

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF JUDGMENT: CHARLES REZNIKOFFS

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1: Charles Reznikoff's "Amelia": A case study by Richard Hyland | Jacket2

In its spareness, eloquence, and simplicity, Charles Reznikoff's poem "Holocaust" remains one of the best literary attempts to come to grips with this bleak tragedy. Reznikoff (--) wrote the poem in when it was published by John Martin and Black Sparrow Press.

Its first volume appeared in , and the last appeared posthumously in . The sales of all the volumes summed together cannot have reached one thousand copies. Yet Reznikoff has been the sole subject of two scholarly books and dozens of articles and is routinely cited by documentary and conceptual poets as an important influence. Until I read his work myself, I suspected that many of these people were pretending to have read him: Now I think otherwise. In his extremely quiet way, Reznikoff is like the Velvet Underground. I sometimes hear him in my own writing, and I am not even a poet. After more than eighty years disarticulated, *Testimony* has finally been issued in a single, complete volume by Black Sparrow Books. Given the extreme rarity of the volume, which was never reprinted, this is the first occasion most readers have had to take in the entire work. I think otherwise to the extent that his work reflects a principle, that principle is sympathy, and though wrongs cannot be righted, Reznikoff suggests it is relatively easy to do the right thing in the first place. He is a poet of fragile goodness and guarded optimism. Reznikoff completed his law degree at NYU but never practised. He always believed poetry to be his vocation and pursued it doggedly; he wrote his first publishable poems in his late teens and continued writing until he died in his eighties. The reception of his work was hindered by his modesty and infallibly bad professional instincts. His first decision as a poet illustrates the general pattern. Reznikoff was in his early twenties when he began to submit his work for publication and almost immediately had a group of works accepted by *Poetry* magazine; one can hardly imagine an easier or more auspicious beginning. But after a slight delay he withdrew the accepted poems and instead printed them privately, guaranteeing their obscurity. His work never sold well, and often lacking an official publisher, he frequently self-published, in many cases setting the type and printing the copies himself. Near the end of his life Black Sparrow took up his work and has been a faithful steward ever since. Reznikoff began composing *Testimony* while working for a legal encyclopedia. He read accounts of thousands of court cases in the United States, and some of these cases slowly condensed into poems. *Testimony* relies upon cases tried between and and is thus filled with the violent distempers of an industrial age. Yet the reader would not suspect the source of these stories if Reznikoff had not mentioned it. What the poems do contain are vivid, cinematic accounts of bad things happening, bubbles with awful little worlds inside. The index of first lines, which contains nearly five hundred entries, is a masterful, portentous poem in its own right. In style, the pieces in *Testimony* contain none of the clunky or Latinate language of the courts: As legal scholar Benjamin Watson has shown, hundreds of pages of trial material might end up as five or six lines of poetry. Yet the poems also present the reader with something very puzzling. *Testimony* drops few hints about what the author thinks of the story, or what we should think. Reznikoff the author does not editorialize and does not even head his poems with titles that might obliquely suggest a stance. Nor did he leave behind a body of essays or criticism that might tell us more about his motivations. This ambiguity has given rise to two readings: There are certainly persuasive reasons to read him in this way: His work often broaches personal and familial experiences of anti-Semitism. He also used the compositional techniques of *Testimony* to address Judaism and the Jewish experience. He adapted biblical materials to retell the story of David in *King David* and used transcripts from the Nuremberg trials to compose *Holocaust*. His wife, Marie Syrkin, was an important American Zionist. Though Judaism is not a subject much addressed in *Testimony*, the work demands to be situated in some moral context. To them, it suggests that legal source material can be used by poets to confront political questions, often in a way that permits the poet to take a strong position. It is an engaging work addressing the aspects of law that are elided in *Testimony*. The book smells of the courtroom and is full of procedures, rulings, statements, and quotations. This is frequently true of contemporary documentary poetry: Though this interpretation of Reznikoff is freer

