



Interview mit Darren O'Donnell: künstlerische Leitung Mammalian Diving Reflex

DARREN O'DONNELL (55 years) from Mammalian Diving Reflex is an urban cultural planner, novelist, essayist, playwright, director, designer and performer from Canada. Mammalian Diving Reflex (based in Germany and Canada) is a research-art atelier conducting culturally explorative work since 1993. He worked with some of the Mit Ohne Alles members since they were twelve years old.

Tell me a little bit about your philosophy of art.

I use art as an excuse to bring people together who would not ordinarily spend time together and get them to do things they wouldn't ordinarily do, so that they get to know each other. I have focused mostly on children and young people because I just happen to enjoy the anarchy that children and young people bring to a situation. I've never been particularly comfortable in my role as an adult, when I'm with my family, I am more happy eating with the children than I am having boring conversations with the adults. Adults have internalised so many social rules and behaviours and are very predictable. I prefer the irreverent unpredictability of children, since that is very close to how I prefer to be in the world.

What makes collaboration and socialising so important for you?

Collaboration and socialising are important to me and my work because I think that more interesting art is made when you harness the chaos of ordinary interactions and allow that to live, while still making a meaningful experience. When you take a script and hire actors and everyone just stands around saying lines, the chances for something unexpected to happen drop to zero. I like the unexpected. That's why I think *The Last Minutes Before Mars* (performance with *Mit Ohne Alles* at the Junge Schauspielhaus Bochum) is not finished yet, we need to do something more with it, so that we have more of a conversation with the audience. We need more unexpected. I find leaves falling from a tree more interesting to watch than something that is carefully crafted, since no matter how great the artist is, chance is a much better artist.

What kind of projects do you create?

I create projects that bring people together in unusual configurations and I provide a creative excuse for people to get to know each other. I try to make work that is as close to simply hanging out as you can get and still sell tickets. Examples: *Nightwalks with Teenagers*, *Haircuts by Children*. Sometimes there's more or less form (*Nightwalks with Teenagers* has a very simple loose form, while *All the Sex I've Ever Had* has a more strict but still simple form), but it's always about finding a container for people to get to know each other.

What do you expect when you start a new project?

When I start a new project, I'm usually hoping to create a meaningful encounter between the audience and my collaborators. My concern is about pushing the audience outside of their comfort zones so that they encounter others, and we all increase our social intelligence. I want the audience to see the world differently after my projects. When I used to see large groups of teenagers on the street, they would make me a bit nervous, but now after working with teens for 15 years, when I see a group of teens, I see people who could potentially be my friends.

What kind of borders people need to overcome to participate in your work?

To participate in my work, people just need to trust that they're going to have a good time. But probably the biggest border, is the border that is brought by anyone who is interested in typical theatre. They don't find much value in what I do. They want to see dramatic performances. Sorry, but you have to be patient and look carefully for the drama in my work, but, trust me, it's there and it's much more dramatic and interesting than Hamlet worrying about his mom fucking his uncle.

What have you learned personally from kids and teenagers?

It's not so much what I've "learned" from children and young people, though there's always things to learn about whatever they're interested in, cultural stuff like mukbang, or whatever. But the thing that I value is their way of being in the world. Their deep sense of justice and fairness. If children actually ruled the world, I think there would be a lot less inequity. I think children understand fairness and are quite happy to share, if it means that there's more harmony in the group. They also are very perceptive around identifying when adults are using things like "safety" to merely control others. Kids recognise when others are being unduly authoritarian and are very vocal with their objections. As I have written many times, children force adults to either be anarchists, forget about hierarchy and directly negotiate with children or authoritarians and command children. So they force adults into a corner when they must choose to either take the time to negotiate fairly, or be bossy. I find it interesting that adults often choose to be cunts.

Any mesmerizing moments in your career?

Watching a crew of kids from the Ruhrgebiet go from 10 to 20 years old, and become smart, funny adults who ask fantastic questions. Also, the audience of *All the Sex I've Ever Had* crowding around the performers to talk to them about their lives.