

The artistic research and development workshop and performance is part of Coble's ongoing artistic research project *Gestures of Defiance* that has resulted in multiple live performances that explore the relationship between live performance and activism. Embracing unpredictability, messiness and failure Coble aims to manifest problems of bodily, societal and symbolic navigation particularly focusing on issues of injustice and normative boundaries. Coble's artistic research revolve around queer politics and poetics often working site-specifically, research-based and – from time to time collectively/participatory.

Over the five day artistic research and development workshop-*Performance as Political Assembly*-there were elements that were both conceived of and structured beforehand by Coble as well as elements that were expanded on and newly formulated by the 8 collaborators who participated in both the workshop and live performance *Red Rover* which occurred on the sixth day.

Workshop and performance elements include:

1. Thematic discussions, readings, presentations
2. Performance development and preparation through body work
3. Public live performance

1. Thematic discussions

Coble's ongoing artistic research linking queer performance, activism and contemporary urgencies served as a foundation for the discussions including looking at the visuality of protest gestures such as the raised fist or protests where groups of people link arms and assemble together or times where single bodies defy structures of power. Humorous and performative acts of glitter bombing and pieing (strategies defined as "tactical frivolity") and other non-traditional forms of resistance became points of engagement and research for the group.

An aim of the workshop was to link concepts around the recent Presidential elections in the United States and the Trump administration's rhetoric in relationship to the Scandinavian and European political climate and to distilled these specifically through the children's schoolyard game *Red Rover* which is played in the United States and elsewhere under various names such as Forcing the City Gates Octopus Tag and Send, O King, A Soldier. The live performance would be based around the game as a way to challenge and scrutinize contemporary urgencies of boundaries, barriers, fences and border control as well as the lines between play and violence and social control.

Red Rover is traditionally played as follows:

There are two teams (team A and team B). The members of team A line up side by side-holding hands or linking arms. They stand opposite of and facing team B who is in the same configuration and is 15-20 meters away. Team A elects a player from team B and together they yell 'red rover, red rover send XXX right over'. This person then has to leave team B, running or moving towards team A trying to break through their linked arms and clasped hands. If this person successfully bursts through then they get to take one of the members of team A back with them to team B. If this person is stopped from breaking through then this person must join team A-adding to their team size. This routine continues until one team completely consumes the

opposing team leaving a single mass of 'the winning team' verses two opposing sides. To note- Red Rover has been banned in many US schools today because of the violence and bullying that some think it promotes; others support the game citing the teamwork and strategic thinking that's needed.

Also included in the workshop were guest discussants including Artist and Educator Frans Jacobi, Professor Timebased Art/ Performance, Institute of Art Faculty of art, music & design, University of Bergen; Artist Gitte Sætre of the *The Green Hijab Movement* and Line Daatland, Director of Art & Design, KODE-Art Museums of Bergen.

2. Performance preparation

Based on the discussions described above the workshop served as a propagator for the live performance *Red Rover*. The workshop participants and collaborators were gathered through an application process supported by the KUNO Nordplus network which consists of 18 Nordic-Baltic Fine Art Academy's. This allowed for international artists as well as artists based at Bergen Academy of Art and Design to apply for a spot to collaborate on the workshop and performance. A surprising contribution to both was the negotiation of the seven languages spoken by the collaborators that included Danish, Dutch, English, French, Icelandic, Swedish, Lithuanian. Through the development of the performance the use of all languages became crucial to the concept of the work.

Together through physical exercises and critical thinking the workshop participants developed a set of choreographed moves and strategies that would allow for control during the live performance of the Red Rover game but would also created moments of chance and spontaneity that all combined could relay some of the complex elements of assembly, election and strategy and embody a thin line between play and violence associated with the hypermasculine.

3. The live performance

The live performance occurred began in the KODE1 building and then flowing into an adjacent park in front of the museum. *Red Rover* began with a team communal chant of "we declare war, we declare war, a war has been declared, let go, a war has been declared, let go. This was taken from a tradition of 'pump up' or warm up chants practiced by sports teams as a critique of hypermasculinity developed over the course of the workshop into a crucial elements to this work. "Muscle vests" were worn to both push the idea of the hypermasculine but to also modify the bodies and the actions of the mostly female identified performers. For example beating on the chest of the muscle vests both created a rhythm and sound that set a tone for the performance but also served as an action that most performers were both estranged from but fascinated with.

Each cycle of the modified version of Red Rover that was played thus began with a communal 'pump up' chant following by a round of the game and then back to a pump up chant. This was the rhythm of the performance, which lasted for 1.5 hours. The endurance aspect was key as the game itself broke down as performers became exhausted.

Examples of chants include:

Chant in Dutch: Ik. Ik denk. Ik denk dat wij. Ik denk dat wij gaan winnen!
(I think that we are going to win!)

Chant in Swedish: Jag tror vi kommer vinna!
(I believe that we will win!)

Chant in French
on va les massacrer

(we're going to kill them)

Chant in Latvian
Mēs! Mēs varam! Mēs varam uzvarēt! Mēs varam uzvarēt!
(We! We can! We can win! We can win!)

The original children's game Red Rover could still be recognized during the performance but variations of the game were created so for example at times a team may raise their arms to let their opponent through voluntarily; an opponent may choose to join the team vs breaking through or a wall is created so the person running has no chance of breaking through. Each move was named, choreographed and rules were created based on many of the political discussions, resistance tactics and urgencies that were discussed as part of the workshop. The teams were constantly changing over the course of the performance and at moments (such as the pump up chants) when there were not two sides but one. The performance ended as the once again unified team chanted their way back into the museum leaving the viewers standing alone at the playing field.