

COME: 1b: to move toward
or enter a scene of
action or into a field
& of interest whether
partly physical or
wholly ideal

GO: 14a: to come to be:
BECOME, b: to un-
dergo a change or
transformation.¹

Kristine Stiles

Basic to Peter D'Agostino's art is a continual exploration of three phenomena: origins, receptions (in the sense of receiving, taking possession or getting; harboring and reacting through response) and transformations. Selecting aspects of "observable" reality (as manifest in "facts" and events), he creates works which serve to mark with signification the transit relationships between these three points.

In effect, he continually produces works which objectify that which is transitive, visualizing it through structures incorporating spatial elements in sequence, quantity and number, through language as symbol and through the juxtaposition of real and illusory perceptions. His metaphors seek to stay movement occurring between approach and recession, that synaptic juncture in which meaning resides and connects to recognition producing knowledge.

Taking an "instant" photograph and watching it develop on a television screen can be a slow and tedious process. What seems to be quick in one medium can appear to take an unbearably long time in another...³

Given his obsession to still the meaning laden moment in its ephemeral transit between things and experiences, the photograph with all its subsequent technology (film, video, broadcast television, etc.) serves him by allowing him to "freeze-frame" his observations and intuitions, to re-structure information to function as parable, and, at its best, to provide insight through example and ostention.

In 1977, Peter D'Agostino realized an event, *coming and going: Angel Island*⁴ which incorporated a completed film, an illusive performance, an installation in which the original film was reconstructed and an activity in which the public participated. Regardless of the numerous formal elements, *Angel Island* was an unobtrusive, modest artwork in which complex, rich associations and experiences were linked with very simple procedures. However, because of its totally unpretentious character and formal simplicity, coupled with a confusing context of simultaneous events,⁵ *Angel Island* has not received the attention which it deserves.

Angel Island itself is a national park located in the San Francisco Bay. There D'Agostino shot what he called a "home movie" with his future wife, Deirdre Dowdakin, in May 1974. It documented their walk from the top of Angel Island to the ferry dock and then crossing the San Francisco Bay back to the city. However, throughout the day, they attempted to

create the impression that they were walking toward the top of the Island rather than away from it. The film was shot at variable speeds progressing from a highly animated 2 frames per second, until they arrived at their destination (San Francisco) where the timing returned to 24 frames per second or the filmic "real time." From beginning to end, the *Angel Island* film sustained a texture of temporal reversal, observational reversal and durational variation. Time was literally reconstructed to appear to be the past of a future-oriented activity.

Three copies of the film were made: the original, 100' or 3 minutes; a second and third copy which were cut into 50, 2' strips without regard for sequencing. The cut-up sections of the third film were then placed into 50 small film cans with the following notation taped to the tops of the cans:

COMING AND GOING: Angel Island
The EVENT is synonymous with the LOCATION
LOCATE
PERCEIVE
VERIFY

Angel Island: GOING AND COMING

The second film was mounted in plexiglas and exhibited at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (as part of the exhibition, *America, 1976*), along with some photo-enlargements of the film's frames.

Invitations were sent out requesting to meet at the Angel Island Ferry, Pier 43½ at noon on October 29, 1977 where a maximum of 50 passengers would receive one of the small tins in which a segment of the original film lay. The film itself functioned as the "score" to the EVENT and Peter requested that people verify the "reality" depicted in their 2' strip.

The object was to find, become conscious of and absorbed by authenticating the representation pictured in the 2' film strips: to pair image to reality, through experience. Once this immersion into the artificial (film-image) was corroborated with the natural (the actual places depicted on Angel Island), the two were once again collapsed into a single experience, PERCEIVED and VERIFIED, then the participant would, return the 2' film strip to Peter who would re-edit the film in an old bike shed near the Park Headquarters on the Island. The final edited film was determined by the number of people who participated and the sequence in which they returned with the film. At the end of the day, the original footage and the newly edited film were shown in the bike shed.

