

(About Nonviolent Action and Group Process, with the example of the European ploughshares movement)

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An important challenge for any movement which wants to do effective nonviolent actions is how to actually prepare these actions. Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King emphasized “self-purification”, i.e. individual preparation through meditation, fasting or prayer. They believed in “nonviolence of the strong”. Since the 1970s, with the criticism of such spiritual and individualistic nonviolence together with the creative development of new organisational forms, especially within the US feminist movement, NVDA preparation has become more group-oriented. Even in big movements most work is done in (smaller) groups.

Depending on what nonviolent action you are planning different demands arise for the action group. There is always a necessary practical preparation to be done (how to get to the place, have enough of material, communicate, etc.). Such logistic organising might seem overwhelming.

But there is another type of preparation that might be a lot more important and difficult: group preparation. Activists don't just need to know what they practically need to do. The task is to get enough of newcomers prepared both as individuals and as a group to act together, to know what to do and why. They need to understand enough of the movement work to be able to deal with unexpected situations, represent the movement, recruit others and develop the movement repertoire. That is about “group process”.

The practical planning of the action is probably the easiest task, and it can even be done in advance by experienced activists. But the group preparation process is not possible for others to do, that has to happen within each individual and the group that actually does the action. It is impossible to skip (at least if you want people to come back and stay in the movement...). But of course, different groups will spend more or less time on it and have different traditions on how it is done.

Generally any group process need to find its own right combination of process vs. goal orientation. If we work in the tradition of Gandhian thought means and ends are connected and facilitate each other. Then it makes sense to build a democratic, respectful, non-oppressive and just community culture within your movement if you want to be effective in creating a democratic, respectful, non-oppressive and just society. Thus preparation is two-folded: building community and enabling effective results. Any group will differ in how exactly it wants to go about combining these orientations, since they demand very different activities. To make the right combination with energy, fantasy and endurance we need something more: creativity, both individually and collectively.

So, a good group needs to facilitate creativity, community and effectiveness, in a good combination (and that “right” combination depends on the group and the context, the task ahead, etc.) that makes nonviolence flourishing in our selves and the society.

Basically the group preparation process needs to combine theory and practice. What is most emphasized, again, is a matter of different movement cultures and their task ahead. But everyone individual and group need to learn both how to do various movement activities (do a press-release, facilitate a meeting, give a speech, gather information, organise transport or food for a group, etc.) and, based on experience, reflect on that practice, in order to experiment and develop it. If movements don't learn from mistakes as well as success then it won't be able to grow and facilitate change. The theoretical activity might be concentrated with educators/trainors or scholar-activists within the movement, but it can't be isolated. All participants need to reflect and evaluate, need to learn why certain ways of doing things work or fails.

This is difficult and in order to give an example of how it can be done and what problems might arise the experience of the Ploughshares movement in Europe might be helpful.

The Ploughshares is a movement that do nonviolent disarmament actions at military factories or bases (see <http://www.plowsharesactions.org/>). Since 1980 there has been some 70 actions in which equipment of e.g. nuclear weapons, fighter air-planes or machine-guns have been disarmed/destroyed, with the hammer blows and bolt-cutters of ordinary citizens. The actions have been done in the US, Europe and Australia. Activists have sometimes received up to 20 years in prison but mostly one or two years. A couple of times activists have been acquitted by a jury or the judge, succeeding with their aim: making disarmament of weapons accepted. In the US ploughshares are predominantly Christian but in Europe they are typically secular peace and solidarity activists.

The preparation model was adapted from the US Ploughshares which is based on a small affinity group which met and reflected on broad issues and practical planning. But the Swedish model of what we called "ploughshares retreats" is possible to understand as a combination of the US ploughshares' type of bible study groups and the Scandinavian people's informal education tradition (from the 19th century with "Folk High Schools" and "study circles") – which by the way inspired Gandhi in his development of an Indian educational system, and which is partly similar to the Paulo Freire tradition. These "resistance retreats" focused on text reflections in the group, with the aim to develop a resistance movement and life long resistance activists. We also developed the group support to the activists and the group preparation process. The role of supporters is central since they enable more activists to do actions and amplify the political effect and meaning of the action. By working freer and continuously outside of the jail they can make the most of the action.