than a reading rooted in his Judaism, it has valid grounds. Both interpretations address themselves to the moral void at the centre of Testimony: Reznikoff was a lifelong New Yorker, and his collections of personal poems offer an unusually warm vision of city life. Modernist poetry made a great deal of alienation and rootlessness in urban life. By contrast, Reznikoff takes note of the many modest ways that cities work because of the sympathy and cooperation of strangers. By the Well of Living and Seeing, the collection I consider his best, and one very unlike the volumes of Testimony, is full of small kindnesses. Some poems observe the gracious behaviour of others. That personal disposition emerges as the unmistakable moral of this collection: Yet, perhaps to avoid criticizing others, Reznikoff plays up his personal weaknesses and effaces his kindness. In one poem he writes a letter for an illiterate man and makes such a careful and gently humorous study of the man that we may easily forget that the poet is spending several minutes helping a complete stranger. In another poem, Reznikoff has wandered far away from his usual city haunts and enters a fruit stand, where he listens to the worries of a greengrocer whose son has been sent off to war. Years later the greengrocer, whose son came home unharmed, recognizes Reznikoff and quietly replaces a rotten apple that had found its way into his bag of fruit. By the Well of Living and Seeing also anatomizes many small acts of cruelty and derision. Characteristically, these acts arise from an unwillingness to acknowledge the humanity in others. Many of these poems discuss anti-Semitism, but others, including some of the most biting, address race and could easily describe American cities today: By this time there were two or three other passengers on the platform and we stood at a distance from the Negro and watched him, though we pretended not to. He expresses his view of the fetters of prejudice most clearly in a little allegory: At the zoo, the camel and zebra are quarreling: Of course, they come from different continents. But to the extent that it is a world provided with friendliness, it is not a fallen world, just one that has stumbled and retains enough grace to carry life onward. I first read him in *The Poems of Charles Reznikoff*: I had seen the woman at the cash register many times before. She had always seemed intelligent but sublimely indifferent to the people standing in front of her, and I never sought to impose my conversation on her—it seemed she had important things in mind. As I learned later, she was composing poems. When I put Reznikoff on the counter, her esteem for me rose very quickly. Within a month she had become one of my best friends.

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2: Holocaust by Charles Reznikoff

Whatever judgment may ultimately be passed upon him, not much more than his works is ever likely to be known of Charles Reznikoff. He left no fervent disciples. The record he wished to preserve is the one he made himself, but it is quite detailed, and will surely have to do for those readers who, treasuring his memory, might like to know more.

This is a book I would not have picked up on my own and I was skeptical when my professor assigned it for workshop. I tend to avoid holocaust narratives, in part because I feel inundated with them, in part because you know they will as Allison says make you want to drink the bleach. Reznikoff collaged fragments from the courtroom transcripts of various trials e. He focused on the first person accounts in the transcripts; he pared down the testimonials but did not add to them. He did arrange them under various subheadings: The resulting poem is brutal. Things that will stick: Something about the form lends to the "absorbility" the narrative; maybe it is the rhythm imposed by the line breaks, the spare language. It is so unsettling to be in these landscapes that are cramped and overpopulated only to be emptied and erased a few lines down. He does this in small stories about people, recounting nameless victims with hyperclarity. Reznikoff -- wrote the poem in when it was published by John Martin and Black Sparrow Press. It is good to have it back in print. Reznikoff was little known during his life. He wrote "objectivist" poetry which took as its motto "no ideas but in things. It is based entirely on the records of the Nuremberg trials and of the Eichmann trial. There is no narrative voice or "I" in the poem. Further, there are no names given, with the exception of the salutation "Heil Hitler" by members of the S. The poem is told in a roughly chronological way in 12 sections beginning with the early deportations of Jews and ending with the pending liberation of the camps. The cruelty and destructiveness of the Holocaust are shown in spare, understated short poems. Here is the concluding poem of Section IV, "Ghettos". She began asking for mercy: She was near a fence between the ghetto and where Poles lived and behind the fence were Poles ready to catch the baby and she was about to hand it over when caught. The mother bleeding but still alive, crawled up to his feet. Just then a stray dog passed and the S. They were led up a hill. Here they were told to chant their prayers and raise their hands for help to God and, as they did so, the officers poured kerosene under them and set it on fire. The writing is simple, understated, and direct. The reader feels he is witnessing the events described without an overlay. To the extent possible, the reader is allowed to respond to the events directly, without the intermediary of the author, and with no superfluities or ideological commitments beyond the events themselves. There a bleak scenes of horrors and killings in "Holocaust", both of individual people and of masses, in gas chambers, gas trucks, firing squads, burnings, and elsewhere. There are also a small number of episodes of acts of kindness. Reznikoff presents his materials throughout lucidly, simply, and with understatement. Two dozen workers were busy opening the mouths of the dead with iron hooks and with chisels taking out teeth with golden caps; and elsewhere other workers were tearing open the dead looking for money or jewels that might have been swallowed. And all the bodies were then thrown into the large pits dug near the gas chambers to be covered with sand. This poem of his old age will help the reader to reflect upon the Holocaust.

