. When technology becomes a limit rather than a source of possibilities she moves on, to return later from another direction.

In 1993, already skilled and flexible in her use of photography and video, Annie became interested in the early possibilities of digital technology as an artists' medium. By the end of 1994 she had equipped herself with the skills, and researched and produced an award-winning multimedia piece which reflected upon the family,

its re-presentation through photography, and photography's relationship to memory and the tragic death of her own small son. In 1995, during several months of highly intensive work at the computer, she designed the architecture, navigation, and produced a major part of the CD Rom *From Silver to Silicon*. Running simultaneously with this project she used the computer to design the large scale landwork watermark, now using the computer as a means for visualising the way she would plant a river bank with flowers. On completion of this project, Annie switched off the computer to work with light and glass in her *Blue* installation for 'Swinging the Lead', returning to another theme related to Bristol's uneasy mercantile past. As she put it 'I was repelled back to glass and grass'. Now, in 1998, she is again working with video and considering new digital media projects.

The history of 20th century art is shot through with strategies to foreground 'art as process' over 'art as commodity'; the effort to make work which resists an easy assimilation to a consumerist economy and culture. Stories of how such strategies have been recuperated are well known: how the urinal became the curator's precious object; or how, through its photographic, film or video documentation, the ephemeral and subversive performance becomes a form of cultural capital; a qualification for the next Arts Council grant or piece of corporate sponsorship. There has been little, if anything, in this radical history which has not been commodified; setting artist's interventions apart from the lived social relations in which they were made and finally rendering them up as items to be traded and invested in. This may be the history, but in the work of an artist like Annie Lovejoy we can see these strategies at work in the here and now.

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