

**T.R.
MANİSA CELAL BAYAR UNIVERSITY
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL**



**MASTER'S THESIS
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

**VOICES IN THE VOID: MEANINGLESSNESS AND
DISCONNECTION IN ANTHONY NEILSON'S THEATRE**

Gültekin ÇİLENGER

**Thesis Supervisor
Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emre ÇAKAR**

MANİSA – 2025

**GÜLTEKİN
ÇİLENGER**

**VOICES IN THE VOID:
MEANINGLESSNESS AND DISCONNECTION
IN ANTHONY NELSON'S THEATRE**

2025

TAAHHÜTNAME

Bu tezin Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Ana Bilim Dalında akademik ve etik kurallara uygun olarak yazıldığını ve kullanılan tüm literatür bilgilerinin referans gösterilerek tezde yer aldığını, tamamen kendi çalışmam olduğunu, her alıntıya kaynak gösterdiğimi, tezin yazımında akademik ve etik kurallara aykırı herhangi bir yapay zeka ve program kullanmadığımı beyan ederim.

Gültekin ÇİLENGER



DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written in accordance with the academic and ethical principles of the Graduate School of Manisa Celal Bayar University, Department of English Language and Literature. I affirm that all the sources in this study have been properly cited and referenced that this thesis is entirely my own work and that all quotations have been duly acknowledged. I further declare that no form of artificial intelligence or software inconsistent with academic or ethical standards has been employed in the writing of this thesis.

Gültekin ÇİLENGER



ÖZET

Yüksek Lisans Tezi

Gültekin ÇİLENGER
Manisa Celal Bayar Üniversitesi
Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Anabilim Dalı

Danışman: Doç. Dr. Emre ÇAKAR

Bu çalışma, çağdaş, Britanyalı oyun yazarı Anthony Neilson'ın *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* ve *Realism* adlı oyunlarını Absürd Tiyatro bağlamında incelemektedir. Neilson her ne kadar geleneksel anlamda absürd yazarlar arasında yer almasa da eserlerinde bu türe ait birçok temel öğeye rastlanır. Bunlar arasında yapısal kopukluk, döngüsel diyaloglar, sahnelerdeki ani geçişler, tekrarlar, sessizlikler, iletişimsizlikler, yabancılaşma, anlamsızlık ve varoluşsal belirsizlik gibi öğelere sıkça yer verilir. Neilson'un karakterleri anlamsızlıkla çevrili bir gerçeklik içinde yön bulmaya çalışır. Anlamlı bir hayat arayışına girseler de içinde bulundukları sistemler bu arayışı sürekli boşa çıkarır. Bu durum Absürd Tiyatronun temelinde yer alan 'anlam arayışının sonuçsuzluğu' fikriyle örtüşür.

Oyunlarındaki sahneler kimi zaman gerçeklikten uzak, düşsel ya da grotesktir. Ancak bu kurgu yalnızca estetik bir tercih değil, aynı zamanda Neilson'ın çağdaş bireyin zihinsel çöküşünü ve kimlik krizini görünür kılma çabasıdır. Zihinsel sağlık sorunlarının, toplumsal yalnızlığın ve sistemin birey üzerindeki baskısının altı çizilir. Neilson'ın bu temaları işlerken kullandığı anlatım dili ve biçimsel tercihleri Absürd Tiyatro'nun modern biçimlerle nasıl evrildiğini gösterir.

Çalışma bu iki oyunu Martin Esslin'in absürd kuramı ve Britanya tiyatrosunun tarihsel gelişimi çerçevesinde değerlendirilmektedir. Ayrıca yazarın yaşadığı dönemdeki sosyal değişimlerin, Neilson'ın eserlerine nasıl yansıdığı da ele alınmaktadır. Çalışma sonucunda Neilson'ın oyunlarındaki absürd tiyatroya ait elementler tanımlanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Absürd Tiyatro, Anthony Neilson, Anlamsızlık, Yabancılaşma, Etkileşim

2025, 73 sayfa

ABSTRACT

M.A. Thesis

Gültekin ÇİLENGER

Manisa Celal Bayar University
Graduate School of Education
Department of English Language and Literature

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emre ÇAKAR

This study examines the plays *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism* by contemporary British playwright Anthony Neilson within the context of the Theatre of the Absurd. Although Neilson is not traditionally classified as an absurdist writer, many fundamental features of the genre appear in his works. These include structural fragmentation, cyclical dialogues, abrupt scene transitions, repetition, silence, miscommunication, alienation, meaninglessness, and existential uncertainty. Neilson's characters struggle to navigate a reality surrounded by absurdity. Although they search for a meaningful life, the systems they inhabit frequently limit this search. This limitation demonstrates the core idea of the Theatre of the Absurd: the futility of seeking meaning.

The scenes in Neilson's plays contain surreal, dreamlike, or grotesque elements. However, this is not an aesthetic choice; it also reveals Neilson's attempt to portray the psychological collapse and identity crisis of the modern individual. The plays deal with themes such as mental health issues, social isolation, and the oppressive nature of modern systems. Through his language and stylistic choices, Neilson demonstrates how absurd theatre has evolved into new forms in the contemporary British literature.

This study analyses *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism* in light of Martin Esslin's theory of the absurd and the historical development of British theatre. It also evaluates the reflection of the social transformation of Neilson's age in his works. As a result, the study identifies the absurdist elements within Neilson's plays.

Keywords: Theatre of the Absurd, Anthony Neilson, Meaninglessness, Alienation, Engagement

2025, 73 pages

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before expressing my thanks, I must acknowledge the long and repeating path that brought me to this point. For almost thirteen years, I remained in the same place, always preparing, always intending but never progressing. This repeated hesitation, the return to the beginning and the unfinished attempts made me feel like a small Sisyphus cycle of my own. In this sense, the entire process resembles the ‘absurd condition’; movement without advancement, intention without completion. Thus, the guidance and presence of my advisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Emre ÇAKAR gives ‘meaning’ to my ‘meaningless’ attempts. I would like to express my deepest gratitude to him for his support, patience and guidance. Without his encouragement, this study would have been another unfinished attempt. He has always been there for me as an advisor, a friend and like an older brother.

I also wish to thank my family for their support and love. They have always been there for me.

Finally, I would like to thank my loving wife, Duygu, for her patience, understanding and support.

Gültekin ÇİLENGER

Manisa, 2025

CONTENTS

ÖZET.....	IV
ABSTRACT.....	V
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	VI
CONTENTS.....	VII

INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Theatre of the Absurd.....	1

CHAPTER I

DRAMATIC WORKS OF ANTHONY NEILSON

1.1. Anthony Neilson and Theatre of the Absurd.....	20
---	----

CHAPTER II

MEANINGLESSNESS AND DISCONNECTION IN ANTHONY NEILSON'S THEATRE

2.1. Absurdity and Theatrical Experimentation in <i>The Wonderful World of Dissocia</i>	36
2.2. The Absurd Meets the Real: An Analysis of <i>Realism</i>	50
CONCLUSION.....	59
WORKS CITED.....	62

INTRODUCTION

One can easily state that almost every movement in literature resulted from big and impressive changes in society or they came into consideration as a reaction to literary movements which occurred before them. The Theatre of the Absurd is not an exception to this statement. The Theatre of the Absurd came into existence in the mid-20th century as a response to the chaos, disillusionment, and existential angst that occurred in post-World War II Europe. This revolutionary theatrical movement shattered conventional dramatic forms, challenging audiences to confront the absurdity of human existence. Through the works of playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, and Harold Pinter, the Theatre of the Absurd pushed the boundaries of traditional narrative, language, and character, offering a unique lens through which to examine the human condition. For the Absurdist playwrights, the world and the universe which covers the human condition, became irrational. According to Albert Camus, “the Absurd is a divorce between the mind and the world” (27). The rejection of traditional structures in the Theatre of the Absurd comes from a frustration with the idea that the modern world is logical and meaningful. Writers in this movement tried to show the contradictions and uncertainties of human life. They pointed the gap between expectation and reality. This disappointment with rationality sits at the centre of Absurdist thought.

At the centre of the Theatre of the Absurd, there is a deep disappointment in the idea that the modern world is rational. According to Ionesco, the absurd is “devoid of purpose ... cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (qtd. in Cornwell 3). In philosophy, absurdity is not simply nonsense or chaos. It refers to the idea that life has no fixed order. It is possible to say that the sense of contingency, the feeling that things could always be different, creates a feeling of absurdity. In this view, human freedom comes with the loss of stability or final meaning. This relationship between freedom and uncertainty shaped Western thought for a long time. Some philosophical traditions questioned the permanence of change, the reliability of perception or the coherence of rational systems. Some early thinkers even questioned the idea of change itself. Others doubted whether language could express truth. These ideas are connected to a wider uncertainty about the things we know and our experiences about the world. As traditional religious and metaphysical systems lost their authority, especially in modern times, this sense of instability became clearer. Rather than

offering clear guidance or universal meaning, philosophical thought increasingly embraced ambiguity, paradox and contradiction. This shift could be interpreted as part of a broader cultural movement in which absurdity is not just a theme but a condition, something embedded in the structure of human existence and perception itself (Cornwell 3). Life and man are both filled with the certainty of death and this makes life and the universe meaningless. Life leads nowhere and at the end of it man has nothing in his hands which belongs to the life he has lived for years. The first half of the twentieth century saw two world wars which deeply affected the second half of the century and they took place in a very short period. They both caused widespread destruction and left deep psychological and social problems across the world. The Second World War began only twenty-one years after the First World War and lasted six years. People who experienced the first war were deeply affected by the second one. After the first war, several totalitarian regimes came to power, including Stalin's Soviet Union, Franco's Spain, and Mussolini's Italy, each contributing to a climate of fear, repression, and violence. The new one caused fear, distrust and trauma. At the same time, the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki led to the sudden and tragic loss of thousands of lives. These events fundamentally changed the way people viewed human nature, political power, and technological progress. As the world became divided into Eastern and Western blocs, the Cold War began to shape international relations. During this time, the presence of radioactive materials and nuclear weapons created serious concerns about the future, especially regarding their long-term effects on human health and the environment. Unlike earlier wars, the Second World War was also a war against civilians, not just soldiers. Moreover, more than seventy million people, including both civilians and soldiers, died during the Second World War.

As a literary movement, the most effective event on the Absurd as mentioned above was World War II. The term 'the Theatre of the Absurd' refers to a group of playwrights active during the 1950s. They were mainly in Europe and England. This theatrical movement is strongly connected to the post-war period, both in time and in theme. Its development reflects the cultural and psychological impact of the war. Especially the sense of loss, confusion and disillusionment followed them. Martin Esslin states that "the decline of religious faith was masked until end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism, and various

totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by war” (4). Therefore, we can easily say that the Second World War was the trigger for absurdism.

