

## Head Count

Cross-legged upright all night  
floating in Santa Ana jail  
after a routine traffic check  
turned up an outstanding ticket  
for overtime parking years before  
at an anti-war demonstration,  
not knowing how well they'd search the bus  
(impounded for the duration)  
but knowing what they might find  
(rules of the road: *Keep moving,*  
*Never get popped for two at a time*)  
meditating like crazy all night  
trying to keep my mind off that,  
afraid the energy might guide them

wondering while my fellow threats  
to straight white lawn order threw up  
babbling epics of hardcore  
dark-skinned poverty  
the stinking racist reality  
of this squirrely teller's cage  
Bank America dream  
how many millions of us there are  
in here interdependently  
of each other or if it's just  
we two imagining one another  
in all our possibilities  
or just the one exercising  
oneself in names and verbs and syntax  
(the lover as Eckhart says turning  
always into what is loved)  
multiple personalities  
unity in diversity  
diversity in unity  
all of us born of the same parents  
removed several times over  
each character in the dream  
dreaming all the others in  
a universe of mirrors

how many  
trying this time to not end up  
bitter at best seeing our lives

as floundering in utter delusion  
 (hands on the wheel eyes on the road  
 heads up between our legs  
 as if switching lanes in heavy traffic  
 would get us anywhere faster)  
 but find instead with any luck  
 among the strings of ampersands  
 (*one damned thing after another*)  
 some chord to trip up time  
 to dance with the infinitesimal  
 infinities some melody  
 to sing us through the white noise  
 of factual experience  
 the crushing rocks and swirling waters  
 of unreconciled self-contradictions  
 yet awfully afraid our truths  
 loves beliefs like meaning itself  
 may be no more than gibbering,  
 our mouths going off in rapid fire  
 down the pike in time to the cells  
 exploding behind our bleeding eyes  
 that constant nipping of nothingness at  
 our bloody heels as the slope  
 gives way before and behind

how many  
 their sense of self-worth their good word  
 permanently smeared by even one  
 old timer's anecdote  
 recollection recall  
 deeply held memory  
 told and retold as hard fact  
 found by their locked up jury  
 to be utterly fantastic  
 if not an outright self-serving lie  
 and so all their other memories  
 judgments attitudes and gestures  
 also suspect all testimony  
 for the defense presumptively false  
 no longer able to trust themselves

how many so distraught  
 so starved for meaning purpose  
 answers to why love always seems to leave  
 it's all we can do just to survive

the mean streets and demeaning lower  
registers of the sliding scale  
life plays itself out on:  
never time to smell roses  
*loafe and invite the soul* listen  
to grass growing relax  
figure out what's what besides  
hardscrabble, DEW lines and spite  
so some at least of life's better things  
might happen just under the skin where sounds  
smells tastes and visions touch us  
directly, undenatured by  
the obstinate all-knowing eye

how many tired of beating their heads  
against among other things  
a certain understanding of  
economic geography:  
oil / crack / opium /  
smack / the weapons racket—  
a room with a view of the house on the hill  
the five-sided figure raised on the fill  
where the swamp used to be  
the temple where the price of money  
gets set by the priests who traffic in it,  
the court of last resort seating  
men and women of the cloth  
the fortified state house  
all built by those who live without—  
giving opinion an attitude

how many suckered into blaming  
people instead of the system  
for their impossible situations,  
putting their times and energy  
into the more or less curable symptoms  
rather than root causes, forgetting  
that yesterday's economic scandals  
political slapsticks judicial  
injustices point to something  
that lies behind the present tense  
and can't be dealt with on personal levels

how many trying to kill desire  
instead of themselves or love itself

convinced by the *Myth of Sisyphus*  
not to slice our wrists quite yet  
but go into isolation like Moses  
in Mississippi teaching kids math  
or those red diaper babies  
romantic hearts with enlightenment heads  
incommunicado for good  
reasons (pride remorse confusion):  
whatever survival instinct demands:  
never opening the door  
without asking first who's there  
never using names on the phone  
never sure which bed is wired  
a cold eye in a warm body

how many caught in the bind between  
biology and mind asking  
how we could dare bring children  
into this war-infested world,  
nurse them on milk contaminated  
by products of free enterprise  
(better killing through chemistry)  
here in the heartland where we who wanted  
only to live in peace now fight  
fire with fire an eye for an eye  
becoming our own worst enemy  
making the scorched world blind  
afraid even here (alien nation  
land of the brave) to say how we feel  
tell it like it is for us for fear  
some night we won't make it home  
or find if we do instead of mail  
a rattlesnake a letter bomb  
a stab strangle bullet or worse  
from men we're nothing to but a job

how many blowing their brains out  
with cathode tubes glazing their eyes  
corporate probes stuck in their ears  
jumping like frogs on a galvanized wire  
to tunes in the register labels prefer,  
getting cancer from x-ray exams  
chlorine daughters in the water  
benzene rings when filling the tank  
a little bit here a little bit there