Ideally, the film would be edited in the reverse order in which it was filmed. Logic: The ferry would be the first images verified while the places that were a greater distance from the grove (eg: the mountain top) would take longer to locate and return... The system I used to edit the Angel Island film was a totally arbitrary procedure based on the time it would take the participants to "verify" the "reality" of the images depicted... Real life followed film image—changing the order and structure of the film. The theory and reversal of film experience to real life and back to film is the most important aspect of the work for me.⁶

By mapping the contradictions, reversals and convolutions of "knowing" and "imagining," *Angel Island* wove the real (a participant's primary experience) and the artificial (the original film and its reconstruction as secondary information) back and forth over the behavioral terrain of the participant. As a container metaphor, this artwork functioned as a prototype through which a complete ontological metaphor for "meaning" and its construction could be understood. Peter had placed human beings at the center of form where the ultimate issue of "relationship," both to things and to events, is central to the creation of "meaning."

Happenings and activities function as systems which, when entered into and played out, provide us with an expanded knowledge of the life issues upon which they are based.⁷

The "life issue" at stake in the *Angel Island* work is the re-unification of perception with action which will lead to responsible awareness and conduct.

Angel Island was used as a metaphor through which one way of conceiving a phenomenon is demonstrated in terms of another:

Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.⁸

So, the spatial directions requiring "verification" and designating the location as "synonymous" with the "event," instructed the participant to begin ordering information so that the body would be physically ori-

ented through the creation of boundaries. As human beings, our material existence imposes a perception of that which is "in" and that which is "outside" of us, projecting that "in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded by surfaces."⁹

But even where there is no natural physical boundary that can be viewed as defining a container, we impose boundaries... There are few human instincts more basic than territoriality. And such defining of a territory, putting a boundary around it, is an act of quantification.¹⁰

When Peter required the individual to participate in the re-construction of experience by objectifying images which he had already seen and then shot with his camera in the film, he asked the participant to quantify and re-contain things—trees, houses, landmarks, a bend in the road, flowers, etc. By so quantifying, he established a ground upon which perception could order relationship between the concepts of "me" and "it"—or the ontological experience of "in" and "out," the orientations which determine reality. The "event" itself was then conceptualized as the "location" (in the way that Peter's instructions required) so that all of the participants actions within this event could be transformed into objects—could be objectified, understood as metaphor and thereby distance the process of conceptualization from experience providing a symbol through which experience could return to understanding. This is precisely the way in which the notion of "aesthetic distance" functions; and in this way, *Angel Island*, while being a participatory activity became simultaneously an aesthetic object.

Not only did *Angel Island* establish a complex metaphorical structure, but Peter organized the process of references to create what is linguistically known as metonymy,¹¹ or one thing which *stands for* another, as a referential device, unlike metaphor which *replaces* one thing for another. The "contiguity" between the participant and Peter became the metonymical structure through which a direct and binding connection was established between "Maker" and "Receiver" and through which then "Maker" became "Receiver" and "Receiver" was transformed into "Maker." In other words, Peter de-emphasized his own "subject-self," shifting his presence into a subordinate role and thereby leaving the field of action/creation open to the spectator to become "Maker."

By directly connecting art practice, through action, to life experience, Live Art expands the communicating mechanism of symbolic representation. Live Art "actions" link life "events" to and through the other like a conduit.¹²

The event he built included activities which were the performance of normal human pursuits, occupations and recreations.¹⁴ At the beginning of this essay, I claimed that the roots of all of Peter D'Agostino's work were entwined with problems relating to "origins," "receptions" and "transformations." These activities led away from the origins toward receptions captivating the spectator and transforming him/her into natural metonymical extension/continuation of the origins both in form and content. In this way, "viewing" (objectifying) became "doing" (subjectifying) and the traditional distance between subject/object dissolved into mutually shared symbols. These symbols leave us at the crucial apex of meaning in D'Agostino's work, that area which he concretizes "transit."

Of utmost significance here, is the way that he constructed an artificial form which had woven into its design all the signals for reciprocity, that relationship in which responsibility and involvement occur. For, as soon as he had filmed himself and Deirdre during their Angel Island sojourn, cut up the film and distributed it as an "object-map-signal," they lost their significance as "subject," and no longer real bodies in space and time, they became devices for signifying someone/something else, physical presences referring forward to someone/something absent. We, the participants, were "someone" absent; our experiential movement-realization-discovery became the "something" and the content was the absence which we filled. Content, set free from the original subject in/by Peter, was re-embodied (literally) in us, the participants. Peter then became the observer, deconstructing his own control for a time¹⁴ in an exchange with the new status of the spectator as "Maker." That maker-participant then reconstructed the chain of correspondences leading back to the source in layers of exchanged perception which reinforced the same play of forces primarily experienced as the behavioral, body-boundary to which I referred earlier in this essay. The spectator literally embodied the "transit" where meaning resides, filling the absence, we spectators turned participants became content.