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF JUDGMENT: CHARLES REZNIKOFFS

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3: Untitled Document

A Phenomenology of Judgment: Charles Reznikoff's Holocaust 61 part 2 Excess and Eros 87 3. The Ethics of Excess: Edward Dorn's Gunslinger 91 4.

Social life, like art, is a problem of appeal. Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change It is testimony, if anything, that founds the possibility of the poem. Almost all those who took the stand, Arendt writes, were survivors and many had authored books about the Holocaust before testifying at the trial. He credits this chorus with making the trial so momentous. It was, he claimed, a revelation for any Israeli consciousness. The differing responses of Arendt and Gouri can be explained by their assumptions about that to which testimony testifies, how it takes shape, and how it lives on. He says there is, in fact, nothing to hear. In a quote from the poet Uri Zvi Greenberg, Gouri spells out what for him is the ultimate lesson of listening to survivors detail their experience: For Arendt, the fact of remainders is crucial. Even while she felt that little of the testimony presented in Jerusalem had any bearing on the moral and legal questions at hand, testimony itself was the defeat of annihilating principles. She argued that actions taken by individuals in dark times are thus never worthless, never in vain, even when those gestures were sometimes just words. Many who speak out in defiance may well disappear into night and fog, but in the end, the past always returns: The holes of oblivion do not exist. One such story in Jerusalem was that of Zindel Grynzspan, and Arendt considers his testimony at some length. The foolishness of the thought could be blamed on thinking that a mere 10 minutes could possibly capture the 24 hours that destroyed 27 years of life. The United States " Holocaust happens to begin with a rendition of the Grynzspan testimony that so struck Arendt. When they came to the Polish border, the Polish officials examined the papers of the Jews, saw that they were Polish citizens and took them to a village of about six thousand" the Jews numbered at least twice as many. The rain was driving hard and the Poles had no place to put them but in stables, the floors covered with horse dung. The expectation is that the poetic intervention should bring us closer to the experience. Instead, there is a distancing that highlights the apparatus of testimony. In the Grynzspan example, the I of the witness and we-who-suffered-greatly are replaced by the they of a secondary report, a documented case. The tenor of an anguish experience is not only removed, but what remains is also at one remove so that the what happened is replaced by the language of reporting. From the unmirrored, unreflected innocence of heart and mind Arendt heard in the courtroom, the poetic transformation accentuates testimony not as human presence but as the linguistic production within the realm of law: Reznikoff uses a similar distancing effect to etch a much different emphasis elsewhere in Holocaust. Their mass" hundreds, most between the ages of two and four" are said to be a tangle of dirt, diarrhea, and fear In a day or two. The original Objectivist Press edition that Reznikoff self-published has three primary sections: Many of the categories are repeated throughout the different eras and national regions, stories of respective types stacked across years. These are sometimes punctuated by, or sometimes replaced by, discrete tales with specific titles: It generally relies on the prose of extended vignettes. A rare few have the quality of portraiture, as if to hint at a character or personality. Captain Pride had once beaten a sailor until he was flat on the deck. This time he was tied to the rigging by his hands, and as the master beat him he sank down, lifted up only by his hands. The United States 43 But mostly he stays within the evidentiary outlines; the cold, telling remains of a clue: When she was found, she was lying on her face, frozen to the death. The weather was extremely cold and where she lay the snow was about eighteen inches deep. In gunshot wounds the edges are sunken; in wounds made with a knife the edges are smooth and the lips of the wounds stick out. Put another way, with the referenced actions spreading across a range of social spheres and institutions" and with the social actors mostly stripped of psychological gloss" there is the sense of encountering a catalog of sociological data. For his transformations, what Reznikoff saw in the legal cases became the material of the poems. And I felt no regret for the glittering words I had played with and only pleasure to be working with ideas" of rights and wrongs" and their elements and of justice between men in their intricate affairs. One

