

Rachel Harrison  
Transmission Gallery, U.K.  
April/May 2005

The space was decorated with garlands of gaudy foil bunting, the kind you expect to find demarcating the boundaries of a used car dealership. The routes through this garish noise were determined by boxes of various shapes and sizes. Fonts emblazoned on these jumbled cardboard building blocks invited the piecing together of a sculptural poison pen letter. Any possible narrative connections were hopelessly fleeting. Reframed by the act of collecting these materials in the locality of the gallery the texts of lowly crisp packaging became exotic and 'foreign'. Here Rachel Harrison's *Car Stereo Parkway* (2005) Orchestrated the improvised grafting of objects to other objects, a tactic of shifting connections similar to the brutality of a 'cut and shut job' (the practice of welding together written-off automobiles to make a new and illegal whole).

A wall of these boxes greeted the viewer, and from underneath this edifice a pair of glam platform boots emerged. The crocodile skin surface partially transformed these disembodied appendages into an urban version of a snake in a woodpile. Only on navigating your way round this obstacle did the boots' position seem to be the result of an accident or possibly a hugely wayward stage dive. Like the unfortunate carriers of extravagantly large panes of glass in TV car chases, the boxes appeared to be designed to absorb an immanent impact. Their stacking and arrangement in the space seemed to be all about latent energy, and the objects lurking behind and around the wall offered some confirmation of this theory. As if a toxic tanker had slewed across the road and spewed its radioactive load of coloured gloop over the innocent bystanders, a barely recognisable figure, wearing a blobby red mantle, occupied the corner of the gallery. Sprouting from what I surmised was the head end was a fantastic, tumescent, prosthetic nose, replete with elastic retaining strap. This schnozzle was

reminiscent of Willie Murphy's Tricky Dick drawings from the late sixties, sagging male genitalia as Richard Nixon's droopy jowls and bulbous nose.

The Watergate era informed much of the show. The perception of the public personas of slightly ludicrous individuals, constructed or otherwise, was a repeated motif. Pompous rock band Kiss were entrusted with carrying a substantial part of this dimension of the work. Harrison's approach was once again esoteric in approaching the familiar heavy metal genre. The slightly hermetic tactic of her transubstantiation of the received meaning about the band was both disorientating and thrilling. Although most people are familiar with the slightly ludicrous spectacle of Gene Simmons and co. Harrison's more tangential reframing showed a Kiss most people would barely recognise in a video projection from atop an upturned box plinth, . Heavily edited footage juxtaposed interview sequences of abject hilarity with Harrison's 'adverts', images of cleaning materials shown, like the boxes, as part of her dreamlike anti-logic. The result was one of the most bewildering reassignments of domesticity since Queen's *I Want To Break Free* video (1983), in which high camp spilled over into a cross dressing stadium rock band doing domestic chores. Harrison's video sequences seemed to be selected on the basis of maximum graininess making a kitsch music phenomenon seem like a bootleg that could be of great importance to the discerning collector.

Bonus tracks, so to speak, were provided by the show's expansion into the basement of the gallery, where one encountered a stage maquette and an unlikely audience for the whole extravaganza. Potatoes, sprouting away merrily in the gloom, stood in for a muddy and adulant festival crowd slowly going to seed with their heavily made-up hard-rocking heroes. Harrison's process of excessive repetitiveness reminded me of revelations about Stanley Kubrick's estate after the director's death, and of one anecdote in particular. Journalist Jon Ronson, on entering Kubrick's library, was amazed by the number of

books. Only when he took a closer look did he realise, "Bloody hell. Every book in this room is about Napoleon". If Napoleon were substituted for Kiss, a model of Harrison's joined-up thinking could be constructed. The mass of materials and the repetition of families of objects in her show were a device reflecting not a compulsive act, but rather a kind of Brechtian alienation effect, the startling feeling of having the everyday represented while revealing all the mechanisms behind its enactment.

Mick Peter 2005