The preparation model was in itself a cultural adaptation from the US Ploughshares. It was a "reflection retreat" type of preparation, to 90 % consisting on the reading/presentation of moral/political/theoretical themes, group silence/reflection, a go-round on each participant's thoughts and then a discussion. Themes were like e.g. prison, family, obedience, the law, symbols, effectiveness, etc (see Appendix). The main idea was to develop a "resistance community" and a educational process that would make people chose resistance as a central part in their life (not just do an action) and a strong community support (with not necessarily strong individuals) and a well-developed form of action (that always was part of the development of the movement).

The US ploughshares model of preparation is a fusion of catholic monastery tradition and experiences from radical social movements (especially the Anti-Vietnam war movement, the Feminist movement of the 1960s and the Civil Rights movement). In the way it has developed it mainly emphasise resistance community and (Christian) spiritual faith, none of which has been possible as building-blocks for the movement in Europe (only for individuals). That means that European ploughshares (1983-) had to develop its own version of the movement and the group process.

Each ploughshares group is autonomous and does its own experimentation and version of the preparation process, type of action and cultural adaptation. The continuation of the movement is secured by participation of group members that has been in some other groups before. The reflexive group process constructs innovation of the movement tradition through new members' perspectives and the older members'

experience of earlier successful methods or problems/conflicts/failures.

The ploughshares preparation process is best described as a group oriented resistance retreat model (Vinthagen 1998:15-18) which builds on group reflection (in the US on Bible texts, in Europe on secular texts). The retreat means that you take a step back from action and daily life, reflect on it and get ready for new actions and a changed daily life. The process is on an intellectual/political level about facilitating the reflection on our social role as humans/Christians in the world we live in and our moral/political duties and possibilities of social change.

The European version uses a developed and formalized alternative meeting-structure (with rotation of responsibilities, go-rounds, silence, evaluations of meetings, facilitators, vibe-watchers, "oppression watchers", secretaries and sometimes even process-facilitators, etc.).

During civil disobedience trainings in Sweden it is common to have a "Obstacles exercise" in which participants individually lists all that hinders them from doing an action, then develops collectively as many solutions for each hinder as possible. When e.g. someone writes "prison", then the solutions might be: study-visit to prison, reading novels from prisoners, interviewing experienced activists, try with an action that only gives a couple of days in jail, learn meditation/yoga, etc.

On a practical and action oriented level it is possible to understand the Swedish version of the model as an attempt to do group work on participants obstacles, to develop solutions that make their action possible. The retreats are designed to systematically process all hindrance that exists. There is no chance of getting rid of the serious obstacles (like fear of violence and humiliation; years of prison time, etc.), they don't have "solutions", but they can be minimized, handled or accepted. It is in that sense the process is about "disarming the self", i.e. to manage or live with fears and temptations of affluence and privileges (without becoming paralyzed or passive).

On a relational level it is important that each individual in a ploughshares group is linked both to the group and her/his family/community. The relationship between the individuals within a group is elaborated and systematic but the relationship between the group and families of group members are not clear, sometimes even ignored (although not in Sweden).

Let us look on some general stages or issues which groups who do nonviolent civil disobedience tend to go through. Here they are presented with some examples of how the ploughshares groups have dealt with them. Ploughshares normally meet for weekend retreats for a couple of months, then a week or two at the site before the action, followed by support work of jailed or imprisoned activists (which sometimes takes several years).

The normal and problematic stages/issues in a preparation: 1.Invitation to a group. Who makes the invitation? (Easily becomes the leader of the group; the same peoples/organisers all the time – like in the US where Phil mostly did it?). Should the invitation be personal and secret or public?

