



letters a week on average, 99% of them from prison. Most of them want 'zines, but some have contributions, essays, poetry, artwork, whatever, that they want me to help publish. So I have to make a determination about what I'm willing and able to do.

I make a strong point to tell them that this isn't a frivolous thing, we're very serious about this, we want political analysis, this isn't a game to us. As you can tell the artwork is very political, it's not just joking around stuff. But we do have fun with it too. There are cartoons 'zines, although they're political too, and they're banned as well. Comics don't like being made fun of.

TS: It's not a lucrative economic opportunity for prisoners to make something with you, but also they are personally at risk because of the content.

AR: I tell them there's no money in this. Everything is anti-copyright and the only person shelling out the dough will be me. I like contributions but I'm not going to deny somebody because they are indigent and don't have anything.

But usually when they [the prison] find out what they [the prisoner contributors] are doing they get into assy trouble because of it. They'll go to the S.H.U. [Secure Housing Unit], they'll send them to a more restrictive prison, they'll assault them, they'll tear up their cell and take all of their personal pictures to make them feel horrible for doing this. It takes a lot of courage to involve themselves because I'll put their mailing address in the art so that other people can write to them and that's how a lot of times other prisoners are able to contact them because they saw a 'zine that they did. So they'll write to someone they know and say 'Hey, send this letter off to them', or to me, and that's how we'll try to break through the restrictions they have on us.

TS: Prisoners generally cannot write letters to prisoners in other institutions. So they are using a friend or a family member on the outside to help reach out to other prisoners.

AR: Yeah, any way they can. The 'zines themselves get passed all around there. They 'kate' 'zines all through the prisons. They unravel these towels and they make little clothlines* and these 'zines are read by countless people before they are destroyed by the guards.

TS: Was that part of the impetus for trying to get more 'zines into prisoners—

* 'Kate' is prison slang for a contraband letter, or a way of sending messages through the prison.

* Clothlines are used to pull 'zines or other objects down the cell block from one cell to another.

that they'll enjoy a much wider readership in prison?

AR: It doesn't really matter to me about who reads what of mine or whoever; I want to push the struggle forward. I want more and more people to get active and stop this government. That's where I find the more fruitful collaborators, even though they are shackled and beat down and shoved in a cage. They still find ways of being effective.

To this day it's kind of surprising to me that these powerful 'zines are let in as often as they are. I'd say over 95% of them get in without being spit back for some stupid reason. Just recently I got a letter from Florida; they want to ban my catalog, in the whole state. And this is a listing of titles. I wrote them back and said, "You mean to tell me that you guys are afraid of titles?" [Laughter] I guess so!

In prison they have horrible ways they have to communicate and more things around. It's kind of sickening what they have to go through to communicate with the outside world or amongst themselves. They have to scream through toilets, or shove shit up their ass ...



Drawing by Larry Poole, 2011

Anthony Rayson // Publishing 'Zines for Prisoners An Interview with Anthony Rayson

RISO booklet with a double sided full color center page, that focuses on a 60 year old Anarchist who makes radical 'zines that are mostly sent to prisoners, and also includes some of the art that prisoners have sent them.

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