1984 - Workshop

This is the design of the pre-game workshop for the larp 1984. Below is the list of talks and exercises with descriptions and purpose written for each one.

Welcome and Introduction
Have the players come into the workshop room, let them find a chair each and set them in a circle facing each other. Start talking when all are present.

- Welcome to 1984, a larp based on the classical novel by George Orwell.
- The larp is designed by Jesper Heebøll Arbjørn for Blackbox Cph VI, September 2016.
- Beats for the larp were composed by Michael Sonne Jørgensen.
- This larp, 1984, is an experimental larp, where you will use drumsticks and beats as an essential part of the experience.
- Through the workshop more and more details about the design will be revealed.
- But before going further, we will take a round where each person tells about their expectations for this larp and their experience with drums and rhythms.

The purpose here is that most likely there will be some players who have no experience with holding drumsticks in their hands, and that is totally fine. This is not a larp about how skilled people are as drummers.

Explanation of the basic design of the larp
Some words can be used to describe the design of this larp:

- The larp is *non-verbal*. You will not get to speak during the larp, although you are allowed to make sounds, screams, hums, outbursts, and so on.
- The larp is *narrativistic*. It will focus on a story that's being told. In this case it is the story from the novel Nineteen-Eighty-Four. It will be told through eight scenes.
- The larp is *sensational*. That is, the core of the larp experience are sensations and emotions that are being portrayed and experienced by you.
- And then the larp is *experimental* in the sense that drumsticks and beats will be used as the essential element of the larp. There is not a word for that yet.

In short, cutting away the larp scholastic words, this is a larp where you will follow the main storyline of the novel 1984, you will tell the story using drumsticks rather than speech, but your focus will not be on playing out the scenes of the story. Rather you will focus on playing the emotions of the main character as the scenes unfold.

- And then this is a larp that focus on a very specific role playing discipline: The discipline that is sometimes called *extra-verbal* or *meta communication*.
- This means that you should as a team learn to communicate ideas, feelings, actions, and scenes between each other. You should both learn to express them and learn to read them. So we will start with some exercises that focus on that.

Exercise: The Machine
The Machine is a classical workshop warm-up exercise where the people in the room do continually repetitive movements inspired by each other and together they try to act as if they are all part of some strange machine.

- Do The Machine in the normal way
- Do The Machine as a cold industrial clockwork
- Do The Machine while people think of “a boot eternally stomping on a human face” (a quote from the novel Nineteen-Eighty-Four describing the totalitarian regime)

Exercise: Counting and clapping in rhythm
Another classical warm-up exercise: People stand with their eyes closed and count to 20, with only one person saying a number at the time. Do this only once.

- Afterwards, when people are focused on counting: Count to four and then repeat. One person goes “1”, the next goes “2”, etc.
- People count together 1-2-3-4, and then clap on 1 and 3.
- Make the count sufficiently slow, so that people can see they have the time to improvise between claps.
- Continue counting and clapping, between claps one person gets to improvise clapping or making noise. But only one at a time, and they have to, as a group, negotiate and take turns

Explanation of 1984
Here follows some explanation of the some of the themes and the story in George Orwell’s novel Nineteen-Eighty-Four:

- The basic story of the novel Nineteen-Eighty-Four is extremely simple, yet the topics, the messages and the world of Nineteen-Eighty-Four is extremely complex. People have spent ages analysing and discussing some of the aspects of the novel, and many of the ideas are still very relevant today, almost 70 years after George Orwell wrote the book.
- In this larp we will get to touch on some of the heavy subjects of the novel, but only superficially. Our focus in the story is the complexity of the main character and his thoughts and emotions as the story progress.

- The story of Nineteen-Eighty-Four is about an oppressive totalitarian regime, where everything is controlled by The Party, even the thoughts you are allowed to think. A simple man, Winston, who works at the propaganda division of The Party, is an inert disbeliever of the regime, in secret.
- He makes contact with a young woman, Julia, who is also an opponent of The Party, although in a less philosophical way. They start a secret love affair in an apartment in the lower parts of London. There they discuss the injustice of the system and have sex. Which are both criminal offenses.