2.Group-formation. Who can join? What about late-comers? (Those who enters when the group has already been through some basic discussions, decisions and/or building relationships and trust, e.g. at the second retreat). How to deal with early drop-outs?

3.Forming group-rules. What work-structure and rules guides the group? Who decides what? Will there be any formal hierarchy? (Mainly a question of the relationship between activists and supporters). Who will be the informal leader? (There will probably always be at least one and it is something the whole group will be part of creating, depending on how participants listen and treat people different). Does everyone have to be at every meeting of the group? Should there be a group contract (of rules)? Or should we deal with the problems when/if they occur?

4.Deciding and plan group-work with choice of focus and intensity. How intense will the preparation be and what will the group focus on? Mainly a choice between being action-oriented (practical, political, etc) or

community-oriented (supporting each other and building a community that can help people to do the action). That orientation will ultimately be decided when the group experience conflicts or tensions close to the action...

5. Forming relationships to others. How will the group treat family, partners, children, communities, friends, etc.? Will they get to know anything, if so, how much? Will they have any influence on the action? Will there be any contact and influence from the local peace groups, community or activists in the area where the action will happen? (Or will the action be just another “hit-and-run” action messing up work done by locals...?). Will outsiders be contacted prior to the action (e.g. the base/factory, the trade union)? How will the group relate to media (discussion on boycotting media has always occurred but several Swedish groups have worked very professional with media-relations and often had a special “media-group”).

6. Action formation. When will the decision be taken (and by whom: the whole group or only activists themselves?) and how will the action be done? Use of symbols? Alternative scenarios? What if activists are arrested before doing the disarmament? Under what circumstances is the action aborted?

7. When are we ready to act? Are there any motives or behaviour of a participant which is not acceptable for an activist or a supporter? Who decides who can be an activist or supporter; that person individually or the group together, the group that will take care of the consequences? How strict is the time-plan of the action? (In Sweden this would be formalised in a “Criticism go-round”, see below).

8. Dealing with the stress before the action (especially the “action-week”). Here the group will live through a lot of tension-build up and risks of hidden conflicts surfacing (one reason behind having the formal “criticism go-round” before entering this phase...) and the way the group deals with these problems will have a huge impact on the community and relationships after the action... Struggle between group-needs and individual needs will easily arise, and risks of group-pressure or (strong) individuals that dominate choices/decisions. A crisis might occur when someone decides to drop-out (not unusual), have serious doubts/fears or don't prioritize the work enough (very common) by coming late, wanting to change the dates or forgotten home-work (doing banners, checking information, contacting people, making drafts of statements, bringing tools, etc...). The “help” that group members offer to someone who have doubts/worries might become a group-pressure, forcing individuals to stay on, make the wrong decisions. Is it possible to change the time-plan, add more time to preparation, support individuals that have some acute problem (e.g. a fight with a partner, a sudden unrelated but serious problem in the family/work, etc.)? This might be hard when several persons have made themselves free to do the action, when outsiders are contacted (e.g. an “embedded journalist” is on the way to join the action...), there are political reasons to do the action at a certain date (e.g. at a certain Christian symbolic day, in connection to a ongoing political process or in a media-favorable period).

9. Doing the action. How does the communication work in the group during the action, especially when unexpected things happen? How does the group deal with a failure of some kind (e.g. being arrested before disarmament)? How will the support group build there new group community, work-sharing, hierarchy, etc.? How to deal with too much work; what will be prioritized and how to work with “peace” and joy under stress?

10. Support work after the action, during jail- and prison time. Here the group needs to focus on the needs of the incarcerated activists and the political communication of the action (with locals, lawyers, adversaries, media, police, corporations, families, broader movement actors, and the general public). Therefore this period can be really stressful and difficult with a lot of work and little time for the needs of supporters. Both activists and supporters, as well as other actors, tend to focus on the activists, making it really difficult to care for the needs of the “service people” on the outside of the walls. Obviously this might create some tensions, resentment and disappointment.

