



lockdown

***prison, repression and
gender nonconformity***

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inspiration

The idea to make this pamphlet has arisen in response to the mobilisation to the women's prison in Berlin on March 8 2008 (International Women's Day). The demonstration is specifically in solidarity with Andrea who is held there on political charges. It has raised difficult questions relating to forms of segregation. Some of these questions connect to the ways in which we choose (or choose not) to segregate ourselves by having a women-only demo or a women/lesbian/trans block for example.

It has also highlighted the ways in which segregation is imposed on us through the very existence of men's and women's prisons. We support this demonstration because it is all too easy to forget that, when we take our solidarity directly to the prisons, we are most often only at either a men's or a women's prison. We see this form of segregation for what it is: a strategy to divide and rule. *We will not be divided and we will not be ruled.*

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introduction

This pamphlet is intended to expose one more of the fucked up ways in which the State, through its prison system, is able to repress, abuse and dehumanise people.

For a person who does not conform to conventional categories of sex, or gender, or sexuality, being imprisoned entails an additional form of repression. Simply by dividing prisons between the binary of male and female leads to the enforced categorisation of every person held there into one of these two sexes. Many transgender or transsexual people either choose not to conform to these categories or, as a result of the circumstances of their transition, are refused recognition as the sex that they identify as. This (perceived) state of ambiguity or conscious rejection of categorisation exposes people to prejudice, discrimination and abuse carried out both by those figures that enforce imprisonment and also by some of those imprisoned. Even for people who have transitioned, and are both socially and legally recognised as the sex that they have transitioned to, prison is a place that will undermine this status and exploit the vulnerability it carries.

The position of this pamphlet would ultimately seek the destruction of all prisons so that they are no longer able to repress any individual. It does not advocate merely the improvement of the conditions of a certain group of prisoners as some kind of solution. However, while we work towards this ultimate end of complete prison abolition along with the destruction of the system

that creates it, it is also part of our struggle to support those in prison in order to make their lives more bearable so that they can continue to fight both from the inside and again if or when they are released. Fighting for prisoners to be allowed to wear the clothes that they choose or to be able to decide for themselves which sex prison they are held in are concessions that will probably never serve to achieve our complete liberation from the State and its tools of repression. What these changes can do though is to make a dramatic difference to an experience that can often become unbearable.

Improving the lives of those in prison is one form of solidarity that can be offered. What must drive and define this support, however, is the continued and consistent commitment to action of those on the 'outside'. Such revolutionary solidarity is necessary in order to build on and strengthen our struggles. It is the re-affirmation and reassurance that the actions of those who have been imprisoned because of their will to resist have not been in vain. It is defiance and initiative in the face of repression. It is the difference between hitting back and turning the other cheek. We say: *Hit Back*.

"Revolutionary solidarity is the secret that destroys all walls, expressing love and rage at the same time as one's own insurrection in the struggle against Capital and the State."

» Daniela Carmignani

strategies of segregation

Divide and rule

Strategies of segregation are present in all institutions created for the good of capitalism - the work place, the nuclear family home, schools, mental hospitals, the media - and all are used to alienate, dominate and repress us whilst sustaining and strengthening the flow and currents of Capital. Nowhere are these strategies more clearly marked out than in the institution of the prison.

Although many people seem able to conveniently ignore the fact, it is no great secret that prisons exist to control and dominate through punishment, intimidation, psychological abuse and physical violence. They exist as actual, physical fortresses that serve to separate and alienate those on the 'inside' from those on the 'outside'; to keep the 'bad' away from the 'good' and to protect the 'innocent'.

Strategies of division and alienation function on a macro level, that is, through the separation of different groups into different institutions based on social categorisation - criminals into prisons, students into schools, workers into jobs, immigrants

into detention centres etc. Segregation also functions on a micro level within the institutions that house these groups. Like in prisons where carefully calculated structures and processes are used to segregate, divide and disaffect those being held: in isolation units such as the FIES in Spain, through the divisive 'Incentives and Earned Privileges' scheme in England, 'ghosting' and dispersion tactics and, of course, the 'Prison Industrial Complex'.

One form of segregation that is ingrained to such a level that it often goes unquestioned, on both macro-societal and micro-institutional levels, is segregation by sex.

Boxed in

Classification takes place at birth. We are either male, female or (only relatively recently) intersex.¹ Other possibilities are not permitted. This early categorisation is intended to define and control, throughout our lives, basic freedoms such as which toilets we should use, where we are supposed to change, what clothes are appropriate for us to wear...etc etc. Our sex (along with

security classification etc) will also define which prison, or which section of a prison, we are sent to.