It brought down all beliefs which had been settled before the war. Ideals, social values were among those beliefs. “The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions” (Esslin 4). Thus, it’s possible to state that the plays of the Theatre of the Absurd were set in a world shattered by war. Until the end of World War II, people hid the loss of religious belief behind new ideas like progress, nationalism and totalitarian ideologies. However, the war destroyed these beliefs. By 1942, Albert Camus was bravely asking why people should not commit suicide as a way out of this life, if it had no meaning (Esslin 4). As Camus states in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, “[t]here is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” (3). After two world wars the world was left in a state of disorder and uncertainty. The values, beliefs and systems that once gave meaning to life were no longer trusted. People felt confused, hopeless and disconnected. A deep sense of loss replaced the stability of past. This atmosphere of disorder, despair and uncertainty shaped the themes and structure of Absurdist plays. These plays generally focus on the individual’s growing awareness of one’s self. However, this awareness does not offer a solution, instead of the solution it causes suffering. The characters recognize their condition, but they are unable to escape from their condition. As Camus explains, “the absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (28). This ‘consciousness’ reveals that existence lacks a meaning. Once the illusion of harmony between beings and the world dissolves, the absurdity of their situation becomes clear. As things started to lose meaning and turn into illusions, life lost its meaning for those who experienced World War II. It is possible to state that the usual world of man became aimless, as Camus states life has turned out to be an ‘exile,’ he writes:

What, then, is that incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life? A world can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without

remedy, since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity. All healthy men having thought of their suicide, it can be seen, without further explanation, that there is a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death. (5)

As Camus explains in the quotation above, after the world loses its meaning and illusions, people are left feeling disconnected and lost. This sense of alienation is a natural response to living in a world that no longer feels familiar or comforting. When the world is no longer seen as a whole like it was seen before the war, individuals begin to feel like strangers in it. This feeling of being disconnected from their surroundings causes them to question their existence and the purpose of their life. Because they can no longer rely on the usual beliefs and explanations they had once upon a time. After those deep changes in man's life, the world is not seen as a whole anymore. It was corrupted, shattered. It's very normal to say that in a world like that people felt alienated from nature and they started to ask more questions about life. As people became more aware of their existence, they also started to recognize the concept of nothingness. With every feeling of hope, there was also a growing sense of despair. The logical ways of understanding the world were challenged by irrational thoughts and uncertainties. The rules that once helped people make sense of life no longer seemed acceptable in a world without order. Chaos took over and every single thing lost its place, making it difficult for individuals to find meaning. In such an environment, people naturally began to question everything they had once believed in and struggled to understand their purpose in life. All of these concepts made people think as they had worked hard for so many years to achieve things and after the mass effect of the war, everything suddenly disappeared; they started to ask themselves various questions about life and its meaning. The inability to find answers gave rise to new ways of thinking and in the realm of literature and theatre, this paved the way for the emergence of the Absurd as a defining concept.

Absurd, as a word, carries various meanings such as "meaningless, alienation, aimlessness, everydayness and duality" (Baker 2) and irrational, illogical and empty. However, the perception of the meaning depends on the perspective. While the structure and themes of Absurdist theatre might appear incoherent or illogical when compared to the conventions of traditional drama, they in fact reflect a deliberate

artistic choice grounded in a specific philosophical framework. The Theatre of the Absurd cannot be considered as 'illogical' within its own style. The Theatre of the Absurd is a genre that conveys the senselessness of life and portrays all actions and behaviour as futile. It reflects a world where traditional values and structures no longer make sense, and where language often fails to communicate clearly. Martin Esslin emphasizes that Absurd Theatre does not attempt to explain the absurd nature of human existence. Instead of this, it shows this on the stage; "The Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being - that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence" (Esslin 6). This is what absurdist playwrights do in their plays. They demonstrate the absurd man on the stage and do not ask why humans exist or if life has a meaning. They show people as emotionally distant and their characters behave like machines. Relationships have no real feeling. The audience sees pain, violence and sadness on the stage. For Laurence Kitchin, Absurd Theatre separates itself from traditional drama by rejecting its usual techniques and if life has no meaning and there is no higher purpose, then traditional drama forms lose their value (29). In Absurd Theatre, actions do not always come to appoint. Characters may not have a purpose and the plot is often missing. Furthermore, the absence of a coherent plot and a purposeful protagonist renders the epic form obsolete. These plays do not follow a structure in which a central character faces challenges and grows through a meaningful journey. There is no hero who takes action or fights for a clear cause. Instead, the characters often remain passive, confused or lost in repetition. Without a goal to pursue or a resolution to achieve, the idea of a heroic figure becomes irrelevant. This is why traditional epic elements have no place in the Theatre of the Absurd. Even the language is questioned as it is unable to make people communicate. Leaving old techniques behind creates a new way of expression.

Traditional drama and the Theatre of the Absurd differ in some ways. Traditional plays usually follow a systematic structure: beginning, middle and end. Absurd plays do not follow this regular order. Sometimes these parts are changed so much that they lose their usual shape. This fragmentation manipulates the expectations of the audience. It reflects the Absurdist aim to break away from linear stories and logical progress. Traditional drama depends on logic, cause and effect and Aristotle's rules. The Theatre of the Absurd rejects the structured logic and emotional

coherence, which is found in traditional plays. Instead, it reflects human confusion by means of disorder, repetition and uncertainty. This formal change reflects the unpredictability and chaos of real life. In traditional plays, characters develop, show emotions and follow a clear goal, which gives the audience direction. In Absurdist plays, characters often remain still. They seem distant from the world and from each other. They move through scenes that feel empty or without purpose. Their paralysis shows the emotional emptiness many people felt after events like World War II. Even though they speak, their language frequently fails to carry any meaning. Communication itself becomes fragmented or sometimes completely pointless.

Another point of difference can be seen in the tone of the plays. While traditional drama typically distinguishes between comedy and tragedy, the Theatre of the Absurd merges these modes within the same scene or moment. A conversation may shift from serious reflection to absurd humour without warning, blurring emotional boundaries. As a result, absurd plays rarely provide a clear moral or message, leaving audiences with ambiguity rather than resolution. Instead, they use silence, repetition and symbols to make the audience think (Acarlıoğlu 23). We see more than actions on the stage and it is mostly the character and their pain as life appears meaningless. The mixture of humour and despair serves not to entertain but to unsettle, compelling the audience to confront the absurdity of human existence. Instead of offering a clear plot or resolution, it focuses on repetition, silence and meaningless conversations to show how people feel, how they are lost and confused. Every word, every silence and every small act makes the audience think. In traditional plays, speech supports the plot. However, Absurd theatre abandons coherent plots, logical dialogue and psychologically consistent characters, replacing them with fragmentation, repetition and irrationality. Words and actions often repeat and every detail becomes a symbol for the audience.

The rejection of realism is not accidental but on purpose. This intentional rejection is related to the question of meaning, communication or order, whether they are possible in a chaotic world. Absurd plays push the audience to ask if life has any real meaning at all. This reaction has its roots in the trauma and confusion of the post-war years. We can see these ideas clearly in writers like Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Jean Genet and Harold Pinter. In *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett shows two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait for someone called Godot who never

shows up. Their repeated conversations and empty routines represent the futility of time and the emptiness of human hope. In Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*, even language loses meaning. Characters repeat the same lines and still fail to communicate. This shows the collapse of logic and human interaction. Their plays highlight themes such as absurdity, alienation and existential doubt. Writers like Beckett and Ionesco show the strange and empty situations of modern life, and also make the audience question logic, language and purpose by way of unusual structures, broken dialogues and surreal moments. In this sense, the Theatre of the Absurd breaks the rules of traditional drama and displays a world in which meaning is unstable and people often struggle to understand themselves and each other.

When the element of uncertainty is considered, it is observed that people look for meaning in personal ideals such as hope or dreams. Search for meaning creates a kind of emotional comfort in a fragmented world. However, WWII led to huge destruction, the loss of life and the collapse of moral and social order, which caused people to question everything they once trusted. For example, faith, progress, justice or even the simple flow of life began to be felt empty. In this confused atmosphere, many people started to feel a strong sense of existential disappointment, which became an important part of Absurdist thought. The disappointment of people did not only shape the themes of Absurdist drama, but also shaped its form, tone and purpose.

Many people think that some ideas like 'hope' and 'dreams' give meaning to life. These ideals make us deal with problems; however, these ideals were still meaningful and offered comfort when life felt uncertain. But after WWII, the foundation of these ideals collapsed, and thus it became hard to believe in such things. As these inner beliefs began to fade away, people became more open to existential crises and emotional distance. World War II diminished these ideals, causing dramatic changes in society. Traditional values, such as faith in religion and trust in the church, slowly lost their power. Cities grew crowded and people were pushed into chaotic, stressful lives. This new lifestyle made them produce more and consume more than ever. In the meantime, machines began to control humans, turning people into mere objects. Emotions were replaced by conflicting ideas and interests. As a result, people became alienated from their nature. When it is analysed from the absurdist point of view, life is full of opposites: logic and irrationality, harmony and chaos, right and

wrong, joy and fear, hunger and satisfaction, and most importantly, existence and non-existence exist all together.

The Theatre of the Absurd was first mentioned by the Hungarian-born critic Martin Esslin to define some plays written in post-war period, 1950s and 1960s. In his article, written in May 1960, he defines Absurd Plays as 'anti-plays' and says;

At first sight these plays do, indeed, confront their public with a bewildering experience, a veritable barrage of wildly irrational, often non-sensical goings-on that seem to go counter to all accepted standards of stage convention. In these plays, some of which are labelled "anti-plays," neither the time nor the place of the action are ever clearly stated. The characters hardly have any individuality and often even lack a name; moreover, halfway through the action they tend to change their nature completely. (1)

Esslin's description outlines how Absurdist plays challenge conventional theatrical norms by distorting structure, character and setting. Many contemporary playwrights such as Ionesco, Albee, Beckett and Pinter reflected the principles of the Theatre of the Absurd in their works, particularly through their rejection of traditional dramatic forms. These Absurdist plays do not follow traditional forms or structures, as a result, those logical structures along with familiar characters or realistic dialogue have been ignored. This can confuse the audience and sometimes it even disappoints them. In a traditional play, the audience might expect a clear message or conclusion. However, this confusion is not a coincidence for the audience of Absurdist theatre. It reflects the idea that life has no purpose or meaning, which is central to Absurdist theatre. Traditional drama tries to show the world as it is and presents believable characters in realistic situations. Absurd theatre does the opposite. It breaks these expectations (Eradam 157). This formal change is not only a stylistic stance, but also shows an existential problem about the limits of logic, communication and realism on stage.

There is one important step in this artistic rebellion, it is the idea of the 'anti-play', which marks a turning point in the development of Absurdist theatre. Esslin used the term in his criticism, but the idea actually comes from Eugene Ionesco. Regarding the term anti-play, Ionesco originally introduced it to describe the way his early works that break down traditional dramatic structure. This can be seen clearly in *The Bald Soprano*, first published in 1950. Rather, Ionesco dealt with fragmentation, repetition and verbal absurdity to criticise the conventions of bourgeois theatre. In his

collection *Notes and Counter Notes* (1964), Ionesco explicitly labels *The Bald Soprano* as an 'anti-play', describing it as a parody of realism and the so-called 'well-made play' where language loses its function as a tool of communication (Ionesco 179-180). By doing so, he transformed the stage into a site where meaning collapses and absurdity becomes the only consistent element. While these early experiments emerged independently, their formal innovations and existential undertones paralleled the philosophical crisis of post-war Europe. This existential crisis, marked by loss, absurdity and disillusionment, intensely shaped the artistic expression of the time. In 1962, this connection was later clearly explained and organized by Esslin in *The Theatre of the Absurd*, where he brought together writers like Ionesco, Beckett, Genet and Adamov under a common artistic and philosophical idea. Esslin argued that even though these playwrights worked independently, their plays shared similar vision: they all reflected the belief that human life lacks clear meaning and that logical thinking cannot solve the deeper problems of existence (5-6). In this way, the concept of the 'anti-play' which at first was only a personal and experimental reaction against the rules of traditional theatre, turned into an important part of a wider theatrical movement. This movement aimed to reflect the emotional and philosophical confusion of the modern world and to question whether meaning or purpose could truly be found in life at all. Thus, Ionesco's style was considered literary rebellion, and later it evolved into a principle of a new theatrical model.

