

MAMMALIAN DIVING REFLEX (CA)

HAIRCUTS BY CHILDREN (RE-CRÉATION)

sam13 12:00 à 15:30

MEYER COIFFURE 4 rue Juste-Olivier - Nyon



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**FAR° FESTIVAL DES ARTS
VIVANTS / NYON**

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Leur mission : rassembler les gens, les faire participer, réagir, parler, penser et sentir. Mammalian Diving Reflex est un atelier de recherche artistique qui s'inscrit dans la sphère sociale. Leur ambitieux projet HAIRCUTS BY CHILDREN fait partie de leurs performances activistes qui favorisent le dialogue entre les artistes et le public. En collaboration avec le Passeport vacances nyonnais, le collectif propose à des enfants âgés de dix à douze ans de se former à l'apprentissage de la coiffure en plusieurs étapes et d'offrir ensuite des coupes de cheveux gratuites au public dans un salon de coiffure de la ville de Nyon. Responsables de leurs actes, les plus jeunes considérés comme de futurs citoyens.

conception: Darren O'Donnell / production: Eva Verity / coordination: Christine Benoît-Bailo / formatrice coiffure: Sabrina Colomb / avec la participation des enfants du Passeport vacances Nyon: Isabelle Bissig, Fanny Borloz, Emma Delacoste, Axel D'Eramo, Océane D'Eramo, Julie Desmeules, Annaëlle Fivaz, Jennica Folkesson, Estelle Gonet, Léane Guex, Manon Guillermet, Géraldine Jacoby, Heyab Janin, Manon Larivière, Giulia Martini, Ellen Ryder, Carole Steiner, Joanna Watts / production: far° festival des arts vivants, Passeport vacances Nyon / remerciements et soutiens: M. Philippe Meier–Meier Coiffure Nyon, M. Marcel Inglin–HairBeauty professional Sàrl

Mammalian Diving Reflex
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DEFINITION DU PROJET ET DEROULEMENT DE LA PERFORMANCE

LE PROJET

Laisseriez-vous un enfant de dix ans vous couper les cheveux?

Telle est la proposition du collectif canadien Mammalian Diving Reflex (MDR), un groupe d'artistes engagés tant au niveau social que politique.

Le projet HAIRCUTS BY CHILDREN consiste à former à la coiffure des jeunes de 10 à 12 ans durant une semaine et de leur permettre ensuite, l'espace d'un jour, de se mettre dans la peau d'un coiffeur : couper et coiffer « pour de vrai » les cheveux d'un public adulte dans un salon authentique.

L'objectif de ce projet est d'enseigner aux enfants comment croire en eux. Le coiffeur professionnel joue un rôle essentiel en amont et pendant la performance. Il doit en effet aider l'enfant à discerner ses bonnes idées de manière à l'encourager à développer son potentiel créatif.

Au-delà de la coupe de cheveux, c'est de la citoyenneté des enfants dont il s'agit. Créativité et confiance sont les maîtres mots de cette initiative originale. Selon Darren O'Donnell, le directeur artistique du collectif, l'engagement civique doit commencer dès l'enfance. L'assurance acquise par les plus jeunes et la responsabilité qui leur est offerte pendant leur apprentissage les valorisent énormément. Quant aux adultes volontaires, ils sont conviés à laisser de côté leur sens du contrôle et leurs préjugés afin d'établir avec les enfants un autre type de relation.

LE DEROULEMENT DE LA PERFORMANCE

Les enfants (à ce jour 18) âgés de 10 à 12 ans sont formés durant cinq jours à la coupe de cheveux et apprennent surtout à avoir confiance dans leurs choix esthétiques. Au cours de leur apprentissage, ils suivent sept cours animés par un membre de MDR et le coiffeur professionnel : le premier explique la dimension politique que l'art ou la forme artistique peut revêtir afin de mieux leur exposer le contexte du projet et les rendre attentifs à comment l'art peut les aider à exprimer leur opinion. Le deuxième les sensibilise aux droits des enfants. Les quatre cours suivants sont dédiés à l'initiation à la coupe de cheveux. Et le dernier prend la forme d'un débriefing.

La performance a lieu à Nyon dans le salon de coiffure de Monsieur Meyer, Meyer Coiffure au 4 rue Juste-Olivier et dure 3h30 heures le samedi 13 août de 12:00 à 15:30.