11. Doing the trial. What is the goal? To become free or to make a statement? What is the goal of the trial for us? How to deal with that activists are coming to the trial (drafted by the state...) but some of the supporters

who will not come (since they prioritize)?

12. Dealing with the punishment. Who has the responsibility to support the activists while in prison or suffering harsh economic punishments? It is often decided that the supporters have that responsibility but regularly it will be the families/partners that are drafted to do it (even though they are in almost all cases, not even in Sweden, part of taking the decision of the action...) since supporters have a tendency to disappear with time (in Sweden it is not unusual that it takes one or two years until the trial and another one or two years until prison time...).

13. When is the group dissolved? This is a sometimes overlooked but important last stage. For some that is when the action is over, for most it is when the punishment is dealt with. But if people are suffering consequences many years later – by psychological problems, economic hardship due to loss of a job-offer caused by the action or intervention by the bailiff – then, mostly, activists are alone... In some groups this worry of being alone with the consequences after the action has been so strong that a ritual with a signing of a group contract has been introduced (but in at least one Swedish group that didn't help...).

Tensions/problems/dilemmas that each group will have to deal with and face and which arise from the aim to do a disarmament action and/or the process as such (what ever special version is used):

The relative importance of your (chances to have a) family/partner vs. the movement/action. It has not been unusual that ploughshares activists end up talking about it as “either-or”; some claiming that family orientation is counter-resistance. During some Hope & Resistance gatherings celibacy was discussed as a resistance option. Sectarian tendencies (as opposed to “being a sect”) are not unavoidable but immanent, arising from ideas such as “divine obedience” (common description of civil disobedience among radical Christians in the US), “self-purification” (originally from Gandhi, taken up by ML King and then of spiritual NVDA-activists of various sorts), avant-gardism (leading others the “right” way) “speaking truth to power” or “witnessing of truth”. Each radical group that faces such risks as a ploughshares group is of course tending to totalize its commitment of participants, which needs to be understood and countered. Hero-temptation, driven by the way media, public and friends sometimes treat the heroic act of disarmament and (facing) prison; as well as the activist culture of high-status for those who feel a freedom from fear, are disciplined, hard working and brave; and Gandhian ideas of “nonviolence of the strong”. When activists belong to this group of “strong individuals” then they don't need the group support and reduce the supporters to facilitators of some support service. Who decides? Are activists those deciding the action alone as they are the ones risking their skin or are supporters having an equal say since they are the ones that have to do support work the whole prison time? Obviously then, activist could decide on the issues that are concerning them and supporters decide on their issues, but the reality is not as clear-cut. (It is not necessarily so that Helen Woodson who has spent decades in prison having so much problem in prison compared to the supporters in her community who need to take care of her numerous children...).

How long preparation in the group? The action can be done too early or too late. If it is too early it will create stress and oppression of those who are not ready or as strong as others. If the action happens too late the burden of group work and process becomes drawn out, maybe introvert and self-obsessed and the risk of drop-outs rises. The balance between action planning and retreat (reflection and in-depth exploration). Too much technical and practical action planning in the group makes support, community and reflection less central. Each group has to do place scouting (mapping the area), fact-finding, technical entry, alternative scenarios and movement planning and learn about guard-routines, security measures and weapon-technique (in order to disarm), but the question is how much that will structure the work. The group might end up focusing too much on retreat (with e.g. too intimate relationships developing, or too academic discussions on social change, excluding non-academics), or too much on the action-planning (with e.g. too many optional places or ways of doing the action, or too high norms of knowledge of weapon systems and security techniques). The balance between the need to rotate leadership roles (organising meetings, preparing material for the reflections and action, contacting groups, finding information, etc.) creating a democratic diffusion of leadership-skills versus the need that the work is done with high quality and competence. The degree of openness and what will be kept secret is something each group needs to make a judgement on

(since total openness or total secrecy is impossible). Every group decides to keep the action date secret and their helpful sources of information (from workers, soldiers, civil servants, etc.) but some other groups decides to be secret with a lot of more things (the invitation to join the group, that they plan an action, who is part of it, etc.).