Among the central concerns of the Absurdist drama, one can follow the themes such as alienation, existential doubt, communication breakdown and the search for meaning. These ideas display the emotional and philosophical disorientation experienced by individuals in the contemporary age. Absurdist playwrights do not approach these themes through structured narratives or traditional character development. Instead, they expose the instability of human experience by portraying fragmented realities, illogical dialogues and repetitive behaviours that underline the lack of coherence in daily life. Esslin explains that the feeling of 'meaninglessness' is so common in the plays of many absurdist writers; "... the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought" (5). This theme affects both the content and the form of the plays. As a result, audiences often struggle to make sense of what they are watching. But

interestingly they still react emotionally to these plays. Even if they do not fully understand the message, they feel something. This emotional response becomes part of the absurd experience. Therefore, audiences have difficulty understanding these plays, as Esslin states,

The plays of Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov, and Eugene Ionesco have been performed with astonishing success in France, Germany, Scandinavia, and the English-speaking countries. This reception is all more puzzling when one considers that the audiences concerned were amused by and applauded these plays fully aware that they could not understand what they meant of what their authors were driving at. (1)

It is possible to understand from the quote above one possible reason for the confusion that the audience experience lies in the unpredictable structure and changing tones of these plays. In the same scene, the mood can change from emotional poetry to comedy and dialogue often loses control with words. Moreover, it is sometimes possible to witness contradictions between the words and what's happening on the stage which might make the audience think that everything that occurs on the stage is lacking meaning and happening randomly. When the spoken words contradict the onstage actions, the audience may perceive the performance as senseless or arbitrary. This intentional confusion illustrates a core principle in Absurdist theatre that human life is shaped by contradiction and fragmentation rather than harmony or coherence. The Absurd tradition suggests that people often face opposite ideas and emotions at the same time. Nothing in life is completely logical and nothing is completely irrational either. These two sides mix together. A person can feel happy and sad at the same time. Hope and fear can appear in the same moment. In Absurdist thought, this is normal. Human life does not follow clear rules or reasons. Order and disorder can exist in the same place. What feels right to one person may seem wrong to another. Fear can come with joy and hunger can come with satisfaction. These emotions do not always come one by one. They often come together and make life confusing.

The confusion described above includes feeling many emotions at once. It also includes the collapse of logic. The emotional and mental chaos can be observed in Absurdist theatre. In this type of drama, instability is shown openly. Playwrights use unusual structures, broken dialogue and strong symbolic images to express it. These choices show the characters' inner turmoil and point to the absurd nature of their lives.

Absurdist playwrights do not try to explain life in simple terms; instead, they show life as it is; it is a mixture of conflicting emotions and ideas. In such a life, the meaning and meaninglessness stand side by side. Absurdist writers present a world that shifts between extremes. People in this world feel unsure about where they belong. By rejecting clear narratives and psychological realism, these plays lead the audience to face the disturbing truth of their own fragmented experience. This tension shows that absurdity is not separated from reality. It is part of reality itself. One strong expression of this confusion is the sense of existence and non-existence. The Theatre of the Absurd reminds us that life can end at any moment, and we live with this awareness. This produces a constant feeling of uncertainty. It also shows that people search for meaning, but rarely find clear answers. This dramatic approach reflects the post-war despair that shaped much of twentieth-century literature. All of these ideas are central to absurd theatre. And these ideas explain the strangeness of these plays, yet at the same time, the situations reflected in those plays are strangely real. It is through this emotional contradiction that the audience identifies with the characters on stage, despite their surreal or illogical surroundings.

The sense of strangeness can also be traced in the representation of characters. In Absurdist plays, characters have no hope for the future and cannot escape their present situation. Their lives are often full of repetition, confusion and a lack of purpose. These characters are not on traditional journeys of transformation. They exist in a suspended state. It is possible to state that they are caught between action and inaction. One can easily see in *Waiting for Godot*, where Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly talk about leaving but never actually move. This highlights the typical paralysis of the Absurdist characters. They speak in the play, but their words are unable to create communication between the characters. Characters move but never arrive anywhere. In this way, their physical immobility reflects their psychological condition, which is defined by hesitation and hopelessness. Such figures embody the existential uncertainty that defines absurdist theatre as they wander through settings that seem detached from any stable logic or reality. Even a badly explained world feels familiar to people, but when the world suddenly loses its meaning and light, people feel like strangers. Consequently, they feel exiled; further, they have no memory of a safe past and no hope for the future. This alienation is not only psychical or social but also deeply psychological. It creates a break between the self and its

surroundings. It makes identity itself unstable and uncertain. With these portrayals, absurdist dramatists show characters not as individuals who control of their own lives but as symbols of the wider human condition. They move through a universe that gives no clear answers. This metaphorical use of character is central to absurdism and also the criticism of modern life.

The break between the person and their life creates the feeling of absurdity. We can say that Camus's idea of 'the feeling of absurdity' appears clearly in Absurdist plays. Camus explains this feeling as a conflict between our need for clarity, meaning and purpose, and the indifference of the universe. People ask questions and hope for answers, but they face a reality which has no answers to their questions. This conflict produces another confusion. For Camus, absurdity does not come from the world alone. In other words, it comes from the tension between our expectations and the world's refusal to meet them. For this reason, the Absurd is not only a theme, but also a full philosophical framework that shapes every part of these plays. In the Theatre of the Absurd, this existential struggle is not explained through direct statements or logical dialogues. Instead, it is shown through the actions and conditions of the characters. The characters are disconnected from their surroundings, their memories are broken and they have no purpose in life. The characters on stage encounter the absurdity of their existence and the world they are in. They do not want to repeat the same routines, but they also cannot break free from their routines either. One can also state that they fear what is outside their routines. They feel like they are trapped. That is why they always stay in their meaningless lives, just like Vladimir and Estragon do in *Waiting for Godot*. Their suffering comes from being stuck between two things: knowing that life is absurd but not knowing what to do with this knowledge. Although they want to leave, they never manage to do so. Waiting has become their only reason to exist and they do not know what they are waiting for or what would happen if Godot ever arrived. This endless cycle of repetition and hesitation reflects Camus's concept perfectly. It reveals the futility of action by referring to a system in which meaning is absent, but it is longed for. Nothing ever truly changes, yet everything seems to repeat itself in an endless cycle. In this sense, Beckett's characters become powerful symbols of the absurd condition, trapped in routines, haunted by uncertainty and unable to move forward. Their silent struggle echoes the core of Camus' philosophy: life may be without clear meaning, but we must still face it, live it and endure its contradictions.

The emotional and existential conflict is not only reflected in character behaviour and dialogue but also expressed through various stage elements and formal contrasts. In addition to this, showing the elements in contrast is one of the particular techniques of Absurd drama, for example, the opposition of exit and entrance, light and shadow, laughter and melancholy in costume, voice and behaviour as if they were the interactions of human puppets rather than psychologically motivated individuals. They all happen in the absence of logical motivation and without connection to human characters, emotions and goals (Esslin 4). Such disjointed staging techniques strengthen the atmosphere of alienation and reflect the fractured nature of both the characters' inner lives and the world they inhabit. The plays usually show us a universe in which traditional values and structures break down leaving the characters struggling with the lack of meaning and present a world surrounded by alienation and isolation. The world is portrayed as a confusing place. The audience observes the events from a distant viewpoint and like a stranger in a new country who doesn't fully understand the language spoken there. They witness the events without fully understanding. Characters generally find themselves isolated from others in society and they are unable to make meaningful connections with the audience and the audience. Thus, the audience sometimes follows the characters and events without fully understanding.

In an absurd play, one can easily feel the great social alienation in the post-war era. As a result of this alienation, characters struggle to convey meaningful messages. For Bertolt Brecht, when the audience is unable to identify the characters, it is 'Verfremdungseffekt' which is also called 'alienation effect'. Therefore, one can easily state that 'alienation effect' suits well in the Theatre of the Absurd. Brecht regarded theatre as a tool for social and political change. He created the theatre which rejected illusion and focused on direct presentation. His aim was to educate but not to entertain. Brecht wanted the audience to think, not to feel. Actors were not expected to fully become their characters. Instead, they quoted lines and performed gestures with a certain distance both to themselves and to the audience. He broke traditional dramatic forms to create the alienation effect (Yiğit 20). Thanks to this effect, the audience understands social problems with a critical mind.

In this type of theatre, characters and their motives are often difficult to understand. Because of this, the audience struggles to identify with them. This creates

a sense of distance from what happens on stage. It becomes difficult to form an emotional connection with any character. Absurd theatre shows inner conflict by rejecting traditional methods. It uses symbolic elements to express feelings of alienation. Ordinary reality cannot fully show these symbolic and psychological states. So, the theatre creates its own logic and its own form. In this way, it forces the audience to face their own disconnection from the world. Language is one of the main elements that creates this distance. It does not bring clarity, yet it confuses and disorients as well.

Playwrights of the Theatre of the Absurd often use language as a kind of parody. They employ language against its normal purpose; in other words, instead of giving a clear meaning, their language shows the breaking down of expressions. Also, it signifies the loss of the communication power of language. According to those playwrights, language no longer reflects reality; it is reduced to repetitive patterns, empty forms, and clichés. This deterioration in language shows a wider idea: It suggests that language does not bring people closer to truth; rather, it becomes a barrier between the person and the real world. Hence, language turns into a closed system of signs, which is cut off from real experience. In these plays, speech is employed as a broken agency, in which conversations go nowhere and end without meaning. This collapse of dialogue reproduces the collapse of meaning itself; for example, characters express even simpler thoughts. Because of this, absurdist writers turn to symbols, images and basic archetypes to express their concerns. Turning into something strange and sometimes nonsensical, language reflects the confusion and alienation of modern life.

When the breakdown of meaning on stage is regarded, it becomes obvious that it is not randomly represented on the stage. A meaning breakdown shows the failure of language to capture the complexity of human existence, so it pushes the audience away from simple surface meaning. Through this confusion, the audience is guided toward something more basic and more honest. This simplicity should not be compared to emptiness; yet it is a deliberate move away from rational discussion and traditional theatre rules. It is a conscious choice to leave behind old literary forms. As Esslin notes, “the element of ‘pure’ abstract theatre in the theatre of the Absurd is an aspect of its anti-literary attitude, its turning away from language as an instrument for the expression of the deepest levels of meaning” (272). In this sense, the collapse of

communication on stage is not a failure, but an artistic choice. This way of using language suggests that traditional discourse can no longer express the difficult and confusing nature of modern life.

Unlike Absurdist writers, who stress the weakness of language, Brecht saw language as a strong tool. Brecht employed language as an element of thought-provocation and as a means of raising social awareness. In epic theatre, for example, language delivers a clear idea, because Brecht believed that words could lead the audience to think. However, this creates a problem. The actor must play the role, yet s/he must not fully become the character. These two aims conflict with each other. In normal acting, the performer tries to be the character. Brecht wanted the opposite. The actor should keep a distance from his/her role; instead, the role should be shown, not lived. At this point, Brecht found a way to solve this problem and used the alienation effect. This technique reminds the audience that they are watching a play. The actor does not disappear into the role. Instead, the actor shows it. Language makes this distance clear. In this context, speech becomes a performative gesture rather than a natural expression, and it aims to engage the audience intellectually rather than emotionally. The goal is to make the audience think, not feel (Yiğit 17). Through this method, Brecht breaks the illusion and invites the audience to stay alert and critical.