Toutes les étapes de la performance, de la prise de rendez-vous à la coupe de cheveux, sont assurées par les enfants à tour de rôle. S'ils ne coupent pas les cheveux, ils s'occupent des réservations le jour-même, présentent les « apprentis coiffeurs » aux clients et gèrent un stand de limonade devant le salon de coiffure pour attirer du public et faire patienter les clients.

Les bénéfices gagnés sur les ventes de limonade durant la performance reviennent aux enfants qui choisissent ensuite de les attribuer à une œuvre de bienfaisance.

En septembre, un débriefing clôt le projet. La parole est alors donnée aux enfants pour qu'ils racontent leur expérience non seulement avec les adultes mais aussi avec les médias présents le jour de la performance.

TEXTE DANS LE PROGRAMME DU FAR° 2011, p. 53

Mammalian Diving Reflex ou la responsabilité sociale de l'art

Mammalian Diving Reflex est le nom d'un collectif artistique canadien dont le titre oriente de manière métaphorique sur le genre de projet qu'ils proposent. Ce réflex est une réaction de certains mammifères au contact de l'eau froide ou dans un environnement glacial qui optimise la respiration et permet donc de survivre plus longtemps. Le ralentissement de la fréquence cardiaque diminue le besoin d'oxygène sanguin et de façon plus conséquente chez les enfants.

Fondé en 1993, Mammalian Diving Reflex est un atelier de recherche spécialisé dans l'investigation de la sphère sociale, toujours à l'affût de produire des expériences esthétiques innovantes, des événements sociaux-culturels hors du commun, des performances sous une forme théâtrale et des textes théoriques. Ils créent et ont créé de nombreuses manifestations dont les objectifs du contenu sont l'échange intellectuel en sollicitant le langage, les idées et l'information. Au niveau de la forme, ils ont développé une myriade de mise en scènes théâtrales originales en considérant le public comme un acteur de manière à établir un dialogue. Mais aussi et surtout, leurs projets ont toujours une dimension politique qui met en exergue la responsabilité sociale de l'art.

Leurs interventions tentent en effet de démanteler les frontières entre les individus, en engageant la discussion entre les spectateurs et les performeurs. Darren O'Donnel, le directeur artistique du collectif souhaite décentraliser le spectacle traditionnel habituellement dans un lieu clos pour le déplacer à l'extérieur, dans la sphère publique afin de créer des liens entre des personnes d'univers différents. Il est convaincu que les arts de la performance sont un procédé essentiel pour contrer la société de consommation et de rassembler les gens pour créer un monde meilleur.

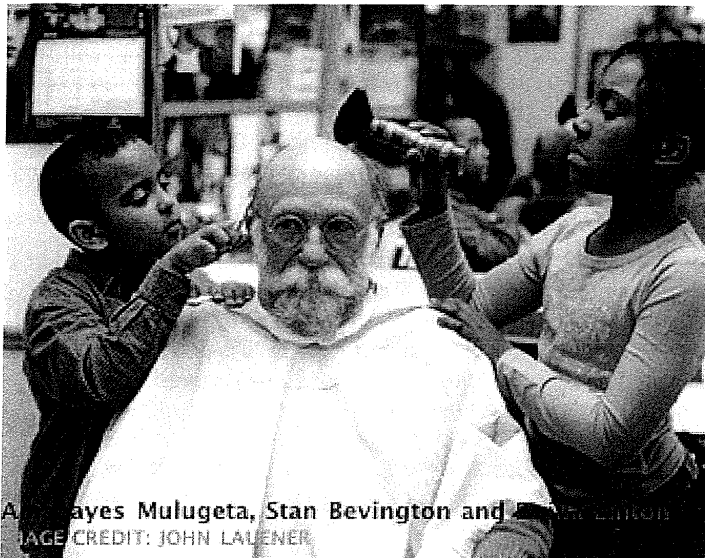
Utopique ? Non, au contraire. Le succès remporté par leurs différentes actions montrent à quel point les résultats positifs se multiplient à travers le monde. Haircuts by Children en est la preuve. Depuis 2006, ce projet a voyagé de Toronto à New York en passant par Los Angeles, Milan, Vancouver et Sydney. L'exécution de la coupe de cheveux crée un moment d'intimité entre les participants et les jeunes coiffeurs ; les corps entrent en contact et le dialogue s'instaure tout simplement. La confiance acquise par les enfants et la responsabilité qui leur est offerte les valorisent incroyablement. Cette performance révèle de manière probante l'élaboration de nouveaux types d'interactions sociales entre diverses générations et participe à la réflexion menée par le collectif sur les droits des enfants. Selon Darren O'Donnel, l'engagement civique doit commencer dès l'enfance.

