

# Construction of Absurd Theatre Form with Parabolic Drama

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**Abstract.** This article explains the concept of absurdist theatre construction that combines the comic and the dramatic, with blocking adapting the performance form of Sandur Bojonegoro, and the theory of Parabolic Drama explained by Michael W Benneth. Theatre as a response to life is built to open the veil of illusion and expose the absurdity of life. The performance is designed to appear improvisational, but still well-planned, using the Meisner method. The theme used as the fundamental foundation of this show is the suicide incident in Bengkulu. This regional theme was then developed into a universal idea by adopting Harold Pinter's technique.

**Keywords:** theatre of absurd, parabolic drama, Meisner, suicide phenomena, Sandur Bojonegoro

## 1 Introduction

Theatre of the absurd, as a form of theatre mentioned by Esslin [1] in *The Theatre of Absurd*, is one of the theatre movements that emerged in the avant-garde era [2]. Names associated with this theatre movement include Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet, and Harold Pinter [3]. Absurdist theatre has features such as anti-character, anti-language, anti-drama, and anti-plot. This form of theatre expresses themes and messages through a combination of comical and dramatic, and promotes humanitarian ideas [4].

The condition that is often discussed in absurdism, both on the theatre stage and in the philosophical tradition, is about self-depression that results in depression, when dealing directly with the absurdity of life. This condition is caused by the illusions of beauty, hope, and love that often cover the absurdity of life being exposed due to certain things [5]. When individuals meet in such conditions, then the possibilities that can be taken according to Camus are; suicide, philosophical suicide, and facing life happily and making peace with the absurdity of life. Indonesia, and some other third countries, mostly take the second path, which is philosophical suicide [6]. This condition is characterised by jumping to ideology, religion, and other metaphysical things in order to get instant answers to the problems they face.

Suicide occurs when the condition of "philosophical suicide" is unable to provide answers and deliver an individual out of the pressure of the absurdity of life [7]. Described by Emil Durkheim, there are four conditions of suicide when associated with a socio-cultural perspective called the "principle of integration & regulation" [8]. These conditions include altruistic and egoistic (both related to integration), as well as anomic and fatalistic (both related to regulation) [9]. The most common suicide condition found in third countries such as Indonesia (especially in Bengkulu) is fatalistic suicide [10]. This theme will be raised and processed into a story

premise, which is then constructed into an absurd-style theatre performance with a parabolic drama approach [11].

## **2 Method**

The method adopted by the writer to compose an absurdist theatre piece with a parabolic drama theory approach is to use Wallas' creative creation stages. Wallas states that the creative creation stage consists of four phases; preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. [28]

The preparation stage consists of gathering information and materials. In this work, the preparation consists of compiling the materials needed to build the thematic and writing the script. The second stage, incubation, consists of formulation, structure, and characterisation. The third stage, illumination, is the process of dramatising the performance. In this stage, the parabolic drama theory is approached. The fourth, or final stage is verification which is the process of representation. In this paper, the last process has been included in the form of staging, and visual display.

## **3 Result And Discussion**

The theatre of the absurd is associated with the absurdist views of Albert Camus who was born in the 1950s, in the post-war depression. A few decades later it became a leading movement in the avant-garde era [12]. The theatre of the absurd, theorised by Martin Esslin in 1981, continued to develop into the post-modern era [13]. One form of absurd theatre developed in the 2010s was parabolic drama, composed by Michael W Benneth. In general, Benneth's theatre conventions prioritise plot, character and theme [14]. The texture of the performance is built from dialogue, mood, and spectacle, which are then stitched together as a plot-bead (plot chain). The creation of absurd theatre with a parabolic drama approach by the author consists of four phases [15].

### **3.1 Theme and Playwriting**

In this phases, what the author does is to prepare a theme, which then becomes a premise. The theme is then globalised. The theme, which is a response to the suicide incident that occurred in Bengkulu, became the main premise for the creation of the play. The creation of the play is based on the playwriting method introduced by Lajos Egri [16], which builds plots and sub-plots as the bone structure of a story from the premise. The premise is built with a dialectical approach, to obtain a synthesis and not to favour one side of the truth. A dialectical approach is taken as the formation of the story's premise, which is then followed by character building. Characters are built in three dimensions, including the physiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions of a character.

The theme, which is still regional, is made more universal by adopting Harold Pinter's globalisation of ideas. Pinter did this in his script "Ashes to Ashes" in the 1980s. The initial idea discussed was an incident that occurred in the domestic sphere or around Pinter's neighbourhood. From the issue of the powerlessness of minorities who are often victims of violence, as well as the issue of injustice raised by Pinter, it is linked to a number of cases around

the world to make the theme of absurdity more global. This method was adopted after developing the premise and characters of the story [17].