critic in this vein writes of Holocaust: In the thick volumes of testimony he found a series of Jobean messengers with tales to tell more numerous and more horrifying than anything he had conveyed in Testimony. This emphasis on the speaking witness stems from more than an assumed voice in literature. The asphalt winds in and out about the trees, the lawns, the lake; a thousand lights shine among the trees; and in the circles underneath the grass is brightly green; but all these lights do not warm the wind. Bernstein suspects that in the American context, Holocaust falls short of providing such a stark encounter. The problem with Holocaust, he writes, is that the scale of its subject requires more than the documents can bear: In the case of Holocaust, however, we all know the facts in advance. When Reznikoff mined the court records in order to select the glittering words from the original documents, he focused on the rhythms that would establish, and had established, some pattern for thinking. At that time, Reznikoff was almost entirely unknown except to a small circle of peers, Hitler had just taken power, and the cultural battles being fought pitted aesthetic privileging against what was called a Marxist-oriented definition of art. Put another way, in Burke we find a start through the paradox wherein the removal of the heartache and the heartening that would accompany the living witness leads, through the mute matter of the legal volumes, to the recognizable elements of the eager argument of eager parties; soundings of appeal before the law. Burke wrote this soon after completing his manuscript for Permanence and Change. In that volume devoted to the deep-rooted power of social structures, he analyzes the limiting capacities of an occupation, or what it means to go about our business. By this he means not just the habits of a job, but an entrenched way of seeing and interpreting the world. Beyond such adaptation, however, there is an intensified sensibility that can be cultivated until it mirrors the strict, defined orbit of a preoccupation: Burke admits that this sounds like solipsism: So through the sightlines of a legal training, Reznikoff gives one such validity. In this case, the linguistic product is particular to the legal sightlines, the testimony translated into poetry precisely where it expresses its potential for legal thought. There are no voices, no presumed encounter with the sanctity of suffering, no secondary witnessing of unassailable experience. For when Reznikoff used his old student training to mine the documents and sees rather than hears, he is following the textual traces without trying to shake off their archival aura: In the testimonial works, Reznikoff exposes the disjuncture between beings as things before the law, the contingencies of the surrounding events that brought them there, the language used in appeals and the documentary status of those words. Instead of human beings bound up with events and contingencies, we have the essential formulations fossilized in the documentary apparatus exposed by the chiseling of the poet. In this description, those before the law are reduced in their case, but also reduced by being within a case; reduced, as Reznikoff said with no apologies, to a mere initial in the mouths of legal scholars. Having been pulled from their privacy into the public realm by crime committed or harm received or witnessed, their public being is circumscribed and constricted, a dynamic that might have been best captured by a line in which Michel Foucault beautifully, and hauntingly, expresses the essence of his otherwise deeply detailed story of modern surveillance, Discipline and Punish: While Burke grants those before the law this subjectivity prior to the mechanisms that write their case, they are still, in his accounting, subjugated by an institution that will have the final say: What was suffered or inflicted, what was wrecked by mangling machines or through the institutions of genocide or slavery, has been sifted from the fuller life and the remnant of pain or attack. It has all been lifted into the occupational sphere of the law. Private lives made public do so through a translation: Instead, they are cultivated and channeled, created through an interplay of fact and fiction, case work and lyric, silence and rhetoric, need and report. Following the Objectivist Press edition of Testimony, Reznikoff not only intensified the rhythm of the language to achieve the effect of the recitative, he further removed the subjective experience that might expect to find in the documentary. The later volumes of Testimony that shaped the renderings in Holocaust emphasize a namelessness such that the inner life of the anticipated speaking subject means far less than a constellation of referents, whether recited during crisis, or subsequently crafted by a poet whose eyes have alighted on the crucial formulations. Here, then, another prefiguring of Foucault. Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his

deepest self did he express in his discourse? What he does not do is sit in judgment in such a way that would demand answers about identity and authenticity. Before exploring why he does not, it is helpful to consider the description of legal interpretation offered by the American jurist Robert Cover. To accept this is also to accept the incompleteness of such judgments, despite their power: In other words, the domination is total while the resources upon which the judgment rests are at best partial. But this gloss should be extended. In this case, the absence of judgment would be its gathering force. The wait for justice may seem all the more painful, and desperate, when the world of cultivated laws and mores, the *nomos*, feels paradoxically saturated by the ungovernable. This idea leads us to the short singular epigraph Reznikoff used for multiple volumes of *Testimony*. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice. This creates a potential double reading, a prejudgment that needs to be made between the contrasting meanings suspended between the title and the opening lines. This is the analysis of Paul offered by Giorgio Agamben. The nearness of the word means the mere—or essential—presence of language itself. In *The Sacrament of Language*: This form of utterance does not reflect a world outside the word, but rather positions and substantiates the speaker. And once that account comes forth—with words haunted by the blurring of bias and perspective, and with the curse associated with perjury as the law defines it in the name of corresponding truth—the violence of human judgment awaits. On earth, for which Beckett said famously, there is no cure, one can only face down, with malice, the bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and railing of existence. To dispense, with justice; or to dispense with justice. The turn away from law and toward poetry did not require abandoning testimony, which there to be transformed, already held the critical music he sought: I saw I could use the expensive machinery That had cost me four years of hard work at law And which I had thought useless for my writing: Prying sentences open to look at the exact meaning; Weighing words to choose only those that had meat for my purpose And throwing the rest away as empty shells. I, too, could scrutinize every word and phrase As if in a document or the opinion of a judge And listen, as well, for tones and overtones, Leaving only the pithy, the necessary, the clear and plain.