Cécile Simonet

TORONTO LIFE

Running With Scissors

Artist Darren O'Donnell's *Haircuts by Children* gives kids the opportunity to shape their destinies while giving you a new coif By Jason McBride



In books (*Social Acupuncture*, *Your Secrets Sleep With Me*), performance art (*Diplomatic Immunities*) and plays (*A Suicide-Site Guide to the City*), artist Darren O'Donnell has tried to do one simple thing—get people to talk to one another. As interested in removing social inhibitions as he is in producing unique forms of art and entertainment, O'Donnell has created situations in which strangers interact in the public sphere. In his latest project, *Haircuts by Children*, O'Donnell rounded up a group of 10-year-olds and trained them to cut hair; throughout May they're offering free trims to anyone who wants one. O'Donnell's point? To illustrate that kids are creative and competent individuals whose aesthetic—and, by extension, political—choices should be trusted. Scary or sublime? Make yourself an appointment and find out.

How will *Haircuts by Children* work?

It's exactly what the title says. We're working with a Grade 5/6 class at Parkdale Public School and we're training the kids, with certified, licensed hair stylists, to cut hair. Then, for four hours every Saturday in May, at a different salon [see list below], we'll be offering haircuts to anyone who wants their hair cut by a kid.

Do the kids get paid?

Yeah, I forget how much. It's an honorarium. It's more than I'm getting.

And what's the thinking behind this project?

It's part of a larger practice I call Social Acupuncture. We do stuff that induces atypical encounters between strangers in the public sphere. We go out into public and create situations where people who don't normally hang out with each other get to hang out with each other. Things like *The Talking Creature*, where we just get strangers talking to one another, or *Home Tours*, where we knock on doors and ask for tours of random people's homes. We have another project called *Diplomatic Immunities*, where we take a group of performers from locale to locale to meet and interview people; then we return to Buddies in Bad Times Theatre and report on our findings. And that's the show. This is all just to prove the power, abundance and generosity of the social sphere, that there's no reason to be afraid of people.

This work grew out of a dissatisfaction with the traditional avenues for socializing, as well as with what passes for entertainment or art. I don't like sitting in a dark room, separate from other people, staring up at flickering light or idiots on a stage. I can't stand live music events. I don't like those configurations. The grown-up ways of having fun seemed so dumb and limited. Only kids played. I wanted to figure out how adults could play, how talking with people you didn't know could be fun and anarchic, how it could lead to discovery.

The empirical proof of what we're doing is the blackout of 2003, when people were jettisoned out of their ordinary social circumstances, when power had been taken away both literally and figuratively. Electricity was gone, but so too was economic power. Those things travel the same wires. You're attached to your computer, checking your e-mail all the time, watching your DVDs-you're plugged into a network that determines social flows. The blackout interrupted those flows and proved definitively that the world is a safe and generous place. It proved there was something to, not anarchy, but anarchism. That we can take care of each other, we don't need the old hierarchies. (For one night, obviously. When you have to figure out how to ship food, other issues will come up.) But it was clear on that one night that people were really happy to bust out of their normal circuits of interaction. It made them ecstatic.

***Haircuts by Children* is an illustration of your argument for giving children more political power, essentially giving them the right to vote.**

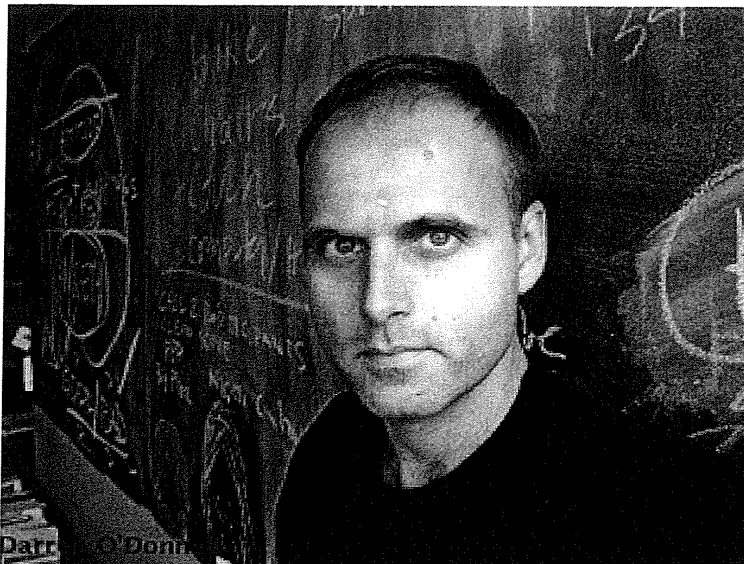
That's how we're framing it. I don't know that it will do that.

