

[from Mark Harris to Joseph Kosuth]

24 March 1998

Dear Joseph,

I've heard from Cindy Smith that you need further clarification about my intentions behind using the Dead Kennedys' record cover for "Holiday in Cambodia" in juxtaposition with your 1965 work "One and Three Chairs".

My reasons are several and I'll quickly try to set the principal ones down, at the risk of somewhat less reflection than I'd normally prefer, so as to get a fax off to you as soon as possible.

To some extent it may not have mattered what object was first taken to be featured in that early piece of yours. A table, lamp, bookshelf, may all have served as adequately to carry forward the proposal that conceptual representation be a lucid (but to all purposes immaterial) embodiment of the concept of art. Those qualities faced me with great clarity when I finally saw the piece in the Columbus Museum. What also faced me however, were implications which, although excluded from the work's original horizon, were summoned up the more powerfully through being the negation of that horizon, for being beyond it. Amongst them, this record cover.

"One and Three Chairs" had always appeared defiantly hermetic, flatly stating that as concept and residual material embodiment of concept it had no further use of the world. In its defiance, its point had begun to seem the success with which it had sealed itself off from its other, which in its defiance it classified as irrelevant.

But you had taken a chair, an object whose function would in all likelihood be immediately apprehended, by word, definition, image and object, and whose prosaic functionality, its everydayness, would in all likelihood immediately limit apprehension from going much further. It was chosen I felt, for its suitability in ensuring hermeticism at both the start and conclusion of apprehension. For me however, perhaps as a result of this resistance to its other, perhaps also as a result of my own stubbornness in face of resistance, it recalled the Dead Kennedys' cover (the only time I've seen that photograph). Here was a Khmer Rouge interrogator killing a Cambodian with a folding chair, the victim's death the more appalling and ignoble for being effected by an everyday 'harmless', familiar object. That I assume was the intention of the torturer. When the reliable, innocuous objects are turned against you in that way, I imagine the end being one of greatest horror.

This use of the chair is certainly beyond the limit of your piece. It is in a sense refused by the three forms in which 'chair' is denoted. Chair as weapon is not there. By placing the record cover next to your piece it points to this limit without, obviously, undermining or ridiculing your piece (never my intention).

There is the possibility raised of the hermeticism of "One and Three Chairs" exploding, but this would never occur since the two parts of the new hybrid maintain their identities through their movement into and out from each other.

I think that in a related way the issue is helpfully illuminated by Heidegger's ontological characteristics of Dasein, set out towards the start of *Being and Time*. Here one of the

instances when our experience of everydayness is heightened occurs when objects break, malfunction or become lost. Previously taken for granted, they suddenly force themselves on us in the form of their usefulness. The folding chair in Cambodia, taken up as a murder weapon, seems the more chairlike in its misuse. In this sense too the juxtaposition of your piece with the Dead Kennedys' cover points to two distinct, perhaps estranged (analytical philosophy/ phenomenology) interpretative systems of how objects are grasped in consciousness.

For me the record cover is significant also for coming from the world of rock music. It appropriates and belligerently displays a cruel image with intentional insensitivity. But then in the world of such images, and as musicians in the nation of whose actions these images were a consequence, sensitivity is beside the point. In certain ways both your work and the Dead Kennedys' cover share a hostility to quite different manifestations of smug denial. Your sustained critique of what you have called the "morphological similarity" of repetitive and derivative art is a sign of this. No need I'm sure to remind you that in 1969 you said: "To work in a tradition now is artistic timidity, and nothing more."

Concerning the jarring juxtaposition of appropriated material, I felt this to be something already deeply embedded in your practice. Not only in the Castelli show "THE THING-IN-ITSELF IS FOUND IN ITS TRUTH THROUGH THE LOSS OF ITS IMMEDIACY" were images (and philosophical quotations) set up to recontextualize each other, but a similar practice occurred with your intervention in the lobby of the Brooklyn Museum. As I remember seeing it, a wonderful idea and installation.

I'd better stop here and conclude by saying that the catalogue for *Host* has been delayed since last Friday to accommodate our pages but must absolutely go to press tomorrow (Wednesday 25th March). If you are interested in writing something to go beneath your image I must ask you to fax it to me as soon as possible. It would certainly be valuable to have a statement from you.

I will be at home working on a paper that I have to give in Birmingham this Saturday so if you need to call me or fax me I'm here.

Thanks again for your help. All the best in Stockholm.

Sincerely,

Mark Harris