

## The question mark experience

There are people, who simply attract attention, and people, who trigger or create attention. Such a person is Rolf Abderhalden, swiss-colombian performing artist and curator, and – together with his sister – head of the Mapa Teatro in Bogotá. When it comes to his curatorial and artistic practice, his approach is a questioning one. An approach, which requires interest, curiosity and openness, and leads to interdisciplinary working processes. If we look at Abderhalden's educational background, we can see, that “interdisciplinary” is not only a label, but a logical consequence out of diverse trainings: he studied Art-Therapy in Lausanne, Theatre in Paris, Visual Arts in Bogotá. As a Professor at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá, where he founded the MA Theatre and Live Arts, he also considers his teaching as a form of curatorial practice, as he points out: “I am teaching as an artist, not as a teacher.”

During the three days of the Symposium I had the opportunity not only to listen to his talk with Ong Keng Seng, but also to participate in a workshop and to conduct an interview with him. In the tandem talk with Ong Keng Seng, Abderhalden stressed the curator's ethical-aesthetical and political responsibility. He referred to Baudrillard's terms of “carnivalization“ and “cannibalization“ and painted a picture of nowadays' cultural practice by applying and analyzing these categories. But how to overcome these structures? How could Live Arts nowadays look like? They both had the idea of creating a platform for young artists to meet and experiment, instead of reproducing the common production policy of a festival. It should be about activating an “intensity of thought in the place of creation, privileging, above all, the profusion of questions and concerns that cross our practices”. The focus on the process of questioning turned out to be the red thread concerning the perspective on curatorial practice. During the workshop we delved into this approach. The location, where the small group of six people came together, was a primary school and the room set the highly loaded atmosphere between teaching and learning, the diverse layers of knowledge and reflection. We were sitting on children's chairs, following the circle form of a little carpet in the middle of the room. Rolf Abderhalden was moderating without exercising authority, but by asking questions, bottom-up, and sharing the moderation with his curator colleague and friend Suely Rolnik, who has a similar focus on the “question mark”. Visualized on sheets of paper, it became a strong symbol and metaphor, the seed of all our discussions – and they were lively. They both explained their working process as a question mark experience: there is something happening in social or political life, which raises questions to the curator, which creates an irritation, and – what they call – “urgency”. This urgency forces them to react. But it starts with a question. Abderhalden was painting. Starting from the question mark he drew wild lines which ended up in total chaos. Around this improvisation he put some clear lines on the paper – a house. For him being a curator

means building a house from the inside, being part of the process by protecting what is happening. In the end of the workshop I couldn't say what exactly we were talking about, because there was no result or something even close to it. But I can say that I got a feeling for his approach to being an artist and curator. Rolf Abderhalden seems to encounter arts, human beings and the world by listening carefully, observing and analyzing (without judging), with interest and curiosity, sensitivity and intuition, with sensuality, understatement and modesty, style and attitude. "Putting yourself in that movement", that's what it's about. In the Interview I wanted to know more about the inner process of the question mark experience. Abderhalden talked about the "knowing body", a physical experience that creates irritation but should not be confused with emotion as private feelings. It's about getting affected, making the body vulnerable. "Listen to the uncomfortable", he says. "The next step is to reflect on what is affecting me – even if it is a negative feeling – and if this feeling is just a private one or a broader cultural issue." So the thought itself becomes action, not just something before action, and the body is the first witness of this artistic experience. As a curator he understands himself as "mediator, driver, vehicle, transmitter, translator or transducer" of these artistic experiences. After the three days, what remains is a question mark, which is not looking for an answer. It doesn't remain as a question, but as an ability to raise questions – as one possibility to encounter curatorial practice and reality.

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