

Walt Whitman's Census Form

by Con Chapman

*(on reading Whitman's Election Day, November, 1884
after filling out the 2010 census form)*

If I should need to name, O Census Bureau, your power-
fulest question of them all,

‘Twould be “How many rooms do you have in this house,
apartment or mobile home (Do NOT count bathrooms
porches, balconies, foyers, halls or half-rooms).”

Why, I ask myself, is a bathroom not a room?



Not you, O “Did this person live in this house or apartment
five years ago?”

Nor you, O “What is this language?”

—This seething form's inhumanity, as now, I'd
name—*the still small question* vibrating—“How
did this person usually get to work LAST WEEK?”

(The heart of it is not in the asking—the act itself the main,
the decennial counting.)



The final form-counting East to West—the faceless
bureaucrats who open
The countless envelopes that fall like snowflakes—
(a wordless shower, until they are opened to reveal)—
“What time did this person usually leave home to go to work
LAST WEEK?”