### **3.2 Phase II: Form Creation**

In the second phase, the creation of form, structure, and characterisation. Blocking adopts the form of Sandur Bojonegoro [18], which is processed with a parabolic drama approach. In addition to the main cast, some players are designed as responders or passive players aimed at forming a diffuse audience atmosphere and strengthening the impression of immersive theatre. Parabolic drama requires a strict circular plot, as well as a reduction in the dominant conventional theatre construction. Another characteristic is the incorporation of the audience into the narrative of the work which makes the atmosphere of the audience diffuse. [19] This eliminates the disintegration between audience and performer as in conventional performances. This condition makes parabolic drama also often translated as immersive theatre. Immersive theatre allows the design of audience involvement in a performance to be well designed and planned. [20]

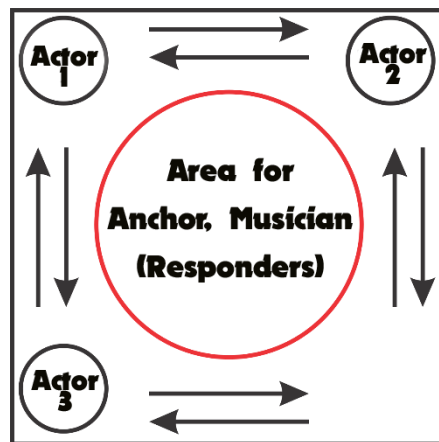
Planning audience involvement by preparing passive players who are tasked with responding to the atmosphere. The design of audience involvement is done using the Meisner method, which emphasises that actors are able to do things reflexively and naturally. [21] Thus, the instinct and natural response of the body to the events around it become the main foundation of acting in the Meisner method. Thus, the construction of absurd theatre with a parabolic drama approach begins with the creation of acting using Meisner's method, combined with immersive theatre forms involving players designed as audiences. Meisner's method is used to give the impression of an improvisational performance that builds an integrated, well-planned atmosphere.

### **3.3 Phase III: Dramaturgy**

The third stage in this conception is the dramaturgy of the performance. One of the things applied in the creation of the absurd theatre form with the parabolic drama theory approach is the insertion of iconoclasm into the body of the performance.

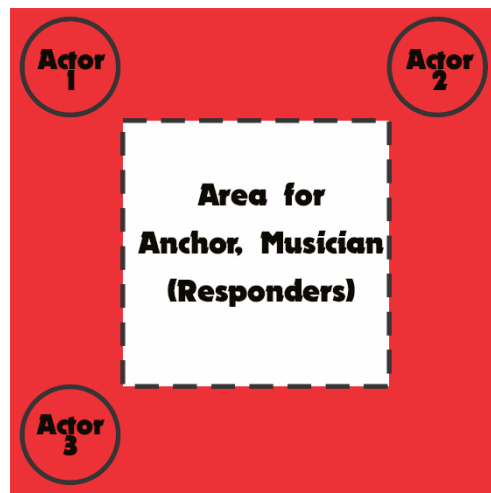
Iconoclasm is one of the characteristics of an absurd play. In an iconoclastic form, the main goal is to strengthen the effect of language. In addition to presenting dialogue to build mood and atmosphere, silences and inexpressibility are also presented to give a stronger impression. Another iconoclastic trait is the removal of all icons, which refer to culture, tradition, religion, ethnicity, and other things that refer to personal characteristics. [22] The omission is intended to make the premise and story more universal, and to promote the idea of humanity. [23]

As for the movement and displacement of actors in this concept, it only requires a maximum of two to three actors. Because the stage is square like the Bojonegoro Sandur performance, the moving will be done as below.



**Fig. 1.** Player positioning and blocking

In this conception, the centre of the stage contains the narrator, the musicians and the responders. In such stage conditions, dialogue can only be done when two actors are in a straight line, either vertically or horizontally. Dialogue cannot be done diagonally. That's why moving is formulated with a rule like the picture above. The playing area, then, is the part coloured red below.



**Fig. 2.** Playing area for player (red area)

This concept was adapted from Sandur Bojonegoro, as it is possible to combine it with absurdist theatre developed into parabolic drama. Parabolic drama requires a circular plot, but is more emphatic. Strict movement and limited space give a verbal impression of the alienation and imprisonment desired in this conception of absurd theatre. This conception also adopts Bertold Brecht's epic theatre to give a *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect). [24]

### 3.4 Phase IV: Representation

The most desirable condition of this conception is the performative society, where the audience merges with the performance. [In this condition, the audience is provoked by the

participants, namely responders, narrators, and passive actors at the centre of the stage. This condition is referred to as a diffuse audience. [26]

The costumes and make-up for the main actors are designed very differently from the callers and narrators (passive actors). The aim is to create the impression that they are in different dimensions of time and space. The main actor is dressed with a pale face, oversized clothes, and comical behaviour that characterises the author's previous absurdism. [The main plot of the story, based on the script, is transformed into an atmospheric dimension by the three main actors. Meanwhile, the passive actors in the middle respond to the storyline, dialogue, atmosphere, and expressions presented in the play area.

These four stages are necessary for the construction of an absurdist theatre form with parabolic drama.

## 4 Conclusion

The construction of absurd-style theatre with a parabolic drama theory approach is designed into four stages: theme and playwriting, form creation, dramaturgy, and representation. For this arrangement, a number of elements and methods are inserted in it. Some of them include Lajos Egri's playwriting method, including the development of premise and theme with a dialectical approach. In addition, the blocking and place are adapted from Sandur Bojonegoro to give a verbal impression of confinement and circularity. Actorial creation is built on the Meisner method, but designed more comically for the three actors who are in the main plot stream of the story.

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