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4: Poetic obligation : ethics in experimental American poetry after - ECU Libraries Catalog

Poetic Obligation, by contrast, considers the poems of Louis Zukofsky, Charles Reznikoff, George Oppen, Edward Dorn, Robert Duncan, Susan Howe, and Lyn Hejinian in terms of the philosophical notion of ethical obligation to the Other in language. Jenkins's historical trajectory enables him to consider the full breadth of ethical topics that have.

Justice, however, was not to be thwarted, for five of the men who did this to the Negro were tried: He looked particularly for cases involving "injury death, assault, theft due to primitive violence; injury due to negligence, particularly those caused by machinery. The Poet as Witness. Randolph Chilton Naturally, nearly all of the poems describe a criminal act or circumstances surrounding such an act. Many of these testimonies are heart-breaking. Most of them reflect the chaos of the modern urbanized world Reznikoff imaged in his first poems. But because they are phrased in longer lines, with more details and more interrelationships presented as context, they are easier to read and absorb than were his early short lyrics. Master of the Miniature. The reader was left to draw his or her own conclusions, and yet fault was not the issue in all of these poems. It was more than that, it was the deepest sorrow and commiseration with pain, suffering, human frailty, with human limitation to self understanding, self discipline and human lack of soul, if one can define spirit of commonality in those terms. He was revealing the grating isolation in which each of the victims and their aggressors were living in a country dedicated to unity within diversity. There was plenty of diversity but little or no unity and the book was an overwhelming indictment of the case. Charles was not about to shirk that duty to the truth, which in his sardonic way he could only hope that someday would act as a therapeutic with which to cleanse this country of its shame. And so I was to find him on every page of Testimony speaking to me as he had not been able to in private on those occasions when we had met, for one, that walk on Fifth Avenue with hints of his project barely made. After the first volume of Testimony I felt closer to him than ever before. A Memoir" In Charles Reznikoff: Milton Hindus Testimony should be a specific against what a fatuous public official once described as "the optimism of the American historical vision. Later, he continued to read these reports for the sheer human interest of them and because he felt challenged to create for strangers by selection, arrangement, and a clarified, chastened style the feelings which some of the cases had aroused in himself. The written record remains, but what good is it if it is unread? From "Epic, Action-Poem, Cartoon: Janet Sutherland He called the work Testimony: The United States acknowledging in the title the importance of seeing the nation as a whole, even while noting its fragmentation. What is most worrying to critics in Testimony is its seeming bias towards all that is most sordid and terrible in American life. This is due in part to its origins as a source-based work, for seldom in criminal court cases is there mention of ordinary life. If we accept that his main aim in Testimony was to give an impression of the problems of assimilation not just problems associated with race and culture differences but also those of urbanization, poverty, etc. The answer would appear to lie in the way Reznikoff uses the verse form to carry an indirect emotional content rather than using an authorial commentary or abstract emotional words which are more characteristic of prose. It is a verse form, however, using speech rhythms rather than a regular metrical arrangement. The shortened sentences taken from the source are broken in one or more places at natural pauses in speech rhythm. It is these breaks which transform the work from a "found" text into poetry. The abruptness of the shortened sentences leads to a kind of staccato effect emphasized by the occasional interjection of very short lines such as "the baby should live," "and shot her twice," "the S. In using the "Recitative" method, therefore, Reznikoff is isolating a particular section of his source--the testimony of witnesses--and in accentuating its particular characteristic the spoken word he gives the reader an unspoken sense of his source. Composed of small, self-contained fragments, each the distillation of an actual court case, the overall effect is nevertheless extremely coherent. Reznikoff has no lesson to teach, no axe to grind, no ideology to defend: To find a comparable approach to the real, one would have to go back to the great prose writers of the turn of the century. As in Chekov or in early Joyce, the desire is to allow events to speak for themselves, to choose the