Alienation is also connected to the lack of communication. In the Theatre of the Absurd, people are isolated. They cannot connect with themselves, with others or with the world around them. They become strangers to their own emotions and their environment. This leads to a loss of inner identity and human values. Brecht deals with a similar idea through his alienation effect. He uses songs, masks, narrators and written signs. These tools are not common in traditional theatre. Their purpose is to break the illusion of realism. They show the audience that the play is a constructed piece of art, not real life. This breaks the emotional connection between the audience and the story. The break is intentional. It makes the audience think more deeply about what they are watching. They do not just get carried away by the plot. They become active thinkers who look for social or political meaning. Brecht believed that theatre should educate as well as entertain. For this reason, he asked actors to keep a distance from their roles. They should not fully become the character. They should show the role. They often speak in a controlled way and this reminds the audience that they are performing. In this method, the character is not someone the actor is. It is someone

the actor shows. This gives the audience space to judge the character more critically instead of feeling emotional attachment. The audience is also encouraged to stay alert and emotionally detached. The goal is not to make them feel what the characters feel. Instead, they should question why the characters act as they do. They should notice the ideas behind each scene. Brecht hoped that this awareness would continue outside the theatre. He wanted people to think about real issues and maybe take action in their own lives. In this way, alienation becomes a strong tool. It supports the critical aims of modern theatre. It proves that the stage is not only a place for emotional stories. It can also be a place for learning, questioning and social change (Yiğit 19).

The Theatre of the Absurd began with the idea of using all theatrical elements in new ways. Its main goal was to draw attention to the stage itself, not to language. In traditional theatre, a script can often stand on its own as a literary work. But Absurdist plays depend on performance. Without staging, they feel incomplete because much of their meaning comes from visual and sound elements. In these plays, masks, sound effects, lighting and technical devices play a central role. They reflect the mechanical and repetitive nature of modern life. Absurd writers also avoid realistic settings. They do not follow familiar ideas of time and place. Instead, they create abstract or unclear spaces. These settings do not follow logical rules. The stage often feels like a dream or even a nightmare. This distortion shows the characters' inner confusion. It also supports the idea that reality itself is unstable. This instability appears not only in the setting but also in the tone. Comedy and tragedy are mixed in an uneasy way. The Theatre of the Absurd does not use normal comedic forms. It blends tragic and comic elements to create a grotesque effect. This mix exposes the emptiness and monotony of daily routines. The absurd does not rely on language as its main tool of expression. Instead, it uses the stage as a whole to express meaning. It does not aim to convince the audience through clear or logical speech. Unlike Brecht's epic theatre, it avoids giving direct messages or asking the audience to take a specific side. Absurd plays do not follow a didactic method, as they neither aim to teach a lesson nor present an argument. Instead, the effect is achieved through the atmosphere on the stage. Silence, repetition, strange movements and visual elements create a sense of distance. The audience is reminded that what they see is not part of the real world. This reflects on what is happening and it is done without being emotionally absorbed. Meaning is not delivered through statements but through form,

rhythm and tension. In this way, the Theatre of the Absurd reaches a level of awareness that does not depend on traditional explanation or logical argument.

In traditional theatre, the audience is encouraged to become involved in the performance, often suspending their awareness of its artificial nature. The focus shifts to the unfolding narrative, as the audience anticipates the outcome with heightened emotional engagement. The stage serves as a mirror of real life, stimulating the illusion of reality. However, this constructed illusion produces a sense of authenticity. Brecht criticised this effect. He believed that theatre should not hide the fact that it is a performance (71). He defined an idea of 'fourth wall', which is a barrier between the stage and the audience that should be made visible through alienation. He aimed to provide critical distance and intellectual engagement through what he called the alienation effect. In this way, Brecht wanted the audience to remain alert, rather than becoming emotionally absorbed, so that they could reflect critically on the social and political issues presented on the stage. For Brecht, theatre was not just a form of entertainment but a tool for awakening awareness and encouraging change. To achieve this, he introduced narrative elements and deliberately exposed the mechanics of performance. As Brecht notes,

The stage began to tell a story. The narrator was no longer missing, along with the fourth wall. Not only did the background adopt an attitude to the events on the stage – by big screens recalling other simultaneous events elsewhere, by projecting documents which confirmed or contradicted what the characters said, by concrete and intelligible figures to accompany abstract conversations, by figures and sentences to support mimed transactions whose sense was unclear – but the actors too refrained from going over wholly into their role, remaining detached from the character they were playing and clearly inviting criticism of him. (71)

The scenery, actors and even projections took on a critical stance. They sometimes confirmed or contradicted the events on the stage. The actor refrained from fully immersing into the role, clearly inviting the audience to analyse and question rather than empathize blindly. The goal was to provoke critical awareness, not passive emotional identification. In contrast, the Theatre of the Absurd takes a different approach. Rather than building a 'fourth wall', Absurd tears it down completely. The audience is not allowed to become fully immersed in the play. Identification with the

characters is limited. The narrative lacks traditional structure and the outcome is often uncertain or missing. This prevents the passive consumption of the performance, and it creates an active space in which the audience is encouraged to question what they see and how it relates to their own lives. Through confusion, silence, repetition and illogical dialogue, the audience often feels disconnected, which shows the emotional and philosophical uncertainty of the characters. Unlike epic or didactic theatre that tries to deliver clear messages, the Theatre of the Absurd avoids guiding the audience toward a fixed conclusion. The playwright stays outside the content and does not dictate a meaning. The responsibility of interpretation falls on the audience. They are not given answers, alternatively they are left with questions that reflect their own lives. This process matches the absurdist belief that life has no clear meaning and that logical systems cannot fully explain it. Therefore, the theatre becomes a mirror of human confusion. The lack of clarity becomes a tool to make people think rather than to comfort them. As a result, the audience is pushed to reflect on their own reality and this often happens through confusion and discomfort.

When the audience first enters the world of the Theatre of the Absurd, it feels unfamiliar. The scenes may look meaningless or random. This unfamiliar feeling comes from the fact that Absurd plays do not offer clear logic, emotional progress or a sense of direction. In this context, traditional storytelling is replaced by disorder, silence and repetition. The traditional rules of drama do not work, and this creates confusion. However, after a while, the audience begins to see their own lives in this absurd world. The stage becomes a reflection for personal and shared struggles. The characters' confusion, repetition or silence reflect the audience's own experiences of alienation. In this way, the Theatre of the Absurd does not offer a solution. It creates a moment of inner reflection. Moreover, it shows that the search for meaning is part of the human condition. Even if the story does not have a clear structure or ending, the emotional effect remains. The emotional effect is related to the discomfort created by irrational or silent moments, and it invites the audience to face their own fears, anxieties and unanswered questions. Through this indirect path, Absurd Theatre reaches a result similar to Brecht's aim. It does not order the audience to think. It lets them arrive at that point by themselves. Emotional distance, reflective thinking and intellectual attention are not achieved through teaching. They emerge through form, silence and uncertainty. By rejecting traditional storytelling, Absurd Theatre forces

the audience to take part in the meaning-making process. Each interpretation becomes personal and open-ended. This deepens the theatrical experience and brings out private truths. For this reason, one can say that the Theatre of the Absurd is not only unique but also transformative. Instead of giving answers, it holds up a broken mirror in which each person can find their own meaning. This makes the Absurd both challenging and liberating. Therefore, it is possible to state that the Absurd is a rare combination in modern theatre.

Throughout the history of the theatre, the idea of destruction and abstraction was not given full attention until the emergence of the Theatre of the Absurd. Earlier theatrical forms mostly focused on structure, illusion and coherence. However, Absurd Theatre challenged these expectations. It achieved a level of disruption and detachment. This movement broke away from the core elements of traditional drama. Language, plot, character and narrative unity were no longer central. Instead, these tools were minimized or removed entirely. Absurd Theatre rejected fixed forms and dramatic logic. It questioned the purpose of the theatrical conventions developed over centuries. A stripped-down version of the theatre remained, and it no longer aimed to represent the world or teach moral lessons. Instead, it presented the human condition in its most direct and exposed form. The stage became a space where meaning was not given but questioned. This shift marked a radical turn in modern theatre; in other words, it is possible to state that it redefined it as an existential experience rather than a narrative one.

CHAPTER I

DRAMATIC WORKS OF ANTHONY NEILSON

1.1. Anthony Neilson and Theatre of the Absurd

In the 1990s, British theatre saw the rise of a small and influential group of playwrights. Their works left a strong impression on both critics and audiences. This new generation appeared during a time of cultural, political and economic change. Accordingly, these shifts shaped their themes and their style. These writers dealt with extreme psychological and emotional states, and also, they often focused on mental instability, physical trauma and emotional isolation. Their plays included graphic violence, open sexuality and harsh language. These elements drew public attention and created a bold new direction for British theatre (Sierz *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, 57). Throughout history, some significant periods in British theatre have been mentioned with the names of important playwrights; for example, the Elizabethan era is usually connected to William Shakespeare. His unique style and famous plays shaped the identity of that period. Shakespeare's work showed the fears and hopes of his time, and it also created a model for later writers to question their own societies.

In a similar way, playwrights of our century play an important role in forming what people call the 'Britishness' of British theatre (Sierz *In-Yer-Face Theatre*, xi). Writers such as Sarah Kane, Anthony Neilson, Mark Ravenhill and Philip Ridley became central voices for questioning the idea of Britishness. They did not hesitate to challenge the audience or break traditional storytelling. Their plays changed both the language and the structure of theatre. The stage became more direct, more physical and more intense. Through fragmented stories, non-linear timelines and emotionally heightened dialogue, they reshaped the connection between the stage and the audience. Their aim was not only to entertain, but also to make the viewers face uncomfortable truths about themselves and their societies. This new wave, often called 'in-yer-face theatre,' was marked by its intensity and emotional rawness. It refused to avoid the grotesque or the extreme. By showing scenes that were intentionally harsh or uncomfortable, it tried to break the traditional distance between performance and real experience.

This theatrical change did not occur in isolation. Every historical moment leaves behind social and political consequences that influence the cultural expressions

of the next generation. Theatre, as one of these cultural expressions, often responds directly to the mood of its time. It reflects this mood through its form, its content or its tone. For this reason, the rise of in-her-face theatre can be seen as a reaction to earlier social tensions; therefore, it did not appear all at once. This new style grew slowly out of a longer history of unrest and formal experimentation. For example, British Drama underwent a transformation in the 1950s with John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956), which re-energised the stage with the frustration and resentment of the working class that is embodied by the character of Jimmy Porter. The intense emotional tone of the play and its focus on social inequality opened a new path for future playwrights to adopt similar critical perspectives. Similarly, Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1957), which is often associated with the Theatre of the Absurd and Theatre of Menace, depicts a protagonist, Stanley. In the play, Stanley tries to build a small and safe world for himself, but this world is destroyed by the strange threat of Goldberg and McCann. Their arrival breaks his sense of personal space and psychological stability. This reflects deeper fears about control, surveillance, the loss of identity, and fears. The disruption on stage corresponds with the worries of the audience about losing themselves and being invaded by outside forces. In 1965, Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) introduced one of the most controversial scenes of British theatre. A baby is stoned to death on stage, which shocks audiences and gives a signal of the arrival of more confrontational forms of drama. The intensity and directness of this moment challenged the audience's expectations. It also pushed the limits of what was seen as acceptable on stage; thus, such images became more common in later decades. However, these early examples showed that British theatre was moving towards bolder and more uncomfortable subjects.

The cultural and political climate of the 1980s, especially under Margaret Thatcher, shaped the change in drama. During these years, the relationship between the government and the cultural sector changed in clear ways. Thatcher's support for neoliberal values, including strong individualism, weakened the traditional role of the theatre for political and social criticism. Theatre was no longer seen mainly as a tool for public reflection. It began to be judged more by its financial success. As funding decreased and commercial pressure increased, reflective and complex plays were replaced by high-earning musicals and large spectacles. In this climate, theatre lost

much of its emotional and intellectual intensity. Artistic risk was harder to defend under economic pressure. Political ideas on stage began to be considered too divisive or not profitable. For British playwrights like Anthony Neilson, these conditions had a strong influence, because Neilson grew up during a time of industrial decline, social tension and political distrust. His plays show themes of disconnection, inner struggle and doubt towards institutions. The shrinking welfare state, rising unemployment and weakening public services can be felt in the helpless or confused characters in his works. Many of these characters seem lost inside the very systems that should support them. They show feelings of purposelessness, identity problems and existential anxiety. They rarely reach any kind of resolution, which reflects a wider loss of faith in social structures and shared values. The decline of family life along with health problems and the vanishing of community during Thatcher's era, stand behind Neilson's disturbing stage worlds. These worlds are often absurd, sometimes surreal, but they are always connected to real pressures. Even when the plays avoid direct political language, they carry the emotional weight of a decade shaped by structural change.

