

2003 Andrew Hunt. Review: Anglo-ponce Frieze, Oct 2003

Anglo-Ponce

The Trade Apartment, London

'There is something that I have always wanted to say – but I have been too scared. It seems OK to say it now – I love you. It seems OK because I had a dream a few weeks ago where we were both standing in a field and there was an intense white light. And we were naked ... it was like that Bill Viola video where Christ is crashing through the waves. And then you opened your mouth and there was this beautiful sound and we both started crying ... I know you understand. Love, Anglo-Ponce.' This handwritten note dropped through my door just hours before the launch of The Trade Apartment's latest venture in south London. Written by Mark Beasley, Raymond Brinkmann and John Russell, allegedly while trashed on various substances, and mailed to 100 people before the curators sobered up, it served to introduce a truly chaotic sequence of events.

As we entered the gallery from the street, Mark McGowan's performance *Welcome* (2003) invited us to use him as a doormat. With the comment 'We've noticed that the gallery is becoming quite dirty, can you please wipe your feet?' McGowan provided a fitting end-point to his recent act of rolling an epic distance from Elephant and Castle to Bethnal Green. Upstairs, Ulli Knall's *Untitled* (2003), a severely cracked working clay model of Victorian physicist Sir William Grove, combined perfectly with McGowan's welcome mat, forming a no-nonsense parody of Gabriel Orozco's famous *Yielding Stone* (1992), the 150 pound boulder of Plasticine (the same weight as the artist) that Orozco pushed through the streets of New York, imprinting it with debris from the surrounding area.

Inside, other works were spread sparsely around an unkempt exhibition space, providing a loose stage. Bedwyr Williams' *Untitled (Mat)* (2003) included various personal ephemera, such as a letter to the old kids' TV show *Jim'll Fix It*, while Eelko Moorer's rub-



ber *Bear Skin* and *Bear Head* (both 2003), also placed on the floor, added to the theatricality of the space. Disturbingly, the wall of the main video projection room contained the slogan 'down with the highest tradition, Anglo go home'; a take on George Bush's first rallying speech to his troops during the war on Iraq. Itself a homage to a previ-

ous address by the British queen to her own armed forces urging them to 'act in the highest tradition', the slogan provided an angry precursor for the duo Juneau Projects' *Born in '82* (2002), a video showing a burning copy of the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen' (1977) being played at full volume. Within the same room Beagles

and Ramsey's *We Are The People Suck On This* (1999) presented Graham Ramsey as a drugged-up Travis Bickle *en route* down Whitehall to hand over a similarly titled petition to Downing Street.

A separate performance by Juneau Projects, *I Am Swimming Through Pools of Cool Water* (2003), involved the manipulation of sound created by two mobile phones and a blowtorch, but things really got going in a truly spectacular manner with Jeroen Offerman's *The Stairway at The Trade Apartment* (2003). Appearing in a trance and singing a twisted rendition of an unrecognizable record backwards, he disappeared back down the gallery's stairs to baffled applause. After another act, Williams dressed as the Grim Reaper and painfully recounted acts of random brutality in Wales in his deadpan stand-up routine *Untitled (Twenty Points on Violence)* (2003) – Offerman reappeared to project the documentation of his performance. Projected in reverse within the same space as the original, the video magically produced a near-perfect rendition of Led Zeppelin's classic 'Stairway to Heaven' (1971). At times Offerman appeared like an image of

Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (1893) in reverse, sucking in expelled cigarette smoke, while the video was punctuated by an increasingly uncanny sense of recognition and a strangely emotional response from members of the audience.

Unusual in the fact that it had appeared so soon after the event, the video or 'documentation' had become a secondary 'performance' in its own right. Adding another giddy layer of interpretation, the entire chain of events was filmed by artist Thorsten Knaub for the resulting exhibition, the 'correct' documentation subsequently acting as material for an undecipherable 'original'. Confusing ideas of temporality and language, Offerman's work succeeded in articulating the resulting exhibition's whole indeterminate enterprise. Shown alongside other bizarre videos by Bonnie Camplin, Igor Paasch and Petcar, and informed by a lax and deliberately loose curatorial position, perhaps as an expressionistic remedy to the restrictive modesty of certain contemporary practices, the liberating thing about 'Anglo-Ponce' was its strategically critical, yet ultimately unpredictable excessive energy.

Andrew Hunt