exact detail that will say everything and thereby allow as much as possible to remain unsaid. This kind of restraint paradoxically requires an openness of spirit that is available to very few: From "Reznikoff and His Sources. Michael Heller For in Reznikoff, lives, cityscapes, testimonies, tend to remain resolutely what they are, to resist being read analogically or metaphorically. Particularly in the urban poetry, there is a sealed character to the contents of the work, one that is full of sorrow, of a judging sorrow and tenderness, which understands personality, even that of fools and villains, and yet accepts. This air has as much to do with craft as with feeling. The surer, possibly harsher aspects of judgment are left to the reader as if to say, let him or her decide what to feel or do about modern life, about the modern world. Instead of judgment, there is a sense of great detachment, a kind of moral spaciousness that the reader must cross. It is not that there are gaps of information--everything is given. Yet, as with few other contemporary bodies of verse, the reader must discover in himself the attitudes he has toward the material. Nothing seems so aesthetically right, so convincing as this distance. We often find in Reznikoff the sense of the poet having just withdrawn from the scene of the poem, of the people recorded themselves already in some state of taking leave. The great, the impersonal forces of city life or of history have just happened, and now there is the moment urging one to seek stillness, a stillness in which an intuition or perception of what has occurred can take place. At times, particularly in those poems which record the experience of living in the Jewish urban ghettos of the early s, there is a stifling, pervasive claustrophobia: Again, it is as much craft as content which produces the effect. The reader is made to feel the flow of event go by, to participate only as a witness. There are no imperial gestures in the language, barely an attempt to explain, let alone interpret. These works, edited from court testimony, trial records and historical documents, seem at first to be what we have come to call "found poems" if such material in its sheer poetic recalcitrance can be called poetry. For it is the selection and arrangement alone, i. Shorn of entertainment value, of sentiment, this work seems to place a curious demand on the modern reader. And yet for these poems to be simultaneously a witnessing and a rejecting of any social, artistic or psychological agenda in their presentation, for these materials to be able to "speak for themselves," strikes this reader as not only proper but in some powerful way as noble. In commanding response, but not dictating it, the author manages to give both good and bad conscience their due. This, of course, is modernity with a vengeance. This satisfaction in works of art is always mysterious because our views, our understanding of events and of our worlds are always partial, are never exhaustive. This limitedness becomes in Reznikoff but the other side of openness and generosity towards experience. Through it we are uncompromisingly reminded that we have hearts and minds of our own, that we too are the witnesses of our world. From "The Modernity of Charles Reznikoff.

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5: The Review: Testimony by Charles Reznikoff | Brick

Objectivist poethics -- Saying obligations: George Oppen's Of being numerous -- A phenomenology of judgment: Charles Reznikoff's Holocaust -- pt. 2. Excess and eros. The ethics of excess: Edward Dorn's Gunslinger -- The body ethical: Robert Duncan's Passages -- pt. 3.