Although Peter's presence was clear and essential throughout the entire event/installation/illusion-performance, he never allowed himself to dominate. Rather he became the unarticulated force through which others moved in relationship while *they* articulated the event. By locating the activities in familiar practices, he had set a conventional, non-threatening arena through which the usual inhibitions accompany-

ing the pressure to participate in an "art event" naturally dissipated. The individual set free to enjoy his/her own natural processes, could and did become aware of his/her own perceptions as they connected and related to the general format of the event. The phenomena acknowledged were simultaneously seen as image-experience-object to be verified from the film as well as personal "projection" (a subtle play on the act and structure of filming itself). Emotions and thoughts located in the seat of the personally familiar were liberated from that private mind to expand into a public, shared adventure. Immanent in the piece, *Angel Island*, was the facility for generating co-operation. The spectator became part of, contributed to and exchanged information not only with Peter but with the other 50 participants.

Ostension is one of the various ways of signifying, consisting in de-realizing a given object in order to make it stand for an entire class. You ask me, "How should I be dressed for the party this evening?" If I answer by showing my tie framed by my jacket and say, "Like this, more or less." I am signifying by ostension... I am offering to you a model... I am not only picturing a given behavior, I am in fact eliciting a behavior, emphasizing a duty, mirroring your future. In (Roman) Jakobsonian terms, my message is at the same time a referential, a phatic, an imperative, an emotive—and, it is aesthetic.¹⁵

It is the culturally shared base of images, values and forms which makes "primitive" art cohesive, that community of symbols upon which the artist may draw to express his/her own creativity. Just the opposite exists in our world where few common traditions are collectively shared and one must search, not so much to express his/her individuality but to find, and then re-create, an image which may be communicated and understood universally. The relative impossibility of ordering or inventing such a ubiquitous symbol in the plethora of our contemporary information overload is what gives rise to the "genius" who is able to discover that "universal" and thereby link us. However, it is precisely this twist which elevates one creative perception above another, lifting it in the public imagination to the plane of "genius." This divides us again, and reinforces that "subject" or "signature" at the basis of our divided society. So, rather than seek to invent "universal symbols" perhaps the practice of ostention holds the greater possibility of creating a rich and cohesive collective practice in our technological existence.

... if one agrees to define communication as an exchange as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response, and thus of a *responsibility* (not a psychological or moral responsibility, but a personal, mutual correlation in exchange) . . . (then) we must understand communication as something other than the simple transmission—reception of a message.¹⁸

The clarification of the "transit" between reciprocating movement, reality and illusion is the clear meta-

phor for communication which D'Agostino's art sets as an example. Through it, and during our participation in its creation, we learn to see, but also *be* cooperative in shaping a micro-milieu. This may function as symbol for the creation of shared values, "If we understand communication as something other than the simple transmission/reception of a message . . ." (in Baudrillard's words), then *Angel Island* accomplished much towards the demonstration of a method for exchange, for dialogue, for communication.

I have attempted to explain the way in which Peter D'Agostino constructed *coming and going: Angel Island* in a self-reflexive tri-partite structure which wove back and forth over itself and the participants a tightly interlaced system of correspondences. This may best be demonstrated by the following chart:

MEANING Relational	CONTENT Conceptual	FORM Material
<i>origins</i>	<i>self (ontological perceptions regarding the placement of the subject in the world of things)</i>	<i>Peter</i>
<i>receptions</i>	<i>other (objectification perceptions placing the self in relationship to those things by way of boundaries and the limitations they impose)</i>	<i>Participant</i>
<i>transformations</i>	<i>relationship (the connections established between these boundaries and the "transit" from self to others)</i>	<i>Event</i>

I have used the word "transit," the synaptic signifying relationship, to describe the ephemeral value and meaning inherent in Peter's work. Not only the media with which he works (photography as the primary structural tool), but the formal architecture of his pieces collaborate to reveal the fundamental necessity and existence of "relationship." When he is rational and explicit, he refers to "two-way communication" as the issue at the heart of his experiments and his art. When he is his most subtle, intuitive and evocative self, Peter metaphorically creates images and aspects of "transit" which allow the spectator to enter into and perform in a free space whereby they determine what communication is for themselves. In this "everyones-land," the "transit" between origins and transformations becomes reception. Receptions set the context for meaning, understanding and content in life and between human beings.