The balance between formal decisions and structure versus a flexible attitude and supportive atmosphere in the group. Here groups will vary a lot and have their own style. Swedish groups are relatively very formal, doing detailed minutes and exact formulations of decisions, responsibilities, etc. How to combine individual needs and personality vs. group needs and task? Do we really need to like each other and become friends?!

The preparation process has in practice made visible several difficult problems which might arise in any group preparing for nonviolent resistance actions that involves risk-taking. All these problems have already occurred in some ploughshares groups in Europe, as serious conflicts threatening the existence of a group or as minor tendencies which has been managed.

How do we avoid becoming trapped in these group problems?

- 1.The sect and the chosen ones (the revolutionary avant-garde).
- 2.The community of intimacy and hidden conflicts (which don't dare to be honest and face conflicts).
- 3.The community as self-serving goal, i.e. hindrance of the action ("Why do actions when the group process is the great thing, which is what we should bring to others?").
- 4.The problem of using the group as therapy or a new family (Instead of giving energy to the group, the energy is drained for private purpose...).
- 5.The Hero Syndrome (the Brave Activists and their adoring fan clubs).
- 6.The Macho Activists who can do it themselves (without the group) (but who want a group to do the not-so sexy support service...).
- 7.The One Big Action (which is not sustained by boring long-term movement work). Becomes the "The Big Witness" by the truth-speakers, or "the Sainly Act" of self-purification (which, when it is done once, gives a ticket to the Moral Club...).
- 8.Desperation and belief of "quick effects", i.e. pressing the group to do things too quick (wanting to do "something drastic" due to pessimism and anxiety).
- 9.The endless process as hindrance (After several months of group process: who has the energy to do an action?).
- 10.Actions as self-realisation (Developing yourself, becoming a different human through interesting experiences...).
- 11.An alternative and fast development of your job-carrier? (Doing an action and becoming a media-star, author, lecturer, conflict-trainer, radical intellectual, etc.).
- 12.Totalizing of commitment, i.e. pressing people to make an "all or nothing choice" (e.g. between family and resistance).
- 13.The dictatorship of the (stubborn) individuals (through veto and consensus decision-making).
- 14.Group pressure and the difficulty (for new or insecure persons) to say no.

15. A preparation for an action or romance? (Using the group to find intimate relationships).

16. Envy or power struggle between participants, i.e. the support group as hindrance (undermining acts by those who didn't feel ready to risk prison time against those who did...).

17. Ritual murder of leaders (Liberating yourself from internal dependency on authorities or moral leadership figures by attacking them symbolically).

In order to discuss some of these process problems, let me expand on three of them:

a) Community or support group as a hindrance (no. 3 and 16):

This is a two-folded problem, firstly in a group that had a "preparation" process for more than two years, in which one attempted action was done in the middle, and which continued after that, wanting to do more (there where no real consequences of that first attempt) - the "fantastic" meetings, rituals and reflections, the sharing of silence and deeply personal discussions on resistance, power and social change was such a revelation for the participants that they were, you could say, "in love with the process". Then why do an action? That would put an end to the cosy radical community. Secondly, the hindrance is about that the support group, which in our early version of the process, was only formed in the end, close to the action, sometimes became a hindrance in terms of wanting to influence the symbols, action time, tactics, etc. despite not taking the risks. And, some of them, then more often than not, newer to actions, felt they didn't have the same value and worth as the activists. You see, the supporters where not supporters since they wanted to support, but because they didn't feel ready to be activists, so it was a position which represented failure... Consequently, power struggles and tensions sometimes developed between the two groups: activists and supporters.

b) Ritual murder of leaders (no. 17):