poisoning the earth and air  
things that food manufacturers  
put in our mouths words their lawyers  
put in our laws in order to fix  
our unwritten constitutions  
so they and theirs are never proved  
guilty as or if charged

how many so beaten down by  
the state of the union they're half-willing  
to believe that any change  
has got to be for the better, that when  
you got nothing *et cetera*  
throwing the scumbags out the window  
will at least let in some fresh air  
even if the know-nothings  
then slip in the front door,  
half-willing to agree  
with their evil twins that nothing  
short of starting over from scratch  
will work so nuke it all  
let Dada sort it out

how many  
having learned the hard way  
that the first freedom is  
the freedom to be let be  
liberty privacy the right  
undergirding all the rest  
the right to live in peace and good will  
in an unpolluted world  
sharing its necessities  
respectfully and equitably  
the privacy of our intimate bodies  
the sanctity of our hearts and minds  
uninvaded unviolated  
by military industrial  
financial evangelical  
complications

how many  
economic refugees  
in spiritual retreat crossing  
one or another border just under  
the wire under the bottom line

with only the sweat and sun on our backs  
a bottle of water if we're lucky  
on foot in a foreign land (as lovers  
always are) unfamiliar  
with the native tongues

how many  
with substances circle dancing  
around a black omnivorous hole  
their best metaphor yet  
re-learning the ancient tantras  
*You can't know what something means  
unless you know what it might mean  
The goal is nothing the movement all  
Language is never innocent  
You can't possess the one you love*

how many falling back on feeling  
intuition imagination  
sensations compounded with memory  
a certain indubitable something  
to implicate space and time  
in the hypertemporal  
exponentially spatial  
machinations of what they think of  
as consciousness, finding reason  
so embedded in the logic  
behind the carnage it's lost all claim  
to authority over desire,  
embracing absurdity expecting  
paradise in paradox  
any chink for a toehold  
eating drinking making Mary  
such stopgap measures  
the alternative concluding  
in a box oven or ditch  
too depressing to dwell on

how many a little sideways  
looking at things so their edges dissolve  
into weird somatophores  
with no particular rhyme or reason  
this identical to that  
one identified with one  
and not knowing where to stop

drowning in possibilities  
heartfelt correspondences  
uncanny singularities  
physical limits apparently  
irrelevant or out of order  
as if for the time being  
whatever conjecture the mind conceives  
is real and death mere illusion

how many coming to believe  
for want of a better explanation  
that fundamental reality  
is light mood understanding  
and fear like the man said, in that  
order and authenticity  
that old-fashioned shibboleth  
as riddled with rhetoric and chatter  
as any corpse in the heat with maggots  
harder to come by than ever

how many on high as the Indian said  
not just because it feels so good  
except of course when it doesn't  
but to try from a vantage point  
a little further up the scale  
of heightened sensitivity  
to comprehend if not why  
at least who and what we are  
how best to live these lives  
given all the givens we never  
asked for—poor nasty  
brutish short *et cetera*  
all the sad mythologies  
and that it's all mythology  
maybe the saddest myth of all

how many down on head trips  
having lost faith in a freedom  
found only in ideas  
satisfaction only in spurts  
unable to separate *is* from *does*  
*what's happening* from *who we are*  
unable to locate or presume  
a unified sensibility  
still point consistent center

or immediacy persisting  
through time and space and tribe  
unable like some to believe we are  
simply because we think we think  
or think we know anything  
we didn't already believe in  
unable like some Renaissance men  
minds bent into Greek positions  
to privilege the rational  
the immemorial the purely  
imaginary ideal over  
the singularly idiotic  
unimaginable clutter  
of real life redundancy

how many liberated far less  
than expected by the next word  
in technology and at the cost  
of their dreams turned into products,  
who they believed they were into cheap  
commodities and services  
floated on the virtual market,  
the balance of nature and machine  
proclaimed in charts and diagrams  
a fable made believable  
by reducing the real world  
to selected inputs  
that redefine steady state  
as the status quo ante—  
power to the powers-that-be

how many on the ocean floor  
constructing exoskeletons  
from chance encounters with debris  
caught up in the futility  
of trying by process of accretion  
(making knowing experiencing  
having in all the biblical senses)  
to accumulate a self

how many brought to their knees  
by the complexity of it all  
the complicated intricacy  
the incessant insistent  
interpenetration and sheer

multiplicity so time  
makes sense only as a fall  
from an innocence pure and simple  
into the present criminal state  
redeemable if at all  
only by an act of mercy  
a miracle or pardon granted  
by the court of last resort

how many pretty much convinced  
all knowing is merely word games  
all languages and vocabularies  
less tools for navigating the world  
than self-involved intensities  
inoculated against questions  
of the *To what end? To whose  
benefit? Whose detriment?  
What good is it?* sort,  
so trying to make a virtue of that  
maybe ontological  
condition by joining in the fun  
of novel verbal opacities