Margaret Thatcher has a unique place in British political history. She was the first woman to become Prime Minister. She was also the first leader in the twentieth century to win three general elections in a row. Her time in office was the longest of any British Prime Minister in that century. Moreover, her position seems more unusual because an entire ideology was named after her; 'Thatcherism'. This ideology shaped politics and social life in the 1980s. It is known for supporting free market ideas, personal responsibilities and smaller roles for the state. As the state stepped back from areas it once supported, people were pushed to depend more on themselves and less on public services. When Thatcher entered Parliament on 4 May 1970, Britain was facing a serious economic crisis. Inflation was high. Unemployment was rising. Industrial conflict was common. Public morale was low, strikes were frequent and many people worried about national productivity. Thatcher introduced strong reforms, but these reforms also created division. Some groups benefited from new freedoms in the market. Others, especially working-class communities, encountered greater insecurity, and many sectors of the working class suffered. Strikes, protests and political tension became part of daily life. Although she ruled for many years, she did not leave office because of public elections. She was forced to resign by her own party

on 28 November 1990. Her departure ended a turbulent political period, but it did not end her ideological influence. Thatcher's leadership changed politics and culture. It also shaped the world that many playwrights later responded to, either directly or through symbolic and experimental forms. Cultural works from this period often carry the mark of her era, even when they avoid open references to its politics.

As Britain moved into a new decade, Margaret Thatcher lost her position as Prime Minister. Many critics compare her political fall to the tragic endings of figures like Macbeth or Julius Caesar. This comparison shows both the size of her influence and the dramatic way she was removed from office. According to Billington, this change left serious political and cultural effects, especially on British theatre (Billington *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* 325). Thatcher saw theatre not as a cultural need but as a financial burden. She treated it like any other sector of the economy. Instead of considering its educational or social value, her administration evaluated theatre mainly in terms of cost and economic return. Her government reduced public support for the arts. These cuts changed the structure of British theatre in two important ways. First, as Aleks Sierz explains, theatres became more focused on making money than taking artistic risks (Sierz *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s*, 31). In other words, artistic experimentation became less common as theatres prioritized productions with greater box office appeal. Second, as Billington describes, a "siege-mentality" developed, and then theatres became cautious and started to treat ticket sales as the highest priority (Billington *One Night Stands: A Critic's View of Modern British Theatre* 328). As a result, musicals dominated the stage, and new plays by young writers were increasingly avoided by theatres. Proven formulas and familiar formats were seen as safer options. Therefore, the number of productions staged each year gradually declined. At the same time, audience habits also began to shift. While audiences in the 1970s were still open to political or socialist plays, in the 1980s they became more conservative and started to reject overt political messages, preferring safer and more familiar content instead. This change was partly shaped by the broader political atmosphere of the time where public trust in collective solutions had weakened. This period became known as a time when a few older playwrights wrote plays for a narrow, middle-aged audience (Broich 207). Younger voices found it harder to gain space and experimental approaches were often sidelined in favour of material that felt more predictable.

Due to funding cuts and the new economic approach to theatre, many directors and critics believed that British theatre was in a state of stagnation. New writing was now in decline. Fresh ideas and unknown writers were no longer seen as a priority. David Edgar observed that directors had lost confidence in new work and thought it had run out of energy (19). Because of financial limits, theatres began to prefer plays with small casts, short durations and minimal sets. This shift was partly a practical response to budget constraints, but it also reflected a growing hesitation to take creative risks. Michael Billington explains the situation clearly. He says that “new writing for theatre is in a state of crisis” and added that it no longer held the central role it once had in British theatre (360). This statement points to a major change in the operation of the theatre and in the encouragement or ignorance of new talent during this period.

The limits placed on theatre in the 1980s, especially the heavy funding cuts under Margaret Thatcher, created the background for a new and more provocative style. As the space for public criticism grew smaller in mainstream institutions, theatre became one of the few places in which social unrest could still be demonstrated and discussed. Political pressure and economic restrictions pushed many young writers to look for new ways to express dissatisfaction. These writers had little support from institutions. Therefore, they used directness and intensity to draw attention to urgent issues. Themes such as violence, sexuality and social decline began to appear on the stage. These themes became tools for criticism. The stage was no longer a safe or neutral place; rather, it turned into a space of confrontation with the reality. This environment prepared the ground for what later became known as ‘in-yer-face theatre’. In the early 1990s, a group of writers began creating plays that were aggressive, disturbing and emotionally intense. These plays shocked audiences and critics. They showed explicit scenes of sex and physical violence. Their language was raw, vulgar and openly offensive. These choices were not random. They were a reaction to a cultural climate where polite disagreement no longer felt enough. These writers were not trying to shock for its own sake. They wanted to show the darker sides of modern life. They represented a world that is shaped by inequality, alienation and moral uncertainty. By putting uncomfortable truths directly on stage, they rejected traditional storytelling. They did not aim to entertain or comfort the audience. They demanded attention, reaction and sometimes even anger. This emotional pressure

became a key part of the style. Through this intense approach, ‘in-yer-face theatre’ became a form of resistance against the political and cultural atmosphere of the Thatcher years. Even when the plays were not openly political, their style challenged the expectations that had shaped British theatre for so long.

Anthony Neilson, a contemporary figure in both Scottish and British theatre, was born in 1967 into a family deeply rooted in the performing arts. His mother, Beth Robens, was an actress, and his father, Sandy Neilson, worked as both an actor and a theatre director. Being raised in such an environment likely exposed him to the vocabulary, routines and emotional textures of the theatrical world from an early age. According to Joyce McMillan, Neilson spent much of his childhood in rehearsal rooms and backstage spaces, which gave him the chance of observing the unstable but emotionally rich world of theatre firsthand; he “spent a backstage childhood following his parents around the theatres and rehearsal rooms of the country” (qtd. in Reid 3). Growing up in such a creative environment naturally influenced his orientation towards the stage. This early exposure may also explain his later emphasis on emotional intensity and performative freedom. In a newspaper interview with *The Guardian* in 1996, Neilson stated that his mother’s intense performance in *The Widows of Clyth* left a lasting emotional impact on him, shaping how he understood the potential of theatre to evoke deep feeling;

At the end of the first half, the character played by my mother was told her husband had died. She let out a scream of pain that left me chilled. Obviously it was doubly relevant to me because she was my mum. In my work, I think I’m always trying to re-create the emotional shadow of that moment. I’ve always thought to put personal connections into my stuff, my life and the lives of the actors involved – and not shy away from difficult emotional subjects. It was in the Travers that night, in the pitch of my mother’s scream, that I suddenly realized what theatre was about. (qtd. in Reid 2)

As can be observed in the quotation above, this early experience showed him the strong emotional power of theatre. It was only the start of his journey. He first studied at the Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff and took part in different productions. However, his time there ended quickly. He was reportedly expelled for insubordination. At first, his situation could have been an obstruction, but it became a turning point in his career. It pushed him away from acting and toward writing. After

leaving the college, Neilson returned to Edinburgh. At this point, his playwriting truly began. He entered a young playwrights competition run by the BBC and won. Neilson's early success became an important step in his writing career. His first radio play, *The Colours of the King's Rose*, was broadcast in 1988. Two years later, his debut stage play, *Welfare My Lovely*, was performed at the Traverse Theatre. This early work introduced his voice to a wider audience. It was important as it showed his interest in themes he would return to later, such as moral uncertainty, psychological fragmentation and social unease. As Trish Reid states in the introduction of *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, Neilson's style from the beginning showed a willingness to deal with taboo subjects through unconventional dramatic forms (Neilson *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, 2). These early works placed him among a group of emerging playwrights who would later be identified with the 'in-yer-face' movement. According to Aleks Sierz, Neilson's *Normal* (1991) and *Penetrator* (1993) defined this raw and direct approach to theatre, which aimed to provoke the audience emotionally and ethically (Reid 5). This direct approach to difficult subjects became one of Neilson's characteristics. But along with this style, he also kept a strong wish to make theatre that is emotionally engaging and open to any performance tool available. (Reid 2). These early perceptions about performance that is developed through personal observation and experience would later develop into the foundations of a distinctive theatrical style that is not easily categorized.

In 1991, before moving to London, Neilson wrote *Normal: The Düsseldorf Ripper*, which was staged at the Edinburgh Festival. The play quickly attracted critical attention due to its disturbing subject matter and its unapologetically graphic portrayal of a serial killer. By choosing such a controversial figure, Neilson composed the play outside the limits of normal biographical drama. Through disturbing images and representations of violence, it challenged the theatrical norms of its time. Neilson did not use soft metaphors or indirect hints; rather, he dealt with brutality and moral uncertainty in his plays and asked for an immediate reaction from the audience. Many critics and scholars see this play as one of the early examples of 'in-yer-face theatre.' It was bold, confrontational and ready to challenge the rules of contemporary drama (Bull 344). Instead of giving resolution or moral clarity, the play created discomfort. It forced the audience to face the brutal sides of human behaviour that mainstream theatre neglected.

Neilson's early reputation was shaped by his aggressive and confrontational style. His later plays from the same period, such as *Penetrator* (1993), *Year of the Family* (1994), *The Night Before Christmas* (1995), *The Censor* (1997) and *Stitching* (2002) exemplify his commitment to the disturbing sensibilities that are the fundamentals of the in-er-face movement. These plays shocked or disturbed audiences with their explicit content, but they also revolved around personal traumas and social anxieties. Moreover, Neilson's characters face difficult truths about their families and deal with the themes like violence, sexuality and psychological instability. Many of these moments happen in pressured settings. By doing this, Neilson placed himself at the front of a movement that rejected safety. He chose to show the raw tensions of modern life; hence, his plays were not shocking just for the sake of it. He wanted to express an emotional reality that, in his view, traditional forms could not show.

Neilson's early works caught the attention of critics and scholars. At the beginning of his career, critics placed him alongside with other young playwrights such as Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill. In his study *In-er-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, Aleks Sierz describes Neilson as one of the key figures who paved the way for the confrontational style of in-er-face theatre. Sierz writes, "[l]ong before Sarah Kane and Mark Ravenhill hit the headlines in the mid-nineties, Neilson was exploring the darker side of the human psyche" (Sierz *In-er-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*, 68). Sierz's comment highlights Neilson's role as a precursor to the wave of brutal and emotionally intense drama that would dominate British stages in the 1990s. Throughout the decade, Neilson's plays became known for their provocative themes and especially raw emotional content. Works such as *The Censor* and *Stitching* treated violence, sexuality, and psychological trauma. Furthermore, these plays did not recoil from difficult or uncomfortable subjects. Instead, they forced audiences to confront them directly. At this point, Neilson's connection with major venues became significant for his reputation. His relationship with some major venues like the Royal Court and the Traverse Theatre strengthened his position in the British theatre scene, because these theatres played a central role in the rise of new playwriting at that time. They also gave Neilson the space to develop and stage his early works. As a result of these factors, Neilson's writing during the 1990s was frequently linked to the theatrical phenomenon, 'in-er-face theatre' (Reid 4).

