

Numbers

In the hospital Critical Care Unit my drugged grandmother
lay repeating these facts:
her name, maiden & married,
her husband's, deceased,
& the various addresses where they both
once lived. Not only that,
but bank,, social security & telephone digits.
Not only that, but safe codes
& dates of anniversaries, of births.

Oh operator, plug in:
memory's intravenous is running around circuits,
this shorting out overload.

Sorting through calendars, road routes,
the debits & credits of doors, an assemblage
changing with income, habits, years -----
Is there some great rank & file
to which we belong?
Where is the document, the hall of records,
a sort of mantra, that corner & street?
Just a lost dot on the map?
2.5 mg/hour. 190 over 40.
Beep. Wheeze. Hiss.

When she was conscious Grandma began seeing
a glowing green ball in front of my mouth
& I said, "Then let's play tennis. Don't
be afraid." Back 'n forth, lips open
& shut, became an imaginary court.
"Look Gram, you're winning."
But she shook her head & said,
suddenly lucid, "In tennis no score means love,
so let's just leave it at that."