Do you think kids want to vote?

Yeah, sure. Kids want to participate. They often think they're not qualified to. They've bought the propaganda-they don't think they're mature enough, know enough about the issues. But most of my friends don't have a clue, either.

And I bet most of your friends don't vote. Do you want to encourage kids to participate in a system that's flawed, that maybe doesn't work?

Yeah, yeah. I'd like them to feel the frustration of voting and see that Stephen Harper gets, what, 39 per cent of the popular vote, and then gets power. I'd like them to experience the bafflement of that. I think some kids will want to vote and some kids won't, just like adults. It just seems illogical to not include children in the political process, to deny that children are intelligent people who can respond rationally.



Do you worry that you idealize or romanticize children?

No. When I was 10, I was all over the mayoral campaign in Edmonton. I was backing Cec Purves big time; I would go to the all-candidates meetings and get his autograph. I was really interested in him winning, and I tried to participate. Kids know.

Who cuts your hair?

Normally I do. But I went to one of the stylists when I was recruiting her for the gig and got her to cut my hair. I'm going to get the kids to cut my hair when they're training.

How did you convince the hair stylists to do it?

They were funny. You know, we trained for a long time; it's not easy. You can't just give somebody a pair of scissors and ask them to cut hair. One of the stylists is a former theatre person, so she was down with the performance part. The other one thought it was weird, but she liked it. But we're paying them. The salons were really easy to get; we're renting them. Next year we want to do *Haircuts by Children: The Cut Off*, and we want to have competitions between schools around the city and have it culminate in a *Haircut Idol*-kind of thing at Harbourfront Centre.

In your book *Social Acupuncture: A Guide to Suicide, Performance and Utopia*, you describe your work as a kind of acupuncture performed on the social body. But acupuncture is typically something individual people willingly request. A lot of your work is done on an unsuspecting public-or at least a public who hasn't asked for it. And a lot of it could be perceived as aggressive. Do you worry that perceived aggression could alienate people and thus further atomize them?

When I punch you, that's aggressive. If I don't know you and go up and talk to you, that's not aggressive. I say over and over in the book that I think human rights discourse is being applied too liberally. In *Diplomatic Immunities*, we get the audience to stand up and then sit down based on how much money they make. The last person standing is the richest person in the room; we then bring that person onstage to interview him or her. Misha Glouberman [one of the participants in *Diplomatic*

Immunities] asked me if that person was really consenting to that, considering the "huge power imbalance" between us, who are in the know, and this one person. A huge power imbalance? If I have a gun to your head, that's a huge power imbalance. If I have your kid as a hostage, that's a huge power imbalance. We're playing. So you'll be slightly embarrassed. If it was really so abusive or coercive or aggressive, people would easily be able to resist it. If you don't want to talk to me, you don't have to talk to me. Somehow, people expect comfort as their birthright. Comfort is not your birthright. Especially in a world where people are bought off with comfort. People don't want to endure discomfort, but it's necessary, to get anything done, to endure some discomfort. I think the fact that strangers can't comfortably talk to one another is an awful thing.

What advice do you have for people who are shy or reserved, who can't transcend social boundaries as easily as you do?

I would say it's not that difficult. It's OK if we have an awkward time together. It's OK that you're not enjoying it. I'm probably not enjoying it too much if you're not enjoying it. I use the analogy of conceptual intelligence. Nobody looks at a math problem and understands it right off. You have to be confused at first and then clarity will come. It's the same with social intelligence. You have to be made uncomfortable before you can become smarter socially. It's OK to be uncomfortable, to be shy; it's OK that it hurts a little bit. And you can always walk away. You can walk out of the theatre. People often worry they'll say something they'll regret. Hey, I live with regret every minute of every day-it's no big deal.

Haircuts by Children takes place on Saturday, May 13, noon-4 p.m., at Wisdom's Barber & Beauty Salon (1754 Eglinton Ave. W.); Saturday, May 20, noon-4 p.m., at Camille Unisex Beauty Lounge (1524 Queen St. W.); and Saturday, May 27 and Sunday, May 28, noon-4 p.m., at Queens Quay Hair Design and Esthetic (208 Queens Quay W., unit 8) as part of the MILK International Children's Festival of the Arts. For a free appointment call 416-703-5491, or just drop by to watch.