After a couple of years, when ploughshares in Sweden became bigger and, younger in average-age - then some newcomers went through a typical group process that is seen in other groups/movements. They where firstly full of admiration to the founding generation of activists and made them into leaders (basically two men). These where of course informal leaders but all groups and camps where ultra-democratic in its formal structure. Anyway, with time these new activists, when they realised that the leaders were not so perfect NVDA-leaders as they had imagined in the beginning, and they had disagreements with them, they still felt so powerless in front of them (since they were a lot more experienced, travelled, learned and often more vocal) that they didn't dare to make their criticism public (despite the fact that the leaders tried their best to encourage criticism and difference). So, they, of course, attacked the leaders in a hidden way, with slander and mean rumours, character attacks. This is similar to what happens when any great leader (a father, a God) is disavowed. In a ritual murder you kill the Leader/Hero symbolically; you resist the internal heroism by doing something which liberates yourself. In that process liberation do partly happen and people get more ready to become autonomous individuals but the leader might (at least in an anarchist/feminist/pacifist radical subculture like this) be put on a strange trial without any (visible) prosecutor or chance of defence. As an example, some activists believed and spread to others "what they had heard" claiming that the leaders had raped a woman in their community but silenced it... It wasn't true but since it could have been it served the purpose: ritual murder of the leader figures.

c) Actions as self-realization and job-carrier (no. 10 and 11):

You can make yourself into someone by your work in a radical movement, at least in some societies. You might get the base to become a socially engaged priest, a known author and conflict resolution trainer, a peace researcher, a journalist or a NGO-leader, etc. In the start you are just a regular person: nobody. But in the ploughshares there will be a lot of media attention (TV-sofas, etc.), trials, and speeches, things to write and lecture about. Firstly, this gives you self-confidence, an empowerment. Secondly, this gives you status among friends that like what you do. Thirdly, it gives you status within the ploughshares community

(according to who has been longest in jail or done most actions, tells the most entertaining jokes and stories about situations around in the world...). Fourthly, it gives you, in some organisations, a way in to establishment (media, university, consulting, etc.). You basically go through a hell of crash-course in doing press-releases, talking to judges, being in police cells, organise camps for hundreds of people, talk in front of an audience, discuss in TV-shows, etc. So, yes, the motivation to act in the ploughshares is not necessarily so anti-establishment and painful as it might seem (but it might be and motives and processes are different)...

These problems became, as you might understand, after a while the main problem for the ploughshares to survive and develop as a movement. The prison time, the heavy fines, the criticism from friends and family, the problems to get a job, were of course also, like in all NVDA groups, a problem, but not the main problem. In an absurd twist, the preparation process that existed in order to facilitate the actions became the main hindrance for doing actions. People didn't want to go through the group process – ending up in tight relationships with difficult persons, group conflicts and endless process work – thus avoided the movement...

But after a while a number of measures were developed in order to deal with these problems, and that made the process less of a hindrance. The things developed might be suggestions for how to do an improved process and continue the experimentation of community building. For example the groups started to use  
.....XX

My conclusion about the ploughshares preparation process experiment in Europe:

The basic idea behind the group preparation process in ploughshares is that the support and community of the group can facilitate the choice, ability and commitment to disarm. At the same time it is evident, at least from the European and especially the Swedish experience, that the community or the difficulties to build a community with several and different persons constitute the main problem for the activists in their effort to construct a ploughshares action. It is in a sense the paradox of ploughshares preparation that the main source of activism is the supportive small community of activists, while the main obstacle is the conflicts of the same close relationships (including outsiders, like family, partner, children, etc.). Of course state punishments (prison, fines, etc.) and other social punishments (like ostracism, media campaigns, etc.) are a difficult obstacles, especially when activists get long time in prison..., but these problems are mediated through the group, in an action facilitating as well as destructive way.

