

Workshop Report, Pre-Trial Detention 3

February 18, 2026

Massimo and I walk from the small train station up the short path to the prison. It is 11:30; we have an appointment with RS at 12:00. Massimo films our route through the small village, as we had discussed at the outset. There are a few particularly beautiful spots, and I ask him to capture those as well. In between, he keeps stopping to take photographs.

We walk right up to the prison gate and then follow a narrow path along the side of the building to take shots of the architecture. The path is squeezed between the prison wall and single-family houses. From their homes, residents look directly onto the prison building, its perimeter lined with barbed wire. Behind the prison, a church tower with a cross rises into view. We film a small open garden with chickens that shares a fence with the prison. After a few minutes, I notice that someone is watching us from a window in the administrative wing. Gradually, more figures appear at the windows. One of them is on the phone.

As it is just before 12:00, we head back to the gate and ring the reception bell. The gate opens and we cross the forecourt to the entrance I remember from my last visit. Here too, we are scrutinized from the windows above us. VB greets us with the words: „You just triggered a police response. Filming the building is strictly prohibited. Anyone who films or takes photographs is considered suspicious and will be immediately asked by the police to delete the recordings.“ He adds: „I would have appreciated it if you had discussed this with us beforehand.“ Massimo looks at me questioningly, as he does not understand a word. I apologize immediately and explain that it was an honest mistake and that I was not aware that taking photographs and filming the building from the outside was not permitted. VB repeats everything in Italian for Massimo.

We walk with VB across the yard to a second entrance leading into the prison wing. There, he asks us to hand our IDs to the officer at the gate; we will get them back after the visit. RS comes to receive us while VB takes his leave until later. We have to place our phones and all potentially dangerous items in a locker. RS jokingly asks whether we have any weapons on us—a pistol, for

instance. Massimo replies that he has a knife in his backpack. We laugh—but he does in fact open his rucksack, takes out a Swiss army knife, and places it with the phones.

We wait in front of the gate until it is opened for us. We then walk through the empty corridors to the library where the workshop will take place. There RS hands us a confidentiality agreement that Massimo and I have to sign. I take the opportunity to ask him a few more questions about how the workshop will be run: Should I address the inmates using formal or informal modes of address? How much should I tell them about my project? Can they move freely around the building? Will they be accompanied?

Afterwards I accompany RS and Massimo into the prison yard, where they smoke a cigarette. I notice that it is unusually quiet compared to my last visit. I know that open detention was in effect then, and that now it is the staff's lunch break, during which the inmates are locked in their cells—but I still would not have expected it to be this quiet. RS explains that at this time around 90% of the inmates are asleep. I ask why they feel tired at 12:30. „They sleep because it makes the time pass more quickly. Many go to the gym in the morning to exhaust themselves so they can sleep better afterwards,“ RS replies.

It is 12:40 and RS leaves for his lunch break, saying he will be back at 13:20 to collect the inmates. In the meantime, we prepare the workshop. I unpack the materials and set up seven stations, arranging chairs in groups around the room.

Massimo and I are talking when a shout makes us fall silent. A loud voice calls out into the yard adjoining the library. Shortly afterwards, we hear a loud rumbling above our heads.

It is 13:45. We hear several male voices in the corridor, and moments later the men enter the room. Some greet us with a „Grüezi.“ At the same time, five supervisor in uniform join us. Another man in civilian clothes enters the room; when I ask, RS explains that he is the social worker. The men sit down; one is still missing. Someone says he is still in the shower. After a few minutes RS brings him into the room. Once everyone is present, I introduce myself with my first name and briefly explain my master's project and the structure of the workshop. As I do so, I notice some of the men exchanging amused glances. I then demonstrate the imprint process on a wall, to illustrate what I have in mind.

The men look at the stations; some take some modeling clay and get started. From the corridor I hear laughter and conversation. Some are talking in a language that sounds Eastern European to me. Others are speaking Swiss German with an accent.

Massimo and I follow two men who leave the room, accompanied by RS and another guard. One of the men walks purposefully down the corridor to the telephone. As he works the clay in his hands, he flattens it and then presses it onto the keys. He works calmly and carefully. Together we return to the library, where he transfers his first imprint onto paper. Gradually more men come back and begin making prints from their clay imprints as well. I move between them and observe the process. I notice different approaches: some work very precisely and deliberately, others more quickly and with more movement. Some press the modeling clay firmly into the ink pad, others press it only lightly.

The men talk among themselves, ask each other what the imprints are from, and look at the results together. One man has difficulty peeling the clay back off the paper. They also ask me questions—whether I am only interested in disruptive elements, and where the finished prints should be placed. One man eventually comes up to me and asks what exactly my thesis is about.

We walk together with a man and a supervisor. The man goes up a few stairs to the second floor and makes an imprint of a door lock. The door separates the corridor behind it from the stairwell. „The lock is forbidden,“ the supervisor says. „Es prohibido,“ he repeats several times in Spanish. The man laughs and places his imprint on a windowsill. The supervisor then smashes the imprint with a firm punch of his fist and repeats: „Es prohibido!“ The man asks why. „Punto!“ the supervisor replies, repeating it several times on the way back to the library.

We then accompany an inmate into the yard, where he takes an imprint of the window bars. After that we follow another man and RS into a second yard, where he takes an imprint of a scratched wooden table surface, then also of a light switch and a wall. In the background, the beeping of a washing machine can be heard.

RS is asked over the radio whether he knows where I am. „She’s standing next to me, we’ll be back shortly anyway,“ he replies. Back in the library, one of the men informs me that one of the ink pads has run dry. I had not anticipated this, but the social worker

brings ink to refill the pads. The Spanish-speaking inmate asks another participant to write the object descriptions on his sheets for him, then adds his own name himself.

Some of the participants go to the well-equipped sports room to make further imprints there. The workshop runs from 13:45 until around 16:00. The supervisors either accompany the men or remain at the back of the room.

Around 16:00 it becomes clear that most of the men have finished. Some are already sitting on the chairs; one asks me whether I need anything else from him or whether he can go. RS announces that the workshop is coming to an end and asks everyone to gather for a brief feedback round. One man, however, is still working on his prints, picking up color from the ink pad with his finger and painting around the shapes. „I need more time,“ he says. „I’m not finished yet.“

Once all the men are seated, I ask them to give me feedback on the workshop.

„It was good to do something different for once.“

„It was fun.“

„Maybe bring more ink pads next time.“

„You’re welcome to come back.“

After all the participants have left the room, only RS, VB, Massimo, and I remain. RS and VB examine the prints and imprints, and erase any names or cell numbers written on them. RS then asks me to hand him the camera’s SD card and explains that he and VB will review the material in his office. While they are away, I tidy the room and gather up the prints and other materials.

After a while, RS returns and informs us that the recordings of the building must be deleted and proceeds to do so on his laptop in front of us. He then says he does not feel comfortable with the video material and that we should therefore work exclusively with the photographs. He does not want us to leave the building with the material on the SD card. DC comes back into the room and explains that he has just spoken with the media office and that, since Massimo and I have signed a confidentiality agreement, we are legally obliged to handle the material in accordance with the conditions set out therein—and that we may therefore also use the video material. They hand us the SD card and escort us back to the entrance.