Prison systems are institutions designed, built or adapted to accommodate only the two-sex binary of male and female and in many prisons not even this much is true. In Spain, for example, women make up 8% of the prison population and are concentrated in 'special' units in prisons that have been built for men, which means that they don't have access to public spaces like libraries and gyms. What is certain though is that prisons have neither been designed nor built to incorporate transgendered prisoners. There are a couple of cases in the USA where prisons have been specifically designated to hold either transgender or lesbian or gay prisoners. In New York, for example, a unit was created in the 1970's to hold gay and transgender prisoners. It was recently closed (in 2005) as part of a "larger inmate reorganisation" to "improve security". This kind of 'special' provision though is most definitely an exception.

Transgender prisoners defy the institutionalised segregation of the prison system. The multiplicity of combinations of gender/sex/surgery/hormones/identification that people embody resist simplistic and dogmatic solutions. Consequently, given that no capacity (or desire) to comprehend these differences exists, transgender people are subject to what amounts to focussed repression.

It is a common prison policy to resolve this 'problem' (of which prison they should be sent to) by holding transgender prisoners in isolation, consequently removing their access to libraries, recreation time and sports facilities. Referred to in this context



as 'protective custody', solitary confinement removes the dilemma of where people should go by doing precisely that: removing them, making them disappear.

In addition to using isolation as a solution that conveniently removes the problem, solitary confinement is also justified as a means to keep transgender prisoners safe from threats that might arise from the other prisoners. So, rape or isolation? Equally abhorrent possibilities. It may be true that rapes are more likely to occur if the person is not isolated, but this is no choice. It is a blatant reconfiguration of what is otherwise used as a punishment and a psychological and physical weapon of torture and it exposes the prison system's absolute hypocrisy and inherent transphobia.

Safety is not, anyway, assured by segregation. This position suggests that if men and women were not segregated then rapes and sexual assaults would increase. Sexual assaults and rapes occur with a shocking frequency in men's prisons already. The same is true of women's prisons. This argument is a strategy that fuels the belief that prisoners must be fearful of and protected from each other and as a result is divisive and encourages a 'head-down' attitude.

Segregation does not create a safer environment. Not for men, women, or anyone else. Prison is never going to be 'safe' or 'protective'. It is an institution specifically designed to repress, punish and control people. And, as a strategy, segregation detracts attention from those who we should be directing our resistance towards - the prison officials who are responsible for locking people up, who enforce repressive and abusive practices and those who, very often, are themselves the perpetrators of



beatings and sexual assaults.

The economy of the sexes

Prison segregation based on sex is a condition of incarceration imposed as a further form of State control over the individual. It mirrors a division that is implemented and enforced on a wider social level to protect certain power dynamics within that society, as defined by the State. It is not a division that arises from some sort of biological necessity.

Attempting to keep the ‘men’ with the ‘men’ and the ‘women’ with the ‘women’ in prison, as in society, serves to maintain sex and gender roles in a stable, productive place that is most advantageous to the capitalist system that constructs them.

“It is particularly important to challenge these institutions, because their closeness to us, their intimacy, can make them appear not to be institutions at all, but rather the most natural of relationships. And then they can work their insidious ploys and make domination itself appear natural.”

» The Network of Domination -
Wolfi Landstreicher

Make no mistake. It is not being suggested that if prisons were mixed they would, therefore, be ‘better’. Or that if we were able to choose which prison we were sent to that this would be a ‘victory’. It is a not an answer to build ‘special’ prisons for transgender prisoners. Improvements or reforms to the prison system are necessary to the extent that they can significantly influence the lives and conditions of those in prison. For this reason both support and solidarity for those who are in active struggle in prisons are really important. But they

are not solutions in themselves.

What is being suggested is that segregation by sex is a strategy of repression that is as concrete as the walls that are built to enforce it. This is evident from the experiences of those people who are most vulnerable to this form of repression and it should be evident to all of us. Like a concrete wall though, it’s tangibility also makes it vulnerable: vulnerable to resistance. It is a potential line of defiance. It is another wall in which cracks can be found and holes made. It is another wall that can be brought down.

Down With *All* the Prison Walls!

“There is no use in making laws more just... There is no use in trying to reform this system, because every reform will inevitably play back into the system, increasing the number of laws, increasing the level of monitoring and policing and making the world even more like a prison. There is only one way to respond to the situation, if we would have our lives as our own. To attack this society in order to destroy it.”