The term 'in-yer-face theatre' was used to describe works that were confrontational, intense, and explicit. In-yer-face plays transgressed traditional boundaries by shocking audiences with their content. Neilson became one of the main figures of this style. By the end of the decade, expectations about his work became more fixed. Both audiences and critics started to assume that every new play would include controversial scenes and shocking images. As Trish Reid states, "critics viewing his work through the prism of in-yer-face began to look forward to a new Neilson piece in the expectation of something reliably controversial and sexually explicit" (Reid 5). However, Neilson did not want to be trapped in a single style. As the new millennium began, he gradually changed his artistic direction. Instead of repeating the same provocative formulas, he began to examine more reflective, structurally experimental and emotionally nuanced forms of storytelling. This was a change that would define the next stage of his career.

However, as Neilson's career progressed, there was a noticeable shift in tone and structure. Starting in the early 2000s, his works began to incorporate surreal and 'absurd' elements. Plays like *Edward Gant's Amazing Feats of Loneliness* (2002), *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* (2004) and *Realism* (2006) demonstrated a move away from purely confrontational theatre towards more nuanced explorations of consciousness and imagination. These later works still discuss emotional intensity, but they approached it through fragmented narratives, disjointed realities and stylised theatrical forms. In an interview with Caroline Smith, Neilson openly reflected on this evolution in his theatrical approach. He admitted that his writing had undergone a transformation following *Stitching*, moving away from the raw and confrontational tone of his earlier works. Discussing this shift in tone and content, Neilson explained that his later plays began to deal with more surreal and absurd issues, and they were infused with dark humour and psychological severity. As he put it in his own words, "[a]fter *Stitching*, I moved towards comedy and the absurd" (qtd. in Smith 77). His own remarks reveal the clear change in his themes and also highlight his growing interest in transgressing the limits of theatrical reality and audience perception. This transformation in Neilson's style reflects a wider concern with the inner experiences of characters. For example, he tried to display anxiety and mental illness on stage without using traditional realism. His early plays demanded attention through shocking, while his later plays invited reflection through uncertainty. Yet both stages

of his writing aimed to demonstrate the instability of modern identity and the fragile nature of meaning.

In his later works, such as *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*, Neilson began to experiment more openly with structure, tone and style. In those works, it is observed that the boundaries between reality and fantasy are unclear. In these plays, the thoughts of the characters and their imaginary worlds appear in surreal ways. These surreal elements enabled Neilson to go beyond traditional logic by touching some emotional states more quickly. This change in style also added elements of comedy and a kind of absurdity based on psychological depth. Neilson used the stage to place the audience inside the private and chaotic spaces of the characters' minds. These worlds do not follow the rules of real life. By mixing the absurd with emotional closeness, his later works create moments that are funny, unsettling and thoughtful at the same time. As a result, he invites the audience into a more personal and complex emotional experience that combines absurdism with a touching human mood.

Anthony Neilson does not follow traditional writing methods while composing his dramas. Instead of preparing a complete script before rehearsals, he writes his plays during the rehearsal process. This means that when rehearsals begin, the play is still in development. He works closely with the actors, that is, scenes may be created, removed or revised depending on what happens in the rehearsal room. This style gives freedom and flexibility to both the writer and the actors. It also allows the play to grow in unexpected directions. It means that the final version of the play looks very different from what was originally imagined. This working method complies with the principles of absurdist theatre, for instance, absurd plays reject traditional structure, logic and narrative clarity, which is similar to Neilson's approach that creates a sense of unpredictability and fragmentation. According to Michael Billington, Neilson is "best known for ushering us into dark areas of the human psyche ... and for latterly creating a play in the rehearsal room" (Billington *Unreachable Review – Matt Smith Searches for the Magic Hour*). This reflects a shift from fixed literary texts toward theatre as a living, dynamic process.

The absence of a final script adds a sense of instability to his plays. His style parallels with the mental and emotional confusion that can be seen in absurd drama.

Neilson's plays may look chaotic or unclear but these qualities are intentional, not a mistake. The lack of a fixed structure reflects the uncertain and unstable world his characters live in. It also reflects how many people experience modern life, which feels fragmented, confusing and hard to explain. This approach also creates challenges for the actors. Because the script keeps changing, they must remain alert and adaptable. They cannot rely on memorised lines alone. This same instability is passed on to the audience. They are not offered a clear message or conclusion. Instead, the audience is invited to reflect, interpret and engage actively with the play. Neilson's later plays, especially from the 2000s onwards, blur the line between structure and improvisation. His rehearsal-based writing breaks away from traditional theatre but also opens space for new artistic possibilities. Through this method, his plays become more than just scripted stories (Billington *Unreachable Review – Matt Smith Searches for the Magic Hour*). It is possible to state that they become experiences of uncertainty and psychological depth. This experiential quality strengthens their connection to absurdist ideals, where the absence of clear meaning becomes a meaningful part of the performance itself.

Neilson also explains in another interview that this process-oriented method allows each play to take shape depending on the personalities and energies of the actors. He says that although actors do not necessarily make direct suggestions, their presence and individual qualities guide the direction of the material (Amer). This creates a people-specific form of theatre where the text is shaped by the individuals in the room rather than a predetermined structure. Furthermore, he states that working under pressure is a vital part of his creativity. According to him, short deadlines keep the energy and unpredictability alive, whereas too much time leads to overcorrection and indecision. Neilson believes that creative momentum comes from spontaneity, and this belief is associated with his rehearsal-based approach. He also says that he prefers to write in the moment. He lets the structure of the play grow naturally as the work continues. This refusal to finalise scripts beforehand supports his resistance to fixed theatrical conventions and supports absurdist ideals that emphasise fragmentation and ambiguity. Neilson also reflects on the role of marketing in shaping his public image. He suggests that his reputation as a shocking playwright was more a result of external branding than his own artistic intention. However, he accepts this perception pragmatically, stating that theatre needs to attract attention in a competitive

cultural landscape. In his view, if provocation draws people in, it can still be used as a vehicle for deeper emotional and intellectual exploration. This balance between public persona and personal method exemplifies Neilson's dual commitment to both emotional honesty and formal experimentation. His theatre becomes a living process, not a fixed text. It embraces confusion and accepts discomfort. It pushes both actors and audiences into states of uncertainty that reflect the psychological pressures of modern life. (Amer).

Neilson's plays stood out because of their raw intensity, disturbing subjects and bold language; thus, he gained attention quickly in the early 1990s. Neilson did not avoid handling taboos. Instead, he placed them at the centre of his work. His early plays, such as *Penetrator* (1993) and *Normal* (1991), dealt with themes like sexual trauma, violence and psychological collapse. These works were not intended to offer comfort or resolution, but they aimed to unsettle the audience. This discomfort was not random or gratuitous; it was structured carefully within the dramatic context of each play. Neilson was different from many of his contemporaries due to his ability to combine shock with structure. While some writers used extreme content only to shock, Neilson shaped his stories with more care. He created tension not just through what he showed, but also through what he left unspoken. In his work, discomfort became a deliberate dramatic tool. His plays confronted the audience directly, forcing them to witness moments that were generally brutal but never pointless. Neilson's early works reflect the spirit of the 1990s British stage. He reacted strongly to the political and cultural conditions of the time. Many of the frustrations and uncertainties of that era were absorbed into the voices, conflicts and silences of his characters. His plays echoed the frustration of a generation that had grown up under Thatcher's rule. By doing this, he shaped a new kind of theatre. It refused politeness, avoided safe subjects and invited the audience to face real emotional conflicts. This desire to challenge expectations stayed in Neilson's later work as well, even though it appeared in different ways.

In 2016, in an interview with Mark Shenton, Neilson talked openly about the change in his style and the creation process of his plays. He said that many of his plays are developed during rehearsals and that he begins without a finished script. This experimental method not only affects the content but also reflects his resistance to fixed theatrical conventions. He describes theatre as a space that should avoid

becoming “relentlessly competent” and argues instead for forms that are emotionally honest and unpredictable (Shenton). His discussion of *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* supports this idea; he says that the structure is intended to feel disorienting in the first half. He does this to create a specific emotional reaction, even if it risks pushing some spectators away. Neilson insists that a play must provoke a response, confusion, irritation, and introspection rather than merely offer passive understanding (Shenton).

Neilson also talks about his worry that modern theatre sometimes avoids taking risks. Many productions choose familiar formulas and safe choices. He contrasts this with the emotional and psychological complexity of modern life. He believes that these realities need more flexible and fragmented forms on stage. His effort to show these complexities runs close to the absurdist tradition. This is especially clear in his later works, where identity, structure and meaning become blurred. These views also explain the stylistic shifts seen in *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*, where reality is manipulated. Moreover, the audience is left without closure, just like it happens in *Waiting for Godot*. Neilson’s theatre, particularly in these later works, can be understood as a personal and artistic response to both the instability of contemporary experience and the limits of traditional theatrical forms (Shenton). In an interview with *The Guardian*, Neilson explains that even the darkest personal experiences can become “good material” for a playwright (Barnett). This shows a creative process shaped by emotional instability and explains the disoriented and fragmented worlds that appear in his plays.

Neilson’s rehearsal-based method shows his wish to keep theatre alive, flexible and free from too much polish. As Lyn Gardner observes in her review of *Unreachable* (2016), the play was developed entirely in the rehearsal room by Neilson and his ensemble cast. This strategy highlights the playwright’s resistance to traditional theatre. Gardner comments that “the script of *Unreachable* will change during show’s run” (Gardner *Matt Smith Took a Huge Risk With “Unreachable”*). Neilson’s technique proves that theatre, unlike painting or sculpture, is ‘never finished’ but always in motion. In her view, reviewers who criticised the play as incomplete were missing its purpose entirely. This openness to change is not a flaw but a feature that encourages live performance to be unpredictable and alive. Gardner suggests that Neilson’s working process introduces a “genuine whiff of danger” into

his theatre, making the audience more alert and engaged. The element of danger and rejection of certainty are consistent with the principles of Absurdism where unpredictability, ambiguity and fragmented reality form the core of the dramatic experience (Gardner *Matt Smith Took a Huge Risk With “Unreachable”*). Even though *Unreachable* is not the focus of this study, the rehearsal-based method described by Gardner aligns with the techniques Neilson applies in *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*. By avoiding fixed scripts and allowing constant experimentation, Neilson creates a space where characters, stories and even meanings stay fluid. This contributes to the feeling of disorientation and instability, which reflects the uncertainties found in absurd theatre.

Neilson stands out as one of the most consistently ‘experimental’ and innovative voices in contemporary British theatre. Since the early 1990s, his plays have been known for their blend of comic and tragic tones. They have generally used satire, deadpan humour and farce to confront the audience with uneasy truths. As Trish Reid says, Neilson’s plays are both “compassionate” and “deeply experimental” in their approach and they use unconventional dramatic forms to analyse the “exquisite embarrassment of personal secrets and sexual guilt” (Reid 2). What makes Neilson’s work especially ‘experimental’ is his creative process. He begins without a completed script and starts rehearsals with only a loose concept. Neilson develops the play with actors and designers. Reid emphasizes that this “highly unusual” method invests his theatre with “a peculiar kind of intensity” (Reid 3). It allows actors to shape their roles directly and so that they can create performances that feel immediate, unpredictable, and emotionally authentic. This improvisatory and evolving method positions Neilson’s theatre as a live ‘experiment,’ an artistic space in which uncertainty becomes a structural element. Reid argues that this experimental approach is significant to understand Neilson’s artistic idea. He regards theatre not as a fixed or finished product but as a living process. This view parallels Neilson’s description of “experiential theatre,” in which the boundaries between performance and experience blur. His plays do not simply tell stories but also construct dynamic emotional experiments that involve both the performers and the audience. Reid describes this commitment to “rawness and immediacy” as the foundation of Neilson’s creative philosophy (Reid *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson*, 3). His openness to experiment and his focus on emotional truth reflect a national theatre tradition that values innovation,

risk and direct human connection. In this sense, according to Trish Reid, Neilson's theatre stands at the intersection of the experimental and the experiential an art form that tests the limits of storytelling while remaining deeply human in its emotional impact (Reid *Anthony Neilson*, 2).

