

Phenomenology

Snowflakes near headlights look like fireflies.
I Ching's lesson in caution: young fox
crossing the ice falls through. Fireflies melt
on contact. It is not the work of God – the continent
sinking. A mother teaches her child
to swim. Then climb. From a mountain in California
Jupiter rises brighter than any airplane.
It's been ages since I've asked
a question. Child's play: if you cover one eye
you can fit a whole person in the space
between your thumb and pointer finger.

A number is just a name.

A name is just a room you can't get out of.

It matters who mans the camera
whether you can touch my thigh or run your fingers through my hair
or if I can lay my head on your shoulder.

Before you I thought the body a prison

and the mind, Foucault's panopticon.

Now I know you might wait two hours to pee
if you sign up to use the bathroom during count time
when officers cannot supervise you
because they are too busy counting other bodies.

(Note accompanying a white v-neck t-shirt – 619754
printed along its body-side bottom hem –
wrapped in a clear plastic garbage-bag
an officer hands me to put in the coin-operated locker
Before moving through security to see you:

*I wore this sweaty and aching
after lifting weights)*

Note: Title is after J. Jennifer Espinoza.

(What were you thinking

when you held it, cool weight heavy in your sixteen-year-old grip, muzzle gaping like a hooked fish inches from the checkout girl's marble eyes, the shouts, your relief at her compliance, the open cash drawer, the open car door, its open sunroof, and then the years and years and years rolled out before you then stacked up one on top of the other like the cash you'd stash after a deal, like a deck of cards in the visiting room game basket, like the jeans in the closet of your childhood bedroom your mother still keeps pristine—)

Grand Unified Theory of Mass Incarceration
or,
How to Leave

It's something to turn away from –
a cabinet filing lives to review
or retrieve at your convenience.

Learn the game: blink to erase
a body into oath into shadow into stone
into shackle into chattel into cage.

You can be paid to shape a nameless mass.
In the image of a nation's myth
A system creates a body to abandon.
In the image of a nation's myth
you can be paid to shape a nameless mass

into shackle into chattel into cage.
A body into oath. Into shadow. Into stone.
Learn the game. Blink to erase –

or retrieve, at your convenience –
a file cabinet holding lives to review.
It's something to turn away from.

Note: Form inspired by *Myth*, by Natasha Trethewey.