» The Network of Domination -
Wolfi Landstreicher

1. Intersex is the medical term used to refer to anyone whose anatomy does not conform to the criteria of male or female - it incorporates a whole spectrum of genital and reproductive system configurations - and it is still not a legally recognised sex in most countries. Babies born as intersex are assigned a sex (either male or female) and often undergo surgery very early on to ‘normalise’ their genitalia.

the situation in germany

Article contributed by a.r.a.p.: www.arap.so36.net - arap@so36.net

We, arap, are an anti-repression group from Berlin with a primary focus around transgendered people and police/prison. We are not only concerned with criticising the specific enforcement of the prison system, but also with police detention, police controls, private security firms, courts and government departments.

From very early on, we could see that the situation of incarcerated transgendered people in Germany is for the most part an untouched topic.

What is the situation facing transsexual and transgendered people in prison? What problems are they confronted with when they find themselves on the other side of their social niche and without private sphere, in a radically one-sexed institution?

Which criteria decides which prison I will be placed in and how can I struggle against this?

There are for example no police guidelines that can be referred to that can familiarise police with a respectful relationship with

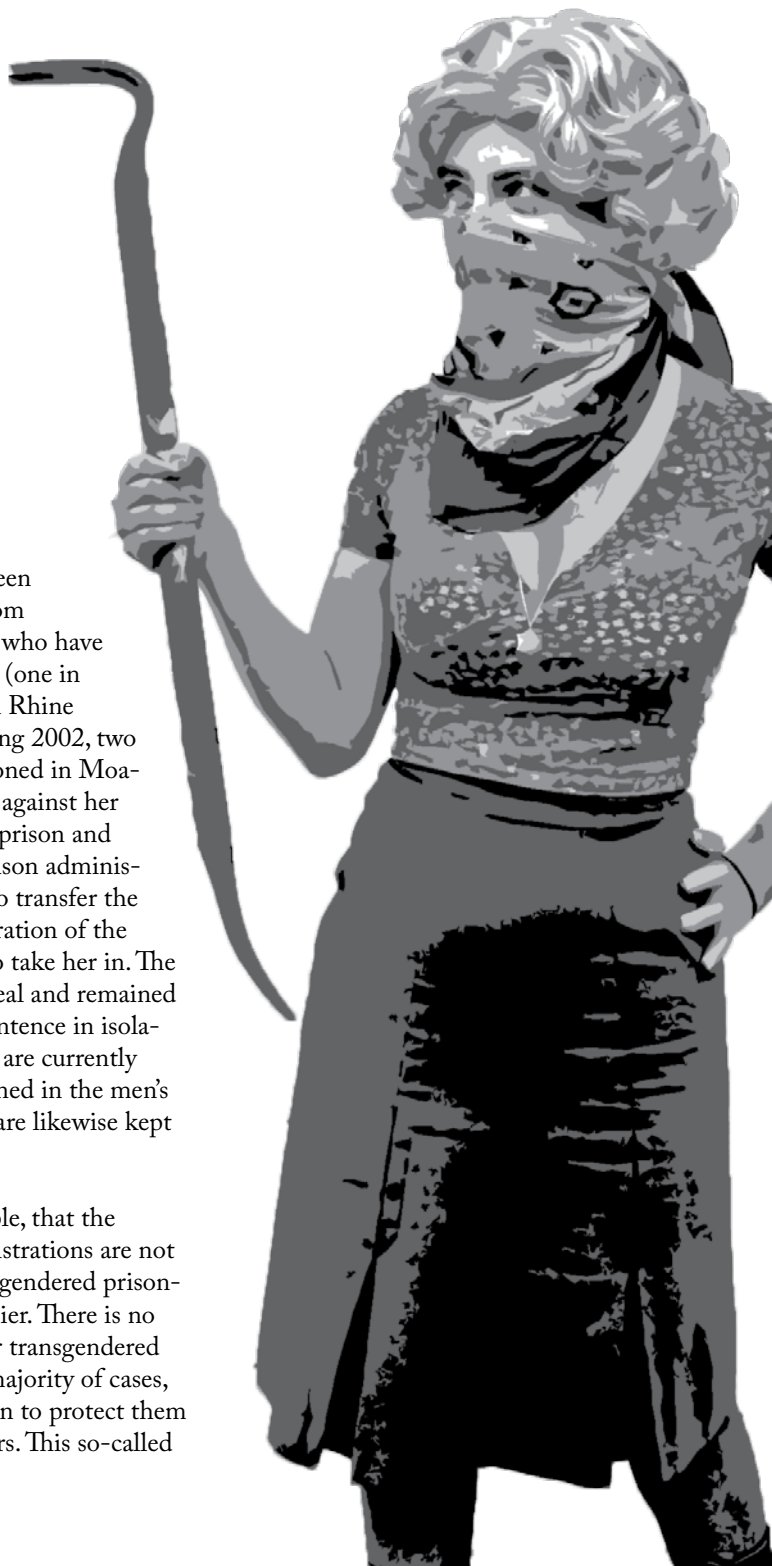
transgendered people. Transsexual sex workers are especially exposed to sexualised violence from police. Under the false pretences of an ID check, they are often taken to police stations for full body searches. Because body searches must be made by officers of the same sex as on their identity papers, transwomen are often forced to undress in the presence of many men. During the searches they also face transphobic insults. Because many of the sex workers are illegal there are few complaints made against the police. In 2002 a woman took action against the police, but unfortunately without success.