- At his work, Winston is approached by a higher ranking member of The Party, O'Brien, whom Winston believes is a member of the rebel organisation, The Brotherhood. O'Brien confirms this and gives Winston some insights of the rebels and The Party.
- Together Winston and Julia seek more knowledge of The Brotherhood while continuing their love affair. But then they are discovered and captured. They were set up.

- O'Brien was not a member of The Brotherhood, it was all a trap. Instead O'Brien is an agent of The Party with the charge to root out bad elements like Winston. Winston is tortured at length by O'Brien with the aim to make Winston realise his misguided ways, give up Julia and instead love Big Brother, the head of The Party.
- In the end Winston breaks to the torture, and he gives away everything. Subsequently he is released, and he meets Julia again. It is clear that she gave up everything as well, and Winston learns that he does not love Julia any longer. Instead he loves Big Brother.

- This story we will get to play, in the cause of eight scenes. Most of the scenes will not have much story or action in them, but a lot of thoughts and emotions are at stake.
- We will get to the scenes later, so don't worry about them now.

Exercise: Two Minute Rock Out

Give people drumsticks. Once they get drumsticks in their hands, they need to get the urge to use them out of their system. Therefore give them two minutes to rock out and go crazy.

- This should also prepare them for the Two Minute Hate during the larp.
- Explain to them the concept of Two Minute Hate: This is an institutionalized ritual in Nineteen-Eighty-Four. Every day, at work, the workers are made to watch a two minute video clip about the enemies of the state, while shouting obscenities at the screen. Afterwards they will hail Big Brother.
- During the larp there will be an opportunity to have a Two Minute Hate session, where the players can just let loose. It is up to them, if they will seize it.

Exercise: Drumming to a beat

In this exercise we start to use the drumsticks and drum to a beat. It picks up from the clapping exercise earlier, and if you feel a need to bridge that exercise to this one, then start with a short counting exercise 1-2-3-4, where people tap with their drumsticks on 1 and 3.

- Pick one of the workshop beats and put it on.
- Let people fall into the basic rhythm of the beat.
- One at a time they can improvise on top of the beat.

Explanation of the regime and the stations
Next follows some more words about the setup of the larp:

- There are basically two ways to play:
    - When you play with drumsticks, you play the thoughts and emotions inside the head of Winston, the main character.
    - Or you can play as Winston, or one of the other two characters, Julia and O'Brien, in which case you put the drumsticks away and instead embody the characters with your own body.
- We will talk about embodying characters later. Right now we talk about playing with drumsticks.

- As you play with drumsticks, you're playing the thoughts inside Winston's head. He is a very complex person:
    - He has an enormous hate towards The Party, but he also fears them greatly.
    - He is a philosophical thinker that contemplates many things that are wrong with the present regime.
    - He imagines how things could be different, and hopes for change.
    - He has love and lust for Julia, but at times he also looks down on her and condemns her.
    - He is intrigued with The Brotherhood and O'Brien, but when he learns it was a trap, he starts to hate The Brotherhood as cowards and even questioning their entire existence.
- But above all that he also has the indoctrination of The Party running in the back of his mind at all times: Leading him to question what he knows, and to fall in line and do as he's told.

- Therefore when you play with drumsticks you have the option of playing the many complex thoughts and emotions inside Winston, or to play The Party's control over his mind.
- The Party's mind control is like a cold stern industrial machine that just goes on and on, a calculating clockwork that is completely devoid of feelings.
- It is represented by the stations at either side of the floor.

Exercise: Drumming as the regime
Each player should now choose their own station. This will be theirs throughout the larp.

