



Hirsch Perlman, EXHIBIT P; HEARING NO. 1; TRANSCRIPTS 23, 14, 6, 10, 22, 13, 28, 1990, Medite, sign painting, paper, cassette tapes, dimensions variable (between readings). Courtesy Donald Young Gallery.

## Hirsch Perlman

Hirsch Perlman's work has consistently situated itself along the chiasmus of the rhetorical overlapping of legitimating systems. In previous efforts, he has stressed gaps in the pictorial and its captions, thus undermining a purity of intent and the authority of documentation. His new series places these earlier concerns squarely in an arena of aesthetics that has haunted criticism at least since Kant. *The Critique of Judgment* reveals the existential pathos of separating the cognitive rules of science from the prescriptive laws of political life; it allows only art to serve as the imaginary bridge that binds the two together in a longed-for unity of social life. While a confusing conflation of ethics and aesthetics has permeated modernism, Perlman's work tries to negotiate this slippery territory anew by denying us the solace of our illusions.

Deploying the allegory of courtroom semantics, he exposes the posturing of art which, like the law, requires regulating conventions to establish its evidence as art. In both cases a gentleman's agreement of torts and taste disguise questions of power and

class with a rubric of universal law. The specificity of caste is neutralized by a vacant logic suspended in a Platonic trial by essential form. As the Enlightenment misread its own historical and empirical constitution as transcendental justice, Western art also mistakes its critical apparatus as an unsullied, "disinterested" witness to pure unbiased presence.

Perlman's installation juxtaposes a series of structural narratives that act as parodic parables of "proper" positions. The show included a cold reading of seven shuffled actual court transcripts (with specific witness names pointedly deleted) on four consecutive Saturdays by a changing series of performers. As they ironically recorded their lines, the actors cast page after page of script/transcript and cassettes on the table of EXHIBIT P; HEARING NO. 1; TRANSCRIPTS 22, 14, 6, 10, 22, 13, 28. The overlays of juridical evidence, art exhibit, and behavioral exhibition permeates the show even when the "readers" were absent, but with them the language games of jurisprudence attain the absurd.

The highly coded repartee of real court dialogue parallels a continuous video reading

from Gertrude Stein's *How to Write*, in EXHIBIT B:

*They are sticklers for right and justice. They are without price. They produce in great abundance. They have no sorrow because they are noisy having with difficulty understood that they were to be known at that time for just what they were very well pleased with their coming in . . . (333)*

The Jabberwocky as judge is here scored not so much as nonsense as marking the unbridgeable discrepancy between act and evidence, event and description. All that mediates them are conventions of protocol agreed upon by the licensed participants, unknown and alienating to the uninitiated. More like a hermetic circle of high priests lost in chants and cant without reference to the real, there is a condensation of language in the guided games of the *magister ludi*. It is the sophist who plays the game best who wins the judgment, the fastest feet take the day.

Perlman's installations include a series of shades of courtroom paraphernalia, generic chairs and tables fabricated of *medite*, a highly refined grade of particle board. Its compression poetically evoked the pretense of a seamless discourse without rupture or incident that marks the flow of all totalizing judgments. It denies the existence of what Lyotard calls the *differend*, the unlitigable injustice that is excluded from the law. Since the law operates on the truth of precedent, it claims an a priori knowledge of the future, it *knows* what justice and art are. To this Perlman introduces a force of resistance to any work of interrogation that presumes a transcendent model by which an event is subject to judgment. He insists that it is only a genre, one of many that *have* been or *could* be in a future of other speakers.

In "truth," the justice or beauty Plato sought is present precisely in the adversarial nature of the law and of criticism. Hegel declared the *agon* of history as the voice of the infinite's eternal temporal Golgotha. Nietzsche clarified the relations of power hidden behind its empty abstract logic, while Marx banked on its roots in concrete systems. Since then we have proliferated its qualifiers: gender, desire, and *differance*, to name only three. Perlman's work takes up certain deconstructive strategies to reveal the mirror double of the law in critical practice: by working at the borders of what the rules of order tolerate, we can invent new moves that are validated only by the future of their use. Art criticism, no less than the law, functions as a horizon of thought, not a final verdict. (*Donald Young, Chicago, November 30-January 5*)

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