British theatre critic Charles Spencer directly associates Neilson's *Realism* with the Theatre of the Absurd. In his review for *The Telegraph*, he writes that the piece "depicts the grinding mundanity of everyday life while owing a strong debt to the theatre of the absurd" (Spencer). This observation is particularly valuable in identifying Neilson's formal kinship with absurdist tradition, especially his use of emotional fragmentation, disjointed reality and unpredictable tonal shifts. His reference is not metaphorical but structural. In a 2006 interview with *The Guardian*, Neilson openly reflected on the experimental and absurdist directions of his theatre (Logan). For instance, with *Realism*, he admitted that he was not just exploring everyday life but examining "normality as if it, too, were a pathological condition" (Logan). This change in focus was not a retreat from extremity but rather a new way of framing the mental landscape of supposedly ordinary individuals. Neilson stated, "if you look at where people go mentally in a day, it's quite wide-ranging", and added that "the conventional realism is reductive and misleading" (Logan). Moreover, in the interview, he praises directors like David Lynch for creating unsettling but truthful representations of the mind and claims that "actually it's not weird, it's just closer to real life than you're used to seeing" (Logan). His reflections show a changing dramaturgy. He uses the absurd not only as a style, but also as a way to express the hidden chaos beneath ordinary life. He even predicted, "I think the next movement in theatre is going to be into absurdism. I already see it happening" identifying his own works like *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism* as part of this emerging trend (Logan).

In his reflection on playwriting, Neilson apparently stated the change in his theatrical approach, "[a]fter *Stitching*, I moved towards comedy and the absurd" (qtd. in Smith 77). His emphasis on simplicity and the fairytale form reflects the clear, stripped-down style seen in the Theatre of the Absurd. In both, ordinary settings hide deep existential crises. In the interview with Caroline Smith, Neilson later admits that "little layers built up to *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*" and he suggested a self-conscious construction of fragmentation (Smith). His criticism of theatrical

conventions, “the most suffocating form of social censorship,” reinforces his rejection of critical realism and his pursuit of artistic freedom (Smith). The change he mentions is not only about style but also about philosophy. He slowly moves away from traditional realism and turns toward a more abstract and unusual form. This artistic direction is not accidental; it intentionally questions the limits of narrative, form and audience expectations. In the preface to *Plays: Two*, Neilson directly acknowledges this shift by stating,

It’s hard not to seem pompous when writing an introduction to a collection of one’s own plays, but I might humbly suggest (presuming your interest) that these four plays also represent an evolution in my personal style. While I have never been a particularly naturalistic writer, I have been pursuing and increasingly absurdist agenda. I currently believe that this form plays most fully to the strengths of the medium, allowing me to address serious themes in the most entertaining and accessible way possible, and also allowing for more fluidity between scenes and a deeper integration of set, lighting and sound design. (Neilson, *Plays Two*, i)

This confession is important to comprehend Neilson’s current position in contemporary theatre. His use of the term ‘absurdist agenda’ is not coincidence. It shows that he knows which tradition he is now part of. For Neilson, absurdism becomes a way to escape the strict rules of realism. His plays do not follow a logical plot or fixed character development. Instead, they examine human experience through fragmented or nonsensical moments. This approach connects his theatre to a broader tradition that includes writers like Beckett and Ionesco, but Neilson’s style remains rooted in emotional truth rather than philosophical detachment. As Reid suggests, absurdist elements in Neilson’s work are less about abstract theory and more about the emotional dislocation of modern life (Reid 88). Therefore, Neilson’s ‘agenda’ is not to mimic the absurd, but to use its tools in a new, instinctive way.

CHAPTER II

MEANINGLESSNESS AND DISCONNECTION IN ANTHONY NEILSON'S THEATRE

2.1. Absurdity and Theatrical Experimentation in *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*

After a series of psychologically intense and narratively fragmented works, Anthony Neilson's *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* marked a significant turning point in his career. The play was first staged at the Tron Theatre in 2004 and soon became one of Neilson's most celebrated works. While his earlier play *The Lying Kind* was considered less successful, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* received wide critical acclaim. It was staged in various theatres across the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Australia, and it also won a major theatre award. The play's success demonstrated Neilson's growing ability to combine strong emotional themes with a distinctive experimental form. As Trish Reid observes and states, "these works achieve 'harmony of form and content' while remaining experimental, and are generally regarded as Neilson's finest to date" (Reid 67) for both *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*. This statement captures the essence of the play with the absurd and fragmented qualities defining Neilson's theatre in the new millennium.

In his review of *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*, Dominic Cavendish presents the play as an intense, experiential and absurd work, he argues that it challenges the usual rules of naturalistic theatre. (Cavendish *Edinburgh Reports: "I Want to Disturb People"*). Unlike the traditional structure of realistic drama, Neilson's play draws its power from surreal moments and psychological fragmentation. Cavendish notes that the performance invites the audience into a world that feels chaotic and emotionally authentic. In this world, imagination takes the place of logic (Cavendish *Edinburgh Reports*). Through its dreamlike shifts and bizarre encounters, the play represents the spirit of 'Theatre of the Absurd,' and portrays human consciousness as unstable and fragmented. Neilson's use of contrasting, comic, disturbing and lyrical tones contain the representation of mental disorder along with a form of theatrical discovery.

In his 2007 review for *The Telegraph*, Cavendish praises Neilson's use of absurdist elements in his drama. He says that *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* creates a new path for British theatre by embracing creative disorder and rejecting realism.

As he states, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* “was the freshest, strangest hit of the Edinburgh Festival ... it remains exactly the injection of inspired lunacy and witty invention British theatre has been crying out for” (Cavendish *Edinburgh Reports*). His earlier commentary also supports this interpretation of *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* as an absurdist work. In a 2004 interview, written just before the play’s premiere, Cavendish already framed Neilson’s approach as an intentional departure from realism. He described the play as operating in a “far more comical, absurdist vein than most of his other work” (Cavendish *Edinburgh Reports*). Cavendish also notes that the rehearsal process felt like a kind of group dream. The structure did not come from a finished script but from collective improvisation. These creative choices, in both form and tone, show Neilson’s early commitment to a consciously absurd style of theatre.

Moreover, Joyce McMillan describes this world as “a wonderful, terrifying and sometimes brutal Narnia-cum-Alice’s-Wonderland” (277). It is filled with dream-like energy and unpredictable logic. In *Dissocia*, Lisa encounters unusual creatures, exaggerated authority figures and familiar places transformed into absurd settings. The review suggests that Neilson draws on fantasy literature and the surreal imagination of the 1960s, that is, Neilson juxtaposes the images of innocence and confusion in his work. McMillan also mentions that the play does not aim for a strong or dramatic conclusion. Instead, it moves back into realism and shows the difficulty of living with mental illness in a controlled system. According to her, Neilson’s illustration of colourful chaos and a plain hospital room in the same frame demonstrates the difference between freedom and the modern culture. One can easily infer from McMillan that this contrast reflects the movement of the play between meaning and meaninglessness and between absurd humour and emotional pain. McMillan’s reading indicates that *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* portrays a mind struggling with fragmentation, fear and the need for psychological balance.

The Wonderful World of Dissocia is divided into two contrasting acts. The first act shows the bright and imaginative world of Lisa Jones. The second act shows the harshness of her real life. This contrast reflects the fragmented nature of her life and mind. From the opening scene, Lisa’s strange behaviour makes the audience aware that something is unsettled in her reality. Lisa is seen strumming her guitar and as the sound grows louder, she remains completely motionless. Lisa shows no emotional

reaction even when a string breaks. This stillness portrays her inner detachment and confusion. Suddenly, a mysterious male voice, which belongs to Victor Hesse echoes from her mailbox and disturbs the silence. When he mentions Lisa's '1972 Sekonda' watch that always runs one hour slow, she reluctantly lets him in. Lisa, dressed for an evening out, seems to be anxious and melancholic. Victor explains that her watch is not broken. Instead, she has lost an hour because she travelled across time zones. He insists that this missing hour must be recovered to restore her sense of balance. According to Victor, the lost hour exists in a strange country named Dissocia and Lisa must travel there to find it. This peculiar invitation becomes the turning point of the play by leading Lisa into an unfamiliar world. More interestingly, this world embodies logical collapses and irrationality. Her journey in Dissocia begins as an 'absurd' descent into the subconscious, which is described as a chaotic and fantastic place.

As Lisa prepares to enter a new world of her mind, Neilson introduces a sudden and disturbing moment that signals the beginning of absurdity within the play;

Lisa Has something happened to my watch? You haven't lost it have you? It's just that my aunt passed it down to me and-

Victor Your watch is quite safe, I assure you. I wonder, though- before I explain – could I possibly trouble you for a small glass ...?

Lisa Oh, yes, of course- *She is about to get him some water...*

Victor – of piss

She stops.

Lisa Of piss?

Victor Yes – I drink glass of urine every day. It's good for the system.

Lisa Really ...?

Victor I haven't managed it yet, today. Contrary to popular belief, they don't serve it on SwissAir. (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 27)

This moment marks a clear shift from a realistic setting to an absurd one. The polite conversation suddenly turns strange and uncomfortable. Victor's request is unexpected, irrational and humorous at the same time. Through this act, Neilson breaks the rules of social interaction and logic. In the scene, both Lisa and the audience

face a situation that has no clear explanation or moral frame. The absurd humour here does not exist only for a shock, but it exposes the instability beneath ordinary communication. Everyday politeness collapses in a single line and meaning becomes unclear. This confusion reflects the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd, where normal language fails to express anything meaningful. Like in Ionesco's or Beckett's plays absurd arises from repetition, silence and the breakdown of logical speech. Victor's bizarre behaviour also reveals Lisa's inner world. His irrational request can be seen as a projection of her disturbed mental state. The scene suggests that the absurdity is not external, but it comes from Lisa's consciousness. She remains calm and quickly embraces the situation. And her calm reaction shows how disconnected she has become from ordinary emotion and reason. In this way, Neilson uses absurdity to open the door into Lisa's subconscious. Hence, a casual visit turns into a symbolic moment of disorientation. From this point on, the audience cannot be sure what is real and what is imagined. The line between sanity and madness, between reality and illusion, starts to dissolve.

Victor's request for a glass of urine embraces the absurd tone of the play. It reveals that logic and social norms no longer apply in Lisa's world. His words leave her confused and vulnerable state and prepare the audience for the forthcoming events. When Victor begins to tell the story of his father who makes a watch, "my mother told me that he had made a watch so small, so ephemeral... that only a butterfly could wear it," the play moves away from reality (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 28). This bizarre and poetic image breaks the limits of reason and the 'butterfly watch' becomes a metaphor for fragility and the impossibility of control. Through this image, Neilson combines absurd fantasy with emotional truth. Lisa's reaction, "that's impossible" is a kind of struggle to accept irrational experiences. However, Victor still insists that he "saw it" (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 28). It blurs the line between delusion and belief. This short dialogue reflects the essence of the absurd. Therefore, it is the embodiment of obscuring the representation of real.