- They should now go to the station, and drum to one of the workshop beats.
- Tell them to spend some time just focusing on falling into the rhythm of the beat.
- When they are confident in the rhythm, you can tell them to start improvising on top of the beats.
- But as in the drumming exercise before, tell them to remember to give the other players room to improvise as well.
- When drumming, players should think of themselves as this cold stern industrial machine, or the boot stomping on a human face for all eternity.

Explanation of characters (circle walk)

Next follows an explanation of the characters. Everybody should stand in a circle and start walking round in the circle.

- Grab one of the players and have that person stand in the middle of the circle.
- Right now this is Winston
    - Winston is an ordinary man of The Party
    - Winston is hateful and fearful at the same time
    - Winston loathes The Party and hopes for a better world
    - Winston speculates how things could be different
    - Winston is angry with himself for submitting to thought crime
    - Winston is fatalistic about the fact that he will sooner or later be caught

- Let the player join the circle and grab another to stand in the middle.
- Right now this is Julia
    - Julia is young, but certainly not innocent
    - Julia is physical and emotional
    - Julia is playful and challenging
    - Julia is the love and desire of Winston
    - Julia is devilishly leading Winston on

- Switch again with a new player in the middle.
- Right now this is O'Brien
    - O'Brien is an authority
    - O'Brien is a mystery
    - O'Brien is keen and relentless
    - O'Brien is cold hearted
    - O'Brien is the perfect agent of The Party

- Each of you can embody either Winston, Julia, and O'Brien.
- It all depends on your choice: In each scene, the first person to enter the scene will embody Winston, the second person will be either Julia or O'Brien. There will never be more than two characters in a scene.

- You should see the characters of Winston, Julia, and O'Brien as shaped by the views of Winston. Meaning, this is how the characters look in the eyes of Winston. What secrets the characters have for themselves are unimportant.

- Everything that goes on in the larp, is shaped by the views of Winston. And the next thing we will do is exercising how we can portray the views, feelings and thoughts inside Winston.

Exercise: Sounds of drum taps on different objects
For this exercise one player gets to be Winston and stand in the middle of the floor. The other players gets to play with drumsticks and try to portray different emotions.

- Scatter some objects out on the floor, objects that can make different sounds, when you tap at them with your drumsticks.
- Tell the players that in a moment they get to experiment with the sounds of these objects and how they relate to different emotions.

- Pick one player to be Winston, and tell that player to put the drumsticks aside.
- Tell the player to react to what the other players are doing, once the drumming starts.

- Put on one of the workshop beats and play the emotions and thoughts one by one:
    - Fear, Hate, Hope, Love, Remorse, Contemplating the ways of The Party
- When one emotion is played, have the players switch who is Winston and go again.

- You will probably find that play works best, when the player playing Winston moves and reacts rather slowly. The players should agree to a suitable pacing, but the larp may well be played in slow motion.

Explanation of the floor and distance
Now you should have a basic understanding of how to play with drumsticks. The next explanation puts some extra layers on top of the simple drumming on things that the players can use during the roleplay.

- As you see there are the stations on either side of the floor. The stations are the regime, The Party, and the mind indoctrination of Winston.
- But at times they will also simply represent the workstations at Winston's workplace, the propaganda division of The Party, called the Ministry of Truth.

- In between the stations are the floor or stage area. This is where the main action of the scenes will take place, and where Winston and the other characters will be at all times.

- On the floor there is a rule: Winston is always the center of the floor.
- This means that everything the other players are doing always relates to Winston.

- In fact, the distance you place yourself from Winston matters.
    - If you are very up close, you will represent a very pressing thought, for instance a very strong hate.
    - If you are very far away, you represent a tingling sensation at the back of the head, for instance a lingering fear that something's not right.

- When it comes to having two characters on the floor, the proximity rule changes a little bit. Because then the proximity towards the other character can also mean something about Winston's feelings towards that character.

Exercise: Drumming with proximity
This exercise is almost repeating the previous. But this time proximity matters.

- First try once or twice with only Winston present on the floor: Fear, Hope.
- Then try with Winston and one other character on the floor: Love for Julia, Hate towards O'Brien.

Exercise: Frozen moments with drums
To experiment some more with the pacing of the characters comes some exercises where they shouldn't move at all. This should give more room to the drummers to experiment with proximity and how to make different sounds.

- We continue with practicing how to express both characters and the thoughts and emotions of Winston in some frozen moments, where the characters cannot move.
- In a moment two players playing Winston and either Julia or O'Brien should go to the floor and pick a suitable pose.
- The rest of the players get to experiment with how to use drumming to add or enhance emotions or make some changes to the scene.

- Put on a workshop beat and try some of these frozen moment scenes:
    - Julia looking coyly at Winston while at work
    - O'Brien revealing a hidden agenda of The Brotherhood to Winston
    - Winston suspecting Julia to be an agent of The Party
    - O'Brien explaining the plans of The Party while torturing Winston
    - Julia and Winston sharing a tender moment

Question: Can players drum on each other?
Ask this question directly to the players, before going further:

- Now you've tried drumming on different surfaces and objects, near and far, and you have experimented with how it all feels.
- But there is still one place where you haven't drummed: On each others bodies.
- The question is, do you want to have this included in the larp?
- Most likely this will be drumming on the three characters, especially Winston, to create some physical response.
- If just one person is opposed to it, then it should not be included.

If the players want to try it before deciding, then pick one of the frozen moments above and play through it. Even if they decide to include this in the larp, it may be a good idea to try it out one time before going further.

Explanation of the scenes and intermezzos

The explanation of the scenes comes last in the workshop, so that people a more likely to remember them when playing:

- Now we are almost ready to begin the actual larp, we just need to go through the scenes.
- There are eight scenes in total, but before each scene there will be an intermezzo, where the story of the scene will be told.

- During the intermezzo, all players should walk to their stations, turn their head towards the screen, and salute Big Brother: Drumsticks crossed in front of their chest.
- Meanwhile we will make the floor ready for the coming scene.
- The briefing of the next scene will be framed as a message from Big Brother.
- Afterwards the players will be told to be ready at their stations.

- Each scene then starts with a beat, and it may take some time for people to fall into the beat. Allow yourselves to take that time.
- The first person to walk from the stations into the floor will portray Winston. The second person will be either Julia or O'Brien. There is never more than two characters in a scene.

- Then the scene is played, and at some point we will cut it by turning down the lights.
- During each scene the projections on the screen will show images from the movie 1984 and quotes from the book. These are meant as an inspiration, if you need ideas for things to do during the scene. Do not spend time looking at them, if you do not need them.

Test scene

Take one of the suggested frozen moment scenes and play it as just explained.

- First the players go to their stations.
- Then explain what scene you have chosen while they stand ready, drumsticks crossed in front of their chest.
- Then put on a workshop beat and tell them to get ready.
- They should take their time to fall into the rhythm, just let them drum until they feel confident enough to enter the floor.
- The first person to enter the floor is Winston, the second is Julia or O'Brien.
- Let them play the scene for a few minutes.

Walkthrough of the scenes

Finally the story is told through the eight scenes of the larp:

- The eight scenes are as follows:

- Scene 1: This is an introduction to The Party, where you should just get that menacing industrial machine under your skin. The scene ends with the so called Two Minute Hate, where you should just let everything out and ignore the rhythm.

- Scene 2: Winston is sitting in his study contemplating the regime and thinking about how the world could be different.

- Scene 3: At the Ministry of Truth Julia proclaims her love towards Winston

- Scene 4: Winston and Julia begin a secret love affair in the poor parts of town

- Scene 5: Winston is approached by O'Brien who tells him about The Brotherhood

- Scene 6: Winston and Julia are at their secret hideout when they are caught by the thought police

- Scene 7: Winston is tortured by O'Brien, in the end he breaks and betrays his love for Julia

- Scene 8: After the torture Winston and Julia meet again, but do they still have feelings for one another?

This is it. Now we play.