For Amelia Richard Hyland The scene haunts me. I now do not think I will be able to forget it. And I want to know what happened to her. I have searched the web, as creatively as I am able, for some trace of her, but largely in vain. Did she find happiness? Did she meet someone who could love her, someone not bothered by the scars? Did she marry, did she have children? I would like for this story to have a happy ending. I know life is not fair, but if I am not to accept that life has no meaning, this little tragedy has to be redeemed. I have answers to none of these questions. Though I can speculate about why Reznikoff tells us she was blonde. From her surname, it seems that the family had immigrated from Ireland. We know of two of her older siblings—John, who was appointed her guardian a month after the accident for purposes of the lawsuit, and Margaret Weinert, who had begun working at the American Lithographic Co. At the end of her first year with the firm, Margaret was asked to work the wire stitching machines. During the fateful minutes, Margaret was working at a stitching machine across the large room on the fifth floor. Margaret was married a year or so after the accident and, on that occasion, quit her job at the factory. Knapp was particularly interested in game bird conservation. Morgan he established a foundation that today is known as Ducks Unlimited. To form American Litho, Knapp bought out eight other lithographic companies, many of the leading lithographers of the day. Knapp teamed up with James Duke —, head of American Tobacco, to print cigar labels, as well as tobacco or cigarette cards trading cards offered as a premium with the sale of cigarettes. Duke introduced modern cigarette manufacture and marketing and created an endowment that helped to fund the university that was renamed after his father. Duke, his father, and his brother are interred in the Memorial Chapel on the Duke University campus. American Litho also printed illustrated Christmas cards and, a few years later, World War I recruitment posters. Not long after its founding, American Litho had become the largest printing company in the world. Before Amelia started work at American Litho, she was an inmate, as they called the children, at St. There is no mention in the legal materials of her parents or of how long she had lived in the orphanage. Her position at American Litho was her first job. She had been hired by the forelady, Miss Blondell, ten days earlier to work in the bindery. The work was on the fifth floor, on the 18th St. Then she moved on to knocking up Arbuckle books. Knocking up meant counting the booklets in groups of 25 and stacking them against the wall. The stacks were then removed by another employee. John was born in Scotland and grew up as the son of a well-to-do cotton mill proprietor in western Pennsylvania. In , the brothers patented a process to seal the porous surface of roasted coffee beans by coating them with a gelatinous mixture of egg whites and sugar. The process preserved aroma while yielding a smooth and pleasantly sweet taste. The coffee was particularly beloved by chuck wagon cooks in the Old West. Each package of coffee contained a stick of peppermint candy. The packages were hand filled by about fifty women until John Arbuckle invented a machine to replace them. By , the company was the leader in the American coffee market. The Arbuckles required large quantities of sugar to coat their beans and produce the candy stick. To acquire sugar at competitive prices, John Arbuckle spent years breaking the sugar trust dominated by Henry O. The Arbuckles advertised aggressively issuing folksy colored handbills and a great variety of trading cards, which included images of birds, animals, cooked dishes, satirical scenes, sports, and maps. In , Arbuckle Brothers reissued both the maps of the American states and those of foreign countries in album format, four cards to a page. To give some idea, the rear wrapper of the world atlas showed a map of Brazil together with a view of the Arbuckle factory and two finely dressed women enjoying their coffee. During her first week, her work kept her away from dangerous proximity to machinery. About four days before the accident, Amelia was assigned to assist two young women known as stitchers, Mary Lauer and Sadie Hernan, who ran machines fastened to tables in close proximity to each other.

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It used wire thread to bind or stitch the spine of folded book leaves into a booklet or pamphlet. The machines Mary and Sadie used stood about four feet four inches high and were driven by a belt that connected the drive pulley at the top of the machines with a revolving shaft that ran under the tables on which the machines were mounted. The revolving shaft was suspended on standards four inches from the underside of the table and about 18 to 20 inches above the floor. The rotating shaft itself was about an inch and three-quarters in diameter. The shaft turned free, unprotected by any case or box. There were about 25 to 30 stitching machines on the fifth floor. The majority of the machines, those located on the opposite wall, received power from overhead shafting. Only the five machines near where Amelia worked were powered from below. She picked up unbound booklets elsewhere on the floor from the girls who folded them and then she placed them on a table located to the right of the stitchers. As the stitchers stitched the booklets, they threw them on a table to their left that was about 26 inches high. That was where Amelia worked. At the time of the accident, Amelia stood about four feet eleven inches tall. She counted the booklets and stacked them on an adjoining table. When the stack reached 25 booklets, Amelia pushed the stack back against the wall, where it remained until it was retrieved by another worker. Amelia did as she was instructed. Factory rules required that all good work be kept off the floor. Good work meant work that had been stitched and was still clean. Work that had been soiled remained on the floor and was swept up by the cleaning crew in the evening. Margaret testified at trial that she had received no instructions to pay the money over to her sister. Instead, it seems Margaret saved it for her. The accident On Tuesday, June 19, the day of the accident, Amelia arrived at work at 8 am. The accident occurred between 11 and She was knocking up Arbuckle books and had managed to stack the finished work into a stack about one foot high. The Arbuckle books had the peculiarity that their covers were smooth and the booklets tended to slip. On that morning, two or three of them slipped off the table and fell through a gap between the tables where the power belt ran. The booklets came to rest near one of the table legs. The legs of the tables on which machines were mounted were made of wood. In order to provide stability, two boards had been nailed across the legs, one just under the table top, the other at the bottom about two to three inches from the floor. The top board was about four inches wide, the lower board about six inches. The distance between the two boards was estimated differently, but seems to have been about 14 inches. Amelia stooped down and looked under the table to locate the booklets. She had long hair and kept it pinned up in what she described as a pompadour. As she raised her head under the table, her hair came in contact with the revolving shaft and was immediately wound around it. As her scalp was torn from her head, blood poured over her face and waist. She put her hand up and felt the iron shaft that was continuing to spin. She had never seen the shaft before. It was not visible from her workplace and no one had ever mentioned it to her. The injuries John Bell, the foreman of the magazine bindery, came to her rescue. He shut off the power, pulled the tables apart, dragged Amelia out, and laid her on a table. Her torso had been pulled through the boards and had come to rest under the table. Cold towels were placed on her head, then she was transferred to an ambulance, where she was treated for shock and hemorrhage as she was rushed to Bellevue Hospital. She remained at the hospital for nine months. At Bellevue, Amelia was under the care of Dr. Mabey later became a diabetes specialist and returned to practice in Montclair. There he was a member of the Orange N. His name is mentioned in two undated entries in *The New York Times*. According to the second entry, Dr. Mabey supervised the summer distribution of pasteurized milk to infants who had been born in tenements in New York. All of his children survived the summer except for one who had been taken away and fed on plain milk for three weeks. The scalp had evidently been disentangled from the shaft and transported in the ambulance to the hospital. Mabey cut the hair from the scalp and sewed it back onto her head. After several days, parts of the scalp began to slough off and were removed as they became necrotic. Only about half of the graft healed in place.