Victor continues to explain that Lisa's broken watch is the result of a lost hour during her flight to New York. He tells her that this missing hour was 'stolen' from her life and it must be found to restore her balance. Lisa admits that she has felt disconnected from time and people since she had that trip. She is always late, tired and socially excluded. These details reflect her loneliness and alienation, which are

also shared by many characters in the Theatre of the Absurd. Neilson portrays Lisa as a figure lost between worlds. She is neither totally sane nor entirely mad. Victor's promise of a trip to Dissocia gives her a symbolic purpose, but the offer is still uncertain and dreamlike. He warns her that she will meet others who may distract her. This shows that absurd heroes always search for meaning but they are rarely finding it. When Lisa enters an elevator that is full of people who do not notice her, her invisibility becomes complete. This moment shows both existential isolation and the breakdown of communication, which are key ideas in absurdist drama. Through this strange transition, Neilson employs irony and wordplay to show the absurd nature of modern life.

After Victor leaves, Lisa is left alone in her flat. She is surrounded by silence and confusion. The encounter with the strange watchmaker shakes her perception of time and reality. She accepts Victor's promise to restore her balance, even though it makes no rational sense. When she decides to call the number he gave her, the play moves even further from realism. With this change, Neilson shows modern individuals and their search for comfort. They turn to systems and voices that no longer carry any real meaning. For example, Lisa tries to call the "Dissocian Embassy" to fix her missing one hour (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 31). It can be argued that her call is not only an attempt to fix her missing one hour but also an unconscious effort to repair her fragmented mind. The play reads,

Lisa Balance will be restored to my life.

She dials the number. It rings, and then we hear an automated voice:

Automated Voice Thank you for calling the Dissocian Embassy. If you wish to report a conspiracy, please press 1. If you think everyone would better off without you, please press 2. If you wish to correct a temporal disturbance, please press 3. If you wish to press 4, please press 5.

Lisa *presses 3.*

Automated Voice Thank you. You wish to correct a temporal disturbance. Your flat is now an elevator. To descend to Dissocia, please press 9.

Lisa Balance will be restored to my life.

Decisively she presses nine.

Immediately, there is a pinging sound. (Neilson, The Wonderful World of Dissocia 31-32)

This scene marks a collapse of logic within *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*. Lisa's phone call with the automated voice turns an ordinary act into a ritual of absurdity. The recorded instructions, which are filled with artificial politeness, imitate the empty routine of modern life in which people communicate more with machines than with one another. The line, "[i]f you wish to press 4, please press 5" perfectly captures the play's absurd tone (*Dissocia* 32). As it can be followed in the quotation that the dialogue is irrational and self-contradictory. Also, it mocks the false sense of order which is created by modern systems. Through this meaningless language, Neilson satirizes that technology and bureaucracy replace human emotion with mechanical structure. She follows the robotic voice in search of order, even though its logic is broken. She believes that pressing a number can restore balance. This shows her vulnerability. On the other hand, it displays the universal human need to find meaning in chaos. The transformation of her flat into an elevator intensifies the absurdity of the situation. The event is physically impossible and that impossibility makes the scene more absurd. However, it is symbolically true; it represents her descent into the subconscious and the irrational world of Dissocia. As it can be observed in this elevator scene, Neilson reveals the modern man's isolation. Like Beckett and Ionesco, he portrays a world where language has lost its function and meaning turns into parody. The absurd phone call becomes a miniature version of existential despair: an automated conversation that sounds organized but says nothing. Through this surreal moment, Neilson exposes the absurd condition of contemporary humanity, mechanized, disconnected and endlessly searching for purpose in a meaningless world.

Upon her arrival to, Lisa is 'weirdly' welcomed by two "insecurity guards" (*Dissocia* 37) who seem to control the border of this unusual world. Their behaviour and language show that Dissocia operates with a different logic, far from the order of the real world. From the start, their dialogue reveals an atmosphere built on confusion, instability and absurd communication. The conversation of the guards has no clear function or direction. Their speech is fragmented and inconsistent. Instead of giving information or maintaining order, they argue with each other, apologise, panic

and make unnecessary comments. This creates a sense of “meaninglessness” which reflects the logic of Dissocia where language loses its usual purpose:

Guard 2 Um – hello – Um – can we help you?

He turns to Guard 1

Guard 2 ‘Can we help you’! That’s so fucking lame!

Guard 1 Yes, um – What we mean is – halt! Um who goes there?!

Guard 2 *covers his face*

Guard 2 Oh no ...!

Guard 1 She thinks we’re a right pair of twats! (*Dissocia* 35)

Their confusion reflects the absurdity in which dialogue reveals emptiness rather than communication. The guards also have no names. Even though they stay on stage for a long time, they remain anonymous and interchangeable. This lack of identity shows that they do not exist as full characters. They appear as signs of instability. They represent a system that cannot guide or protect Lisa. Their failure to perform a basic task highlights the collapse of structure in this world. The humour in their lines when they say that they look like “a right pair of twats” adds fun to the absurd effect. It mixes self-doubt with unnecessary drama (*Dissocia* 35). Lisa’s attempt to speak with them only increases the confusion. Each time she tries to ask a simple question, the guards react with exaggeration or misunderstanding. Her simple arrival becomes complicated for no reason. This also reflects her inner state. She is lost and uncertain. She cannot connect with the people around her. Therefore, the scene introduces the central theme of disconnection. It also shows how Lisa must navigate a place where meaning collapses, identity is unstable and meaningless communication offers no real help.

As Lisa’s interaction with the guards continues, their speech becomes repetitive and circular. To the reader/audience this creates a sense of delay rather than progress. This style immediately recalls the stalled and uncertain exchanges in Becket’s *Waiting for Godot* in which language moves but meaning does not:

Guard 2 Yes, sorry – you’re saying you’ve never been here before?

Lisa Not that I can remember

Guard 2 Right. Because ...

Guard 1 Because there are things ...

Guard 2 There are things you have to do ...

Guard 1 Things *we* have to do ...

Guard 2 Yes, to you –

Guard 1 Not *to* you, so much as –

Guard 2 – *with* you!

Guard 1 Exactly – *with* you –

Guard 2 There are things we have to do *with* you –

Guard 1 – if you haven't been here before. (*Dissocia* 36)

The guards' exchange functions as a clear example of absurd communication. Each line begins but does not fully resolve and the two guards constantly interrupt or finish each other's sentences. Their speech does not guide Lisa. Instead of guiding it traps her in a loop of uncertainty. This pattern is similar to the way Vladimir and Estragon talk in *Waiting for Godot*. The characters speak in circles and rarely reach a clear or coherent point. In both cases, dialogue becomes an activity in itself but not a tool for understanding. The guards also forget Lisa's presence for a moment. This shows the unstable and unfocused attention of the characters. When they finally return to Lisa they begin a new sequence of half-formed explanations. For example, their repeated phrases like "there are things," "things we have to do," "with you" create the feeling of a procedure that is never fully defined. The meaning slips away each time when they try to explain it. Moreover, phrases like "to you" and "with you" have different meanings for Lisa. Once she feels threatened, she finds herself in a cooperation. This confusion reflects the larger structure of *Dissocia*. In this world, language loses its authority, and it creates a tension instead of clarity. For Lisa, the scene becomes another sign that she experiences an unusual communication. The guards' behaviour shows that identity and responsibility are blurred in *Dissocia*. They sound official but their lack of control shows the weakness of the system they represent. As in many absurd works, the characters speak a lot but communicate very little. Their broken dialogue reflects Lisa's own confusion. It also strengthens the theme of disconnection that runs throughout the play.

As Lisa continues speaking with the guards, their behaviour becomes even more inconsistent and illogical. Their explanations about Dissocia's war and their own duties show that language and authority no longer follow familiar rules in Dissocia. This makes it clear that Lisa steps into a void, and in such a place, logic collapses and meaning becomes uncertain,

Lisa An *insecurity* guard?

Guard 2 Yes?

Lisa Don't you mean a security guard?

The Guards look at each other.

Guard 2 What would be the point in that?

Guard 1 No, I mean if it's *secure* –

Guard 2 – why would you have to guard it?! (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 37)

The guards tell Lisa that the country is under threat from the Black Dog King. However, their tone does not match the seriousness of a real conflict. When Lisa confuses “insecurity guard” with “security guard,” their reaction proves that their world has little meaning. Instead of correcting her, they question the idea of security itself. They argue that if something is secure, it should not need a guard at all. This meaningless dialogue shows how ordinary reasoning breaks down. It also reflects the playful distortion of language that is common in absurd theatre. Their interrogation continues in the same illogical manner. They ask Lisa strange questions about “heart-shaped pebbles” and whether she has ever left her hair unattended (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 39). From their dialogue, it can be inferred that their authority is built on nonsense rather than logic. These questions are similar to the bureaucratic rituals seen in absurd drama. The systems seem official, but they work without real purpose. Therefore, Lisa cannot predict what they will say next or what rules she is expected to follow.

The arrival of the Oath Team adds another layer of absurdity. Lisa is told that she must swear loyalty to Queen Sarah who has been missing for a while. This contradiction reflects Dissocia's unstable political situation. Symbols of power exist but they do not actually function. The oath ceremony shows the emptiness of authority

in Dissocia. Even a basic gesture becomes confused and illogical, as seen when Oathtaker instructs Lisa to “[r]aise your wrong hand” (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 44). When Lisa confusedly responds the Oathtaker immediately corrects it by saying, “[s]orry, your right hand” (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 44). This confusion is created with the double meaning of ‘right’ as both ‘correct’ and ‘right hand’. It turns a simple instruction into a small linguistic absurdity. Even basic distinctions between right and wrong begin to break down. This type of wordplay shows that language in Dissocia does not guide meaning but destabilizes it. Instead of clarifying the situation, the dialogue produces a small but significant gap in logic.

Such moments illustrate how Neilson uses linguistic distortion to expose the fragility of communication in this world. According to Esslin, “word games have much in common with the Theatre of the Absurd” (345). At this moment, one can easily infer that the rules of Dissocia are arbitrary and unreliable. It also shows that in Lisa’s new world meaning always changes. The logic of this place does not collapse in a dramatic way; in other words, it quietly slips into nonsense. This creates a sense of a symbolic ‘void’. In such a world, the control is more symbolic than it is in the real world. The guards direct her to the Lost Property Office, and they suggest that she might find her lost hour there. Their instructions remain unclear and offer no real guidance. This scene shows how Dissocia functions as a reflection of Lisa’s fragmented mental state. The confusion of the guards, their meaningless language and their contradictory rules reflect the larger theme of disconnection in the first act. Through these moments, Neilson shows a world where identity, authority and meaning are unstable. This atmosphere fits closely with the traditions of absurd theatre.

After leaving the guards, Lisa calls her boyfriend Vince on her mobile phone. She explains that she is trying to recover her missing hour, so she cannot meet him as planned. After a while, she notices a goat tied nearby. She soon learns that it is a scapegoat whose only purpose is to be blamed for things it did not do. Lisa tries to accuse the goat of stealing her hour; yet, her claims fail. The situation turns frightening when the goat becomes aggressive. It ties her up, threatens to deliver her to the Black Dog King. It even says he intends to rape her. Before anything happens, the moment is interrupted by the sudden arrival of a noisy car. Jane, a cheerful council worker, enters the scene. She says that her job in Dissocia is to replace anyone who becomes

a victim of crime. She insists on taking Lisa's place, even though the situation is disturbing. The goat and Jane leave together. Violent sounds from offstage follow and they make Lisa shaken. Soon after, a friendly polar bear appears and tries to comfort her with a soft song about friendship. Jane eventually returns. She is injured but still optimistic. She tells Lisa that the goat is resting but still plans to hand her over to the Black Dog King. Then, Jane offers Lisa a lift to the Lost Property Office and Lisa accepts with relief. Their journey becomes increasingly chaotic. The car suddenly transforms into a plane and is attacked by anti-aircraft fire. At this point, Jane announces that they will take a short detour to bