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Inventory

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Inventory

Blurred in the more-than-half-gone afternoon
is the thought that someone will count
all the steel made in Bethlehem, PA on this day
and that someone else will weigh the black froth
shot into the air from the coke plants in Coplay
to determine if it makes any difference.
Someone will count all the shoes manufactured
in St. Louis at the one factory still open
because it pays a low enough wage,
and someone else will count the shoes
washed up on the Illinois side of the river
where they once counted slaves
who fled the cages on Court House Square.
Elie Wiesel once remarked that the lists of the murdered
were carefully enumerated; also, that the children of killers
are not the killers of children.
Yet they still measure their borders in centimeters.
In San Jose, California, between the Capitol Shopping Mall
and the Penitencia Creek Condominiums
there's an orchard where waves of mustard flowers
ripple under the blank limbs of walnut trees.
Someone has measured this ground a foot at a time
to calculate its value while someone else has measured the rain
inch by inch to determine whether the landscaping
at the new Exxon station will be permitted to be green.
Someone else counts the inhabitants of ditches,
of abandoned cars, of warehouses and rotted
hotels, of lean-to's under graffiti soaked bridges,
and the encampment under the half-built freeway overpass
where families gather into the rude tribes of the invisible
that the counters now want to include in the population
so that the living might once again outnumber the dead.
Meanwhile, I count the only thing that matters
as the dying sun extinguishes itself in the Pacific:
the number of times the loveliest woman I know
says *not you, not you.*