Prison

A prisoner's legal sex is used to decide which prison they will be placed in. That means, for example, that the majority of MtF's (male to female) that have not changed their legal sex will be placed in a men's prison. This also means that an FtM (female to male) who has changed his legal sex will also be placed in a men's prison, regardless of whether he has had sex reassignment surgery or not.

In practice there have been at least two deviations from this policy for two MtF's who have changed their first names (one in Bavaria and one in North Rhine Westfalia). In Berlin during 2002, two transwomen were imprisoned in Moabit. One laid a complaint against her imprisonment in a men's prison and won her first case. The prison administration however refused to transfer the woman and the administration of the women's prison refused to take her in. The woman then lost her appeal and remained for the duration of her sentence in isolation. We know that there are currently two transwomen imprisoned in the men's prison in Hamburg who are likewise kept in isolation.

It can be said, in principle, that the majority of prison administrations are not ready to do a lot for transgendered prisoners to make their lives easier. There is no common arrangement for transgendered people in prison. In the majority of cases, they are placed in isolation to protect them from their fellow prisoners. This so-called



protection consists of 24 hour lockdown, where even the prison yard walk must be made alone.

Transgendered prisoners are often left with the responsibility of their own safety, with the justification that they would face less danger if they could just look 'a little less showy'.

There is no entitlement to wear the desired clothing or to use cosmetics. Wearing women's clothes in a men's prison is mostly denied, as it is claimed to endanger the security of the institution. This was even denied to a transwoman in isolation.

It is, as a rule, harder to begin a transition in prison than it is to continue a transition that was begun before prison. Since the Penal Law only speaks of an entitlement to medical treatment, it is up to the discretion of the prison doctor and, as the case may be, the prison administrator, to decide what falls within this. Prisoners suing for hormone treatment have greater success when they were already taking hormones before they were sent to prison. In 2004, an imprisoned transwoman in Chemnitz won a court case against the prison after they refused to pay for an operation. This is currently the only known instance of a successful case and, according to lawyer Maria Sabine Augstein, an extremely uncommon exception.

The length of the sentence commonly plays an important role when it comes to the question of transition. With short sentences, first name changes or hormone treatment are often denied – nevermind an operation – with the advice that the person can wait until they are free.

We want to change and improve the relationship the police and justice department has with transgender people – to publicise and scandalise the discrimination and violence from these organisations, to fight so transgender people no longer find themselves at the mercy of the police and justice department in arbitrary situations without rights.

We are currently trying to collect first hand reports from cross-dressers, transgendered and transsexual people. The documentation from experiences, opinions and events can serve to highlight what needs to be changed and act as a basis for campaigns against discrimination and violence from the security services. Transgendered people don't have to remain hidden away and isolated – there is barely any way of living that is less private. The broadening or abandonment of the sex given at birth is carried out essentially in the public sphere – it is visible and therefore also vulnerable.

Because there is no 'correct' way of relating to transgendered people, affinity groups, organisations and circles of friends must consider strategies to create this and how they can mutually give those affected the courage to survive arrests, searches and imprisonment.

**For a society without prisons...
Freedom for all prisoners....**

searches, arrests and controls

Strategies for Confronting, Coping and Resisting

Some text taken from:

Little guidebook for "Queers against G8" made by www.arap.so36.net June/2007

Searches, arrests and controls are unacceptable in any context and are experienced differently by everyone. Some of the text below can be applied to more general situations but what we are focussing on here is how these repressive practices specifically affect transgender or gender-queer people.

Transgender

In Germany, it is the Personenstand (the name and sex mentioned in your official papers) that decides if you are put in a men's or a women's prison/block.

There is an imperative of sex separation in Germany. As far as we know there has been no case in Germany where a person was sent to a prison/custody for the gender they chose regardless of what their papers said. In Germany, there is no code of conduct for police that tells the cops to treat transgender people with respect (not that this would necessarily make much difference anyway...).

Personal searches and controls

Personal searches are done (apparently) to find objects/evidence, for the safety of the cops or the person that is being searched. Which means that you can be searched at pretty much anytime. If you are arrested, you will be searched for sure. They can search your body, your clothes and things you had with you (bags, etc.). Personal searches have to be done by a cop that has the same (legal) sex as the person that is searched. Searching of backpacks/bags, 'patting down', checking the content of your clothes/pockets is often part of 'Vorkontrollen' (preliminary controls, to be passed before you can access the point/area where a demonstration gathers). Also here people have to be searched by a cop of their legal sex. If they want you to take off clothes, there has to be a room where you can't be watched by other people. In this room only cops of your sex are allowed. This is different for doctors. In this context sex-segregation is not mandated by law.

Obviously, it is down to each individual to decide their personal strategies for dealing with controls and searches. You could inform them politely but firmly about your transsexualism/transgenderism and demand to be searched by cops of the gender you choose regardless of what your papers say. Or you get on their nerves and demand a transgender officer until they let you pass without a search (they might actually find a transgender officer for you). Or if you want to avoid trouble, stick it out and let things happen the way they happen, it is your decision and depends on the personal limits of what is acceptable for you.

Of course it is a good thing to resist and to be strong and to refuse to compromise.

It is also important to be realistic about your limits. Our experience is that everyone has to find their own strategies for dealing with situations that are intrusive, abusive and brutal like arrests and searches. While some prefer to be loud, for others it may be better and safer to be quiet. Some may want to be confrontational, others may want to avoid searches. As there is no official line of conduct for the police towards transgender people you, as a group/organisation/friends/individual, have to think about strategies of how to deal with them and how to give each other the necessary respect, power and courage to face searches and arrests.

If possible, think about these strategies either individually or as a group before being confronted with the situation- that way everybody is aware of potential vulnerabilities and can also effectively coordinate responses and resistance.



some personal experiences and strategies

“My funniest experience was when I was initially put with the ‘male’ people who had been arrested. Then I had my passport checked again. I refused to ‘explain’ myself to them. They asked my friends where they should put me - they told them it was their problem. I was moved to the ‘females’. Then more doubt and a further three cops had to study my passport and my appearance before finally deciding that I should be with the ‘females’. Even then they still referred to me as ‘It’. I say it was funny because it was ridiculous and, on some level, entertaining to see them utterly confused about what to do. The reality of what it demonstrates is really quite shit.”

“I like to force them to make the decision. When they ask me if I am male or female I tell them that they are going to have to make that decision themselves. I want to make their lives harder and I refuse to voluntarily categorise myself in that way.”

“When I’m searched I want to take my own fucking trousers down. I don’t want their filthy hands anywhere near me.”

“One time I was arrested for something really minor. It was really dark and I had a cap on so my face was pretty well hidden. All the way back to the station the cops were using male pronouns for me. It was only once my passport was checked in the light that the cop became confused about whether I was male or female. When he decided that I was in fact female he came out with the exclamation that the only reason they had arrested me was because they thought ‘I was some young guy out to cause trouble’. Fucked up. On every level. And the bastards still gave me the fine.”

“In Amsterdam during Queeruption a whole group of queers were arrested and the cops had such trouble trying to segregate them that in the end they just gave up and put everyone together.”

“Sometimes it’s a distinct advantage being genderqueer. Nobody knows who should search you so I have often been able to pass through controls without being checked.”



solidarity is a weapon

What does Revolutionary Solidarity mean? And what does it mean in this context?

First of all, what do we mean by transgender and transexual?

Definitions, definitions... They are exclusionary, limiting and they provide an easy way to avoid deeper analysis and critique. Especially when they relate to identity. But they can be useful. They can be a starting place and sometimes even a catalyst. So here is one definition, just to get us started:

The term transgender has emerged to indicate a broader variety of experiences. Many people use it as an umbrella term (like 'queer') to indicate a variety of genderfucking people: crossdressers, drag kings and queens, genderqueers, transsexuals, FTMs, MTFs, etc. In this way, the term can be used as an organizing tool - a way of calling out to all people who are facing punitive gender norms and subject to gender policing because our gender presentations make people uncomfortable and angry. The term can be used to affirm the experiences and resistances of people living in violation of gender norms.

» Toilet Training - Dean Spade

Prison calling

"I can't comprehend that it (prison) actually exists..like I have these moments where I think 'oh my god, these people are still there'. And my breath is taken away at the horror of it. Day after day, month after month, it just grinds on destroying your will, your soul and your heart"

» One of the Urewera 19 accused, currently on bail after 4 weeks imprisonment

The revolutionary solidarity that we demonstrate to transgender people in prison is fundamentally no different to the solidarity that we demonstrate to any other prisoner. That is to say:



"Solidarity lies in action. Action that sinks its roots into one's own project that is carried on coherently and proudly too, especially in times when it might be dangerous even to express one's ideas publicly. A project that expresses solidarity with joy in the game of life that above all makes us free ourselves, destroys alienation, exploitation, mental poverty, opening up infinite spaces devoted to experimentation and the continual activity of one's mind in a project aimed at realising itself in insurrection."

» Introduction to Revolutionary Solidarity - Daniela Carmignani



Action and the continuation of our own projects provide the foundation and focus of the revolutionary solidarity that we practise. But this shouldn't diminish the significance of support and the direct influence this has on the lives of those criminalised and locked up by the State. In particular we see this support as having the potential to strengthen the active resistance and struggle of those imprisoned.

"What is most significant is active solidarity with the active revolt of our comrades who are locked up or otherwise suffering focused repression. It is within this context that the specific activity of support (letters, visits, financial support, etc) can become a part of the practise of solidarity as the help to maintain communication between all of us fighting against this system."

» Revolutionary Solidarity - A Challenge -
Wolfi Landstreicher

And more specifically in this context, given that many transgender people are in prison for 'survival crimes', illegal sex work, transphobia from wider society, police and judges, solidarity in these terms calls for action in both a personal and broader political context. It must also go beyond giving tangible support to prisoners (eg. letters,

money, books) and towards destroying the system that sent them there.

"The basis of solidarity is the recognition of my own struggle in the struggle of others, it is carried out in practise precisely through continuing that struggle, continuing to attack this social order, and doing so with a focus on what unites my struggle with that of others."

» Revolutionary Solidarity - A Challenge -
Wolfi Landstreicher

This means asking yourself, on an individual and personal level, how your own actions and attitudes might be reinforcing gender normativity. Are you helping to maintain gender rules or creating spaces where they can be destroyed?

"Think of every moment of every day that someone addresses you by your gender, and think how easy and comfortable that feels. Think about giving that comfort up. If that doesn't seem like a big deal to you, recognize how many lives you are conveniently dismissing."

» Toilet Training - Craig Willse

"When you look at trans issues as being about the narrow issue of whether one person gets to be called by a certain name or use a cer-



tain bathroom, it can seem trivial. However, when you look at how all people are subject to extreme regulation on broad scales like the law as well as narrow issues like what we wear and how and who we fuck, you begin to see that a struggle for transliberation and a deregulation of gender is a struggle to end a lot of systemic violence and suffering.”

» Toilet Training - Dean Spade

This also means in a broader context questioning whether prisoners in jail for shoplifting, working the streets (while sex work is legal in Germany, transgender streetworkers still face police harassment and repression. And at least some workers trying to fight this have simply been deported as they also didn't have papers) etc. are less deserving of political support than someone arrested for throwing a stone at a demonstration. Because none of these acts are politically neutral, and anyway if you can separate life (and things people do to survive) from your politics then something is seriously wrong.

“I think we should focus on opposing the Prison State, which includes the abolition of prisons, and this means we don't have to ‘pick and choose’ (about who we give support to)... What I would say is: Direct support to all

political prisoners, and political support for all prisoners in struggle.”

» If it was easy they wouldn't call it 'struggle' - Mark Barnsley

“If folks want to dismantle capitalism, we need to see clearly how economics are bound up in gender regulation, and I don't just mean that women are paid less than men, though that's bad. I mean that we live in a gendered economy, we live in gendered public spaces, we work in gendered activist communities. If the world you are fighting to create does not intimately concern itself with the poverty of non-passing, genderqueer, homeless youth of color—what's the point? If you create a world in which middle-class white boys are free to drop out and dumpster dive, well great, but recognize how small that world is and how many people's needs it doesn't begin to address.”

» Toilet Training - Craig Willse

What solidarity isn't

After 6 hours of an anti-World Economic Forum protest in New York, Dean Spade and his affinity group left the demonstration to go to the toilet. Dean went into a toilet with a 'men's' sign on the door, followed by a cop who told him he was in the wrong toilet and demanded to see his

identity papers. Dean explained he was transgender, wasn't in the wrong place and tried to leave. As he did the cop pushed him against the wall and called for back up. Two of Dean's affinity group tried to intervene, all three were arrested and held 23 hours in jail. Charges against them included disorderly conduct, trespassing, resisting arrest and obstruction of govern-

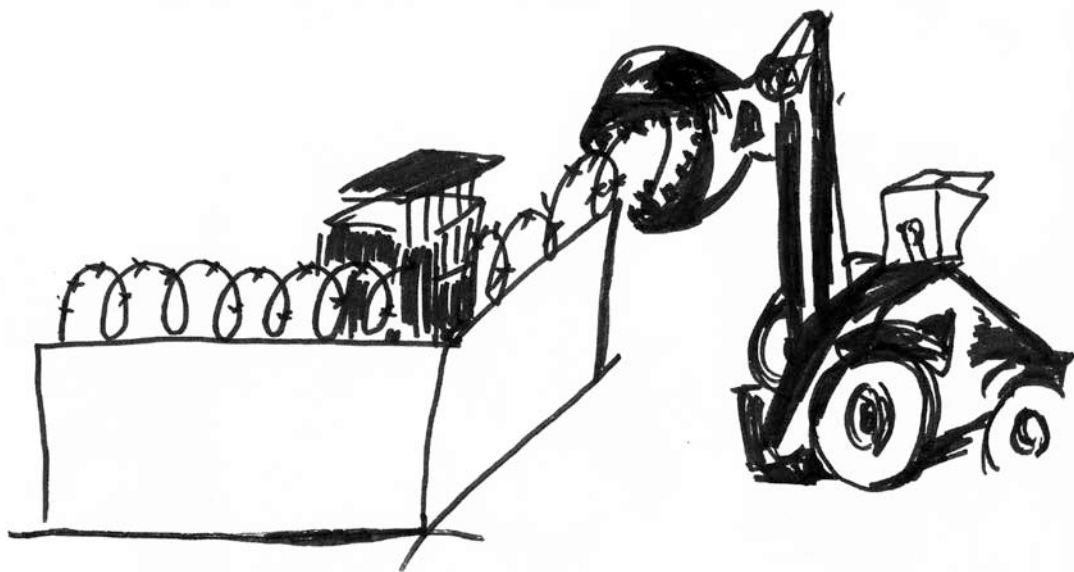
ment administration.

Attempts to de-arrest Dean – direct and physical acts of solidarity – were countered by precisely the opposite: responses on the internet saying that he should have shown his ID, should have used the other toilets, should have been 'passing' more as a man.

And one more thing to hold in your heart

"We see solidarity as a way of feeling oneself accomplice, of deriving reciprocal pleasure and in no way do we consider it a duty or sacrifice in the name of the 'good and sacred cause' because it is not of our cause, but of our selves."

» Revolutionary Solidarity - Pierleone Porcu



review: **cruel and unusual**

**A documentary film
by Janet Baus, Dan Hunt, Reid Williams**

"I sat there for almost a year in 24 hour lockdown, it's a room, just a room, you don't have anything in there but your bed and a window you can't even open, so you don't even get air, you feel like an animal...everyone can see you, it was entertainment for them to see this person in this room going crazy...everyone was walking by, everyone was laughing at me, everyone was hababa, look at the fag, look at the homo"

» Yolanda, imprisoned for 1 ½ years in a men's prison

"When they took me off estrogen it became like I could tear the top of my head off and crawl outside my skin"

» Anna, imprisoned for 4 ½ years in a men's prison

Ashley, Linda, Anna, Yolanda and Ophe-
lia are transgender women incarcerated in
mens prisons in the USA. Some of them
broke the law, some of them just got found
guilty of breaking the law. Since the gender
they were identifying as wasn't deemed to
fit the genitals they had (or didn't have),
the breaking of these laws meant not only
being sent to the 'wrong' prison, but once
in prison being subjected to what can only
be described as torture: forced de-transi-
tioning, being taken off hormones, denial
of medical care, isolation cells, rape and
abuse by prisoners and prison staff.

As a portrayal of what transphobia and
segregation means to transgendered people
in prison, of what it means to have to fight
for your gender identity in an environment
designed to break you, *Cruel and Unusual*
is both brutal and overwhelming. Even
from a viewpoint that accepts the existence
of prisons in the first place, it's hard to see
how putting someone in an isolation cell
for a year for no other reason than they
are transgender fits with the crime-and-
punishment worldview. It's hard to see
how making someone choose between rape
or isolation cells can be justified, or how



denying someone medical care even when they are cutting themselves up is somehow compatible with a society supposedly based on human rights.