PRESSE: «BEYOND THE FRINGE: WHAT HAPPENED WHEN AN ART COLLECTIVE INVITED CHILDREN TO TAKE OVER A NEWCASTLE HAIR SALON», THE INDEPENDENT, 13 Décembre 2009



December 13, 2009

Beyond the fringe: What happened when an art collective invited children to take over a Newcastle hair salon?

Did the kids make the cut? And what exactly is the serious message behind those Day-Glo do's?

Sunday afternoon in the fashionable Saks hair-dressing salon on Newcastle's Market Street, and a team of stylists, concealed slightly by a thick fog of spray-on hair colour, are busy

snipping away. One customer nervously inspects his new look. It's a daring two-in-one hairdo featuring a sleek monkish bowl on top and a patchwork of wobbly tramlines below. Another client removes his gown to find a thick trickle of turquoise colour rolling down the back of his neck. And a woman, who comes in requesting that they turn her into the tousled model of the photograph in the salon's window, walks out with a look that can best be described as asylum chic.

Still, they only have themselves to blame. Each one voluntarily booked in to have their hair cut by a child (average age nine-and-a-quarter), so the liberal use of colour and unpredictable results is hardly something they've grounds to complain about. "When we advertised that we were doing free haircuts by children, the phone started ringing off the hook," says Saks' owner, Adam McMenamin. "Every slot was snapped up; we've done around 50 clients in two days." Yesterday, such local luminaries as the leader of Newcastle City Council John Shipley and Gateshead councillor Mick Henry dropped in. Henry bravely let two nine-year-olds loose with a pair of clippers on his beard, while Shipley left the salon sporting a fluorescent orange star stencilled on his head.

The idea for Haircuts by Children comes from renowned Canadian art collective Mammalian Diving Reflex (MDR), which specialises in creating unusual social situations between children and adults as a means of subtly examining issues such as trust and perception. The first Haircuts by Children was held in Toronto in 2006 and was such a success it has since been exported to salons all over the world, from New York, Portland and LA to Milan, Vancouver and Sydney. It's come to the north-east this weekend as

part of a new arts festival called Wunderbar. "We create environments where ordinary social dynamics have kind of been derailed a bit," says artistic director Darren O'Donnell. "Initially we used it as a way of looking at the simple issue ' of children's rights and the fact that there are so many things that kids are not allowed to do these days. But it has developed into something much more."

All the Saks stylists this weekend are pupils from Walkergate Primary School, which lies a few miles north of the city centre in an area of high unemployment and economic deprivation. There are 24 of them and each one is taking it very seriously. MDR representatives, along with local stylist Lisa Whitlock, have been going to the school every afternoon for the past week to teach the children how to deal with tricky customers and, more importantly, how to cut hair.

The training has clearly paid off. Andy Wilson, who came in with a long blond ponytail, leaves with a fine green mohican. "I'm well impressed," he says, "it's exactly what I asked for. I'm going to see if Shannon, my stylist, can do my hair again next time." Another customer, 27-year-old John O'Shea, is equally upbeat. "I don't often get the chance to have a designer hair-do - normally it's just a number-three [shave] all over," he says. "I've got some important meetings tomorrow and I'm looking forward to making a good impression."

Unintentionally, it seems a lot of cutting-edge styles are being created in the salon today. Kate Metcalfe, who leaves with a short, scarlet fringe, loves it so much that she wishes she'd dared to be more radical. A cry of, "It's the Beckham look!" comes from another happy customer across the ' salon. Rapturous applause breaks out as the eight-year-old responsible carefully places her scissors aside with the kind of gravitas that comes of an epic 40-minute cutting session.

"Lots of people let the kids do something they wouldn't ordinarily do and actually end up liking it and keeping it," says O'Donnell. "There was one guy in Vancouver who'd had the same ugly haircut that everybody had hated for years and he let the kids do whatever they wanted, and they gave him something that he's since kept and that everybody now compliments him on."

It's a scene that reminds me of an installation that took place in Dazed & Confused magazine's gallery space in the mid-1990s. Madcap hairdresser Jonny Drill was given a residency there and he invited members of the public in, on the condition that he could do to them whatever he liked - no mirrors allowed. He sent his victims screaming, crying and laughing back on to the street with elongated foreheads where he'd shaved along the hairline, anarchic tramlines and every stage of mohican going. A precursor, perhaps, to some of the unfathomable looks deemed trendy today.