how many insisting that love  
like art and truth is made not found  
a strategy of the physical  
as the physical is of desire  
the *primum mobile* seeking connection  
one with another even before  
an other is known to exist  
but unwilling to go through it again,  
pulled out of the running  
aware the race is to the young  
who can better afford the price  
sometimes might even get in free  
not feeling compelled to ask  
how it compares or what it will cost  
over a lifetime when time  
is running out and life shorter  
than ever may not warrant repeating  
some of those lessons on what  
the loved one wants the two in love  
to be in being one

how many

allowing themselves to believe in belief  
as they believe in love after all  
the pratfalls and catastrophes  
loving what they believe believing  
that and what they love believing  
love and belief cognates believing  
in themselves enough to allow  
themselves to love and be loved  
by others as well as themselves

how many coming to see ourselves  
less as who we were what  
our ancestors did or didn't do:  
where we come from how we got here:  
how we happen to still be there  
than what we're going through right now  
in time-space — no field no ground  
no then when ever or never  
no negation — paternity  
more genitive than genital  
more ethical than visceral  
maternity a matter of fact —  
not knowing where to draw the line  
between the ego the self and what  
in loose talk we call other  
riding an endless rainbow wave  
heading unknown and little luck  
trying to steer

how many  
questioning their least-examined  
beliefs and values once they see  
what strange bedfellows share  
their most intimate convictions  
maintaining against all odds  
fraternity and equality  
prerequisite to liberty

how many using intelligence  
as a means not an end  
all life-forms aspire to  
but a bio-gadget developed  
through ages of hit and miss to assist  
one strain of protoplasm  
to go forth and multiply

a product of infinitesimal odds  
in a cosmic crapshoot  
how many not otherwise suicidal  
anticipating with some pleasure  
a quantum leap a paradigm shift  
forever changing everything  
physical biological  
psychic social transcendental  
all the elements necessary  
reaching critical density  
all identities deleted  
in simultaneous combustion  
consciousness obliterated  
in the natural order of things

how many up against the precept  
that whether we call the subject in question  
Animus or Anima—  
Life Force or Vital Matter—  
a Spark, Breath or Emanation—  
Will Desire Reason  
(what they used to call Intellect)—  
Ego Instinct Id  
Libido Shadow Archetype—  
cultural constructioning—  
molecular interactions—  
energetic oscillations—  
Form Feeling Impulse  
Consciousness Perception  
*There is no difference between  
here and there, whoever thinks  
there is a difference goes  
from death to death*

how many  
testifying one hand up  
one down to the crotch preferring  
submission in full court to law  
in an understanding of it  
in force at the decisive moment  
toward the end of their long sentence  
waxing philosophical  
general notions of general notions  
the medium as metaphysic  
legacies as possible

and/or potential means of getting  
maybe at least something over  
that might be of some general use  
up against the wall

                                  how many  
coming to accept existence  
as the first miracle  
communication as the second  
the body longing to be loved  
the lovelorn longing to be embodied—  
that outside the solitary act  
of unself-conscious self-absorption,  
relationship, the moving point  
where two come together where paths  
cross, is as close as we get  
to what they call transcendence—  
that having the one you love so close  
is about all any one  
can stand or hope to understand—  
that neither sex nor eros is  
the great wall the politic  
of separation belligerence  
and war

                                  how many in so long  
the light alternating with shadows  
on their faces recalling curtains  
partly drawn against the sun  
spectacles before their eyes  
luminous with reflection  
have become reluctant to scorn  
any victim; no longer assuming  
that people get what they deserve  
so incompetence can account  
for poverty as well as moral  
inadequacy; biting their tongues  
(wanting less to make a point  
than a difference) when confronted  
with ignorance and venality —  
ready to give up the fiction  
that institutions / practices /  
mindsets are anything more substantial  
than historically-determined  
vocabularies and grammars that lead us

to think in terms of universal  
principles and divine truths  
encourage us to believe or hope  
that arguing over common sense  
(intuitively plausible  
platitudes or propositions  
however logical they may be)  
will bring us one whit closer  
to knowing the nature of self and world  
and relations between them—  
in favor of seeing ourselves  
participants in community  
engaged in a civil conversation  
a dialectic tension on how  
to increase individual freedom  
while lessening cruelty and pain

how many seeing themselves as well  
as they can recognizing that concepts  
abstractions myths ideas the mind itself  
whatever we may have forgotten at birth  
though they may make us sensitive  
to this or that irritation  
have no life of their own but only  
in living flesh as we persist  
of this living world its dancing  
with its ineffable self

how many  
trying to make that revolution  
real—to keep the natural world  
natural personal communal  
the law of the commons the common law—  
to stop the unnumbered world war  
the war against our real estate:  
the mountains and coasts and water courses  
the fields forests plains and flocks  
eaten away by those with means  
to buy what can't be sold except  
by legal fictions what can't be held  
except in common—in trust—in touch  
with more than just a passing sense  
of places our fortunes cross—but can be killed:  
the topsoil paved the water poisoned  
the past denied or dismembered

the present taken at face value  
the generations yet to come  
deflowered by the invisible hand