But then it's also hard to see how people can tolerate the existence of prisons at all - if you create an institution designed to take all of someone's will, autonomy and any trace of rebellion away, of course extremely fucked up things are going to happen there.

While solutions put forward by the documentary are inescapably reformist, they are also sadly quite radical to a stupidly huge section of wider society. And if the solutions are not to fight for people to choose which prison they will be incarcerated in, and not to build new prisons for people who refuse to identify as one gender, then what are they? Given that prisons are specifically designed as tools of repression, to ask for reform is nothing but a validation of state power. A better question is

how to fight for the end of prisons without abandoning people incarcerated there now - because on the other hand, anything that helps someone in the realisation of themselves as individuals is a liberatory act.

Out of the frying pan into the fire

"Gender non-conforming people have consistently been among the most visible and vulnerable members of gay communities - among the most likely to be beaten, raped, and killed; among the most likely to be criminalized and labeled deviant; among the most likely to end up in psychiatric hospitals and prisons; among the most likely to be denied housing, employment, and medical care; among the most likely to be rejected and harassed as young people, and; among the most likely to be separated from their own children."

» *Breaking out of the Prison Hierarchy: Transgender Prisoners, Rape, and the Eighth Amendment - Minter*



On top of critique of what happens inside prisons to transgender people, *Cruel and Unusual* presents a clear picture of why transgender people end up there in the first place. And if you're willing to make the connections yourself it's also a pretty good example of how gender coercion (that is, the both violent and normalised enforcement of gender norms) affects people already marginalised: poor people, immigrants, people of colour, people without access to healthcare and education, people who don't pass.¹

Ophelia, for example, is serving a 67 year sentence after attempting to rob a bank to pay for sexual reassignment surgery. Linda (in her own words "too feminine to work the oil fields, too masculine to work as a prostitute") was imprisoned for 7 years after stealing to survive. Her transexuality meant she couldn't even get into a homeless shelter. Yolanda, who had been working the streets since she was 10, was

imprisoned for over 1½ years while awaiting trial for assaulting a police officer and attempted escape, after a fight with someone who had told her she was just another queen and would be dead soon.

In this sense then, it is not only necessary to re-think what is meant by 'political prisoners', to not only attack the existence of prisons but the social systems which create and enforce transphobia, gender coercion, racism and borders in general. Sadly not exactly the view put forward by the film makers, but if you're feeling fanciful you could imagine it to be so.

1. For more on this read *Undermining Gender Regulation* Dean Spade, in *Nobody Passes, Rejecting the Rules of Gender and Conformity*, ed. mattilda aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore, Seal Press 2006

read more!

Read more on paper:

» *Nobody Passes, Rejecting the rules of Gender and Conformity* ed. Mattilda a.k.a Matt Bernstein Sycamore, Seal Press

» *Thats revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* ed. Mattilda a.k.a Matt Bernstein Sycamore, Soft Skull Press

» *Nowhere to Go But Out: The Collision Between Transgender & Gender Variant Prisoners and the Gender Binary in America's Prisons* Alexander Lee

» *The Prison within the Prison – Resistance to F.I.E.S. Isolation units in Spain* compiled by Brighton ABC, PO Box 74 Brighton BN1 4ZQ, UK

» *If it was easy they wouldn't call it 'struggle'* Mark Barnsley talks about Repression and Resistance in British Prisons

» *Down with the Prison Walls!* A talk by Laudelino Iglesias Martinez

» *The Network of Domination* Wolfi Landstreicher

» *Attacking Prisons at the point of production: A brief look at militant actions against the prison industrial complex.* compiled by Green Anarchy, PO Box 11331, Eugene, OR 97440

Read more on the internet:

» *arap* – arap.so36.net

» *Out of Action* – emotional first aid (in german): outofaction.net

» *Activist Trauma Support:*
www.activist-trauma.net

» *Anarchist Black Cross:*
www.anarchistblackcross.org

» *Toilet Training / Pretending we rock – interview with Craig Willse and Dean Spade:*
www.makezine.org/mimi4.html

» *Techno Tranny Slut – technology, gender, sex, resistance:* bang.calit2.net/tts

» *Sylvia Rivera Law Project – Fighting Discrimination against Gender Non-Conforming People:* srlp.org

» *Revolutionary Solidarity:* anti-politics.net

» *An insurgent magazine of social war and anarchy.* Available from Natterjack distro UK and Longing for Collapse Press USA: 325collective.com



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are free