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6: Project MUSE - Poetic Obligation

A phenomenology of judgment: Charles Reznikoff's Holocaust pt. 2. Excess and eros. The ethics of excess: Edward Dorn's Gunslinger The body ethical: Robert Duncan's.

Nov 24, Leslie added it I finished this book last night. This is a book I would not have picked up on my own and I was skeptical when my professor assigned it for workshop. I tend to avoid holocaust narratives, in part because I feel inundated with them, in part because you know they will as Allison says make you want to drink the bleach. Reznikoff collaged fragments from the courtroom transcripts of various trials e. He focused on the first person accounts in the transcripts; he pared down the testimonials but did not add to them. He did arrange them under various subheadings: The resulting poem is brutal. Things that will stick: Something about the form lends to the "absorbility" the narrative; maybe it is the rhythm imposed by the line breaks, the spare language. It is so unsettling to be in these landscapes that are cramped and overpopulated only to be emptied and erased a few lines down. He does this in small stories about people, recounting nameless victims with hyperclarity. Reznikoff -- wrote the poem in when it was published by John Martin and Black Sparrow Press. It is good to have it back in print. Reznikoff was little known during his life. He wrote "objectivist" poetry which took as its motto "no ideas but in things. It is based entirely on the records of the Nuremberg trials and of the Eichmann trial. There is no narrative voice or "I" in the poem. Further, there are no names given, with the exception of the salutation "Heil Hitler" by members of the S. The poem is told in a roughly chronological way in 12 sections beginning with the early deportations of Jews and ending with the pending liberation of the camps. The cruelty and destructiveness of the Holocaust are shown in spare, understated short poems. Here is the concluding poem of Section IV, "Ghettos". She began asking for mercy: She was near a fence between the ghetto and where Poles lived and behind the fence were Poles ready to catch the baby and she was about to hand it over when caught. The mother bleeding but still alive, crawled up to his feet. Just then a stray dog passed and the S. They were led up a hill. Here they were told to chant their prayers and raise their hands for help to God and, as they did so, the officers poured kerosene under them and set it on fire. The writing is simple, understated, and direct. The reader feels he is witnessing the events described without an overlay. To the extent possible, the reader is allowed to respond to the events directly, without the intermediary of the author, and with no superfluties or ideological commitments beyond the events themselves. There a bleak scenes of horrors and killings in "Holocaust", both of individual people and of masses, in gas chambers, gas trucks, firing squads, burnings, and elsewhere. There are also a small number of episodes of acts of kindness. Reznikoff presents his materials throughout lucidly, simply, and with understatement. Two dozen workers were busy opening the mouths of the dead with iron hooks and with chisels taking out teeth with golden caps; and elsewhere other workers were tearing open the dead looking for money or jewels that might have been swallowed. And all the bodies were then thrown into the large pits dug near the gas chambers to be covered with sand. This poem of his old age will help the reader to reflect upon the Holocaust.

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