Spurred on by the lure of a high-fashion haircut, I ask the stylists if I can have my hair done. Eight-year-old Megan Leightley and 10-year-old Kyle Thompson manage to squeeze me in between appointments; I'm their sixth of the day. "It's hard," says Kyle, as he pulls the comb through my hair, "because you cut yourself a lot. I've done it three times today; you have to concentrate hard." They start randomly hacking away at the back. "Let me know if you're uncomfortable, won't you," says Kyle. But I'm not because they're gentle and sweet. They don't pull on my hair, despite the fact that Kyle informs me that it's "a bit stiff". They don't bore me with silly questions about where I'm going on holiday and, what's more, they're both the perfect height for cutting. It gets me wondering why we don't staff all our service industries with children; they're so much less rude and annoying. Then I remember that that would be illegal. The only downside to it all is the natural discrepancy that occurs from having one child working on one side of your head and another on the other. For now, I'll just call it asymmetric.

It's interesting how many customers who have booked in today find the normal salon experience unbearable - the fakery, the mirrors, the vanity. "I'm spooked by hairdressers," says Simon Turner. "I'd rather go to the dentist any day." It's not often you see a scared adult seeking solace in a child, but today there are many. Many people haven't dared set foot in a salon for years and either never get their hair cut, do it themselves or shave it off. "I can't bear the obsession with perfection," says another customer. "I've been looking for someone who wants to break the rules of hairdressing and these kids are it. I trust them way more than I would a normal hairdresser."

It's interesting too, to note the differences that Haircuts by Children has thrown up between nationalities.

When MDR took it to Italy, for example, the parents of the children got much more involved. "Maybe it's the Italian mum thing. I don't know, but we were definitely having to kick a few of them out of the cutting area," says O'Donnell. When it went to Derry, there was a large uptake among the ageing population. "Tons of old people kept turning up," says O'Donnell. "Maybe it was the offer of a free haircut." The most radical styles, he thinks, came out of Vancouver and the only complaint from Norway. "Some guy came to get his haircut and he didn't know what was going on and we said it was a free haircut day by a kid and he kind of accepted this. Of course, the kid did the haircut and it was ridiculous and he was incensed and his friend was like, 'Well you have to fix that,' and the kid was like, 'There's no fixing it, that's the haircut.' So they left in a big huff."

Aside from this, though, there are many serious undercurrents to Haircuts by Children. "The more we've developed it, the more unexpected issues have come out of it," says O'Donnell. "There's so much paranoia right now about strangers and stranger danger that there is rarely any time when kids and adults, who don't know each other, get to spend time together. This project is a kind of safe, controlled environment where a small, quiet conversation can occur between a kid and an adult. It's a rare moment that crosses generations."

O'Donnell cites a book called *How to Live Dangerously: Why We Should All Stop Worrying and Start Living* by Warwick Cairns as inspiration. In Cairns' book, statistics show that if, for whatever reason, you wished your child to get abducted, that child would, on average, need to hang out on a street corner for 200,000 years before actually getting picked up, and even then it would be returned within 24 hours. And if you wanted to get your child abducted permanently, that would be a 600,000-year wait. "We are just trying to acknowledge in some small way that it is actually a relatively safe world out there," says O'Donnell.

MDR is currently working on another children's project called *Eat the Street*, where it gets a group of children to dine out in a number of restaurants and then dish out awards afterwards. "What we're essentially doing is asking the restaurants to accommodate kids and adjust their levels of professionalism accordingly," says O'Donnell. "It's surprising how this makes some restaurants very, very anxious." Next year, MDR is hoping to bring another children's project to Canning Town as part of the London International Festival of Theatre called *The Night of a Zillion Parties*, which will be directed and curated by the children themselves. "It speaks more when kids come in on a social scenario," says O'Donnell. "Everyone is more lenient with each other. It raises the levels of generosity."

Meanwhile, back at the salon, it's unclear how generous Jane McCourt is being to her husband Derek, as she is doubled over laughing at his new look - which, incidentally, she roped him into having. "I think it's hilarious," she says. "I love the abattoir look above his ears. He'd never in his life have chosen this haircut. I think it's fantastic someone has done this to him."

"Yes," says Derek apprehensively glancing in the mirror, "I'm off to buy a hat."