The main conclusion is that the resistance culture creates its own problematic tendencies which need its own reflexive counter-culture in order not to destroy the attempt of resistance. The creation of a ploughshares resistance culture with its way of life, values of thinking, new behavioural patterns makes a “new little society” (a “prefigurative society”) with its own problems, conflicts, hierarchies, power and even oppression. In order not to get stuck in an oppositional role, in a reaction to the “old” surrounding society, a self-reflective and critical evaluation of its own power problems is needed. Thus, a kind of “internal resistance” against the movement culture is necessary: i.e. internal resistance against (some aspects of) the external resistance. If the principle of preparation is support and community, the principle of the internal resistance is open dialogue, plurality and critical self-reflection.

### **Appendix: Themes for group preparation**

Each group will have its own agenda depending on the participants, the situation and the action they have in mind. Besides the reflection themes groups also have group dynamic exercises, games, practical work, ceremonies, meditations and/or role-plays of action situations (similar to what exists in “nonviolent trainings”). But some examples of the normal themes that in Europe are brought up in the process are listed below (Vinthagen 1998: 19, 104-105), showing how the European ploughshares have attempted to make the action preparation into some kind of a “resistance university”.

Typical theme structure:

1. Introduction (by one participant who reads a short key text, a quote or gives a short introducing reflection)
2. Silence (giving everyone time to reflect on the theme).
3. A go-round without discussion (each participant speaks in turn).
4. Free discussion

The introduction is often a general perspective or from another context but the group discussion will often connect the theme to the action and tasks ahead.

General action themes (in no specific order):

Our movement (tradition and experiences, strengths and weaknesses).

“Nonviolence” and “violence”.

“Civil disobedience”.

Life History (each of the participants tells their life story during some 20-30 minutes). (Good to have early as community building theme).

The Political situation in which we live/act.

The law and society: good or bad?

God and faith / Hope and endurance (Its sources, personal attitude, role for the action, etc).

To live and work collectively (in a community, cooperative, etc.).

“Nonviolence as a way of life”.

Motives (to take part in an action group and/or do an action).

“Motives I have but don’t approve of”.

Analysis of present military (nuclear weapons or arms trade, etc.) situation.

The role of the broader movement(s) in which we act (the ploughshares might be linked to radical Christian, New Left, peace, ecology and solidarity movements).

Media: helping or hindering social change?

Resistance (What is it, how is it possible?).

Feminism (What is it, how is it possible?).

Violence inside our selves and in the group? Can it really be absent?!

Fear. Death.

Doubts.

What is the base of (our) activism?! Spiritual, material (class, the body, the political economy), political and/or moral?

Family and friends (What to say to them? How do they view it? Is an open meeting with them a good idea?).

Heroes/Elitism/Sectarianism: How to avoid it? Why does it occur?

Openness and protection (in relation to punishment and infiltration).

The State; police, court, prison, etc.

Future: visions and plans (for each person individually, as well as for the movement's continuation and development).

Personal, collective and society needs: a conflict or a unity?

Punishment (function for society and individual experience/attitude).

Practical action themes:

Time periods (meeting dates, preliminary action date).

Symbolism of the action (how to do it, what to wear and bring with to emphasise the message).

Action message (Witness, etc.). What do we want to say? Is it clear from how the action is done?

How to deal with the media (mass media and own movement media)?

The arrest (legal rights, our goal, preparation, role-playing, etc.).

The trial (legal rights, our goal, preparation, role-playing, etc.).

Communication during action and during jail/prison (Designing main and alternative systems).

Prison: doing time and living on the inside.

Support work (what and priorities).

Investigations (of issue and place). (Reports at meetings, work between them).

Statement (to the press and other groups, e.g. doing litigation for war crimes).

Dialogue with stakeholders (employed, etc.) (With whom? Before, after?).

Regular themes (every retreat):

“Weather-report” (short go-round in which everyone tells about how they feel and what has happened since last meeting)

Evaluation of the group (how it functions; practically, efficiency, creativity, community, participation)

Economy (sharing the costs, and discussing how to build some resources for the future)

What is my role? (Support person or activist).

What tasks and needs exist, are they filled?

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