NOTES:

1. Partial definitions of "come" and "go" were excerpted from *Webster's Third International Dictionary*, Unabridged Edition. These two verbs incorporate a wide experiential range to which I could have referred at great length in this essay. However, for the sake of an introduction to *coming and going: Angel Island*, the physical and "wholly ideal" fields of action, in which being, becoming and undergoing change or transformation, suffice to locate the reader in the domain of Peter's magic.
2. Suzanne K. Langer quotes Karl Britton's *Communication: A Philosophical Study of Language* (1939), pp. 204-206 on "facts" in her *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*, Third edition, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 268. For my purposes, I will accept his definition in this essay to define "facts": "A fact is essentially abstract but *there*. It is what is, an object of attention, of discriminating awareness, in present events. A fact, is that, in events to which we make a learned and discriminating response determined in part by the understanding of statements But the fact which shows the proposition to be true is that in events to which I make a response that has the same structure as the proposition . . ." As we will see in this essay, it is the proposition of a structure of events which the participants respond to by creating a similar, mirror (reversed) structure which leads them to understand the "fact" and subsequent "truth" not only of the art event itself but metaphorically of a certain aspect of experience and communication within it.
3. Peter D'Agostino, *TeleGuide: Including Proposal For QUBE*, Dayton, Ohio: Wright State University/Contemporary Media Study Center, Dayton, 1980, p. 9.
4. The *coming and going* series includes: PARIS (Metro); San Francisco (BART); Washington (METRO); and Angel Island. All of these, with the exception of the Angel Island piece were public installations of videotapes.
5. With the consent of the selected artists, a group of women artists staged a series of simultaneous performances at the *America 1976* project sites. The performances were done in conjunction with the Floating Museum, under the banner of *(H)Errata* or the error of excluding Her. They were a protest against the SFMMA's failure to select any women to exhibit in the *America 1976* projects and "to correct the practice of overlooking and undervaluing women artists." The sudden appearance of additional activities during *coming and going: Angel Island* shifted some of the public's attention to the performances, although the premise and underlying structure of the event remained intact.
6. Peter D'Agostino from unpublished notes on *coming and going: Angel Island*.
7. Kathy O'Dell, *Allan Kaprow: The Artist As Educator*, an unpublished Master's Thesis, The University of California, Berkeley, 1982.
8. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 3.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
10. *Op. Cit.*
11. The word "metonymy" here is used in the sense that Roman Jakobson described it in *Fundamentals of Language* where he discusses aspects of metaphoric and metonymic structures in the light of word associations. Jakobson explains that the similarity between two constitutive units (and any unit small or large) is established by the similarity between the position and semantic content of these units. The structure of a sequence in which the relation between the constitutive elements is a relation of *similarity* is called *metaphoric*. On the contrary, when a sequence of elements is organized on the basis of a relation of *contiguity*, its structure is *metonymic*. That is to say that both aspects of the connection between these elements is a connection of contiguity. Contiguity clearly implies that the elements have no other relationship than *proximity* or *juxtaposition*.
12. Quote is from the introduction to my unpublished doctoral dissertation, *The Destruction In Art Symposium (DIAS): A Metaphor For Twenty Years of Live Art and Its Socio-Political Significance*, in progress at the University of California, Berkeley.
13. Certainly these kinds of activities and the generation of events in which the banal, daily procedures of people are transformed into significant and symbolic-laden metaphors is indebted to Allan Kaprow's "Activities" and his articulation of the "ready-made" routine.
14. The deconstruction of artistic control in Peter's work has been strongly influenced by two sources: Umberto Eco's concept of the "open text" and Alain Robbe-Grillet's concepts of "order and disorder." The "open text" extends certain possibilities to the audience who then makes decisions upon ways in which they will interpret or re-construct those possibilities into meaning. Robbe-Grillet's definitions of "order," or structured, established power, and "disorder," or personal, individual creation, are often found in the way that "order" is assembled in Peter's work to be dis-assembled by the reception, possession and re-order (disorder) of the spectator. This practice functioned clearly in the *Angel Island* artwork.
15. Umberto Eco, "Semiotics of Theatrical Performance," *The Drama Review*, 1973, p. 108.
16. Jean Baudrillard, *For A Critique of The Political Economy of The Sign*, St. Louis, Missouri: Telos Press, 1981, pp. 183-84.