

Schmidt Theron

'Almost limitless' theatricality: Putting the audience to work in the Nature Theater of Oklahoma standard lecture

If a Marxist critique of productive labour is that it is abstracted and alienated, experienced as 'estranged labour' rather than 'life activity' or 'productive life itself', then the theatre might appear to be the last place where such alienation might be resisted, given its long association with dynamics of abstraction, representation, and reproduction. One approach has been to bring the real onto the stage; but I will argue that a different possibility is offered by expanding and amplifying the theatrical, *extending the stage* so that all of life is made into theatre. Such an impossible project is given a form in the reverie at the end of Kafka's unfinished novel *America*, in which his protagonist, Karl Rossmann, stumbles across an enticing advertisement for the great 'Theatre of Oklahoma'. One-hundred years later, the contemporary theatre company Nature Theater of Oklahoma has taken its name from Kafka's imagined theatre; but more than this, I think, its ambitious, 'almost limitless' theatre, sets out to swallow up an entire life—including the life of its audience members—within its capacious artifice.

Bio:

Theron Schmidt works internationally as an artist, teacher, and writer. He has published widely on contemporary theatre and performance, participatory art practices, and politically engaged performance. He has contributed to anthologies and journals such as *Postdramatic Theatre and the Political*, *Performance Research*, *Law Text Culture*, *The Live Art Almanac* vols 1-3, and *Contemporary Theatre Review*, where he is an Assistant Editor. He is a founding co-convenor of Performance Philosophy and co-editor of the *Performance Philosophy* journal. He also makes performance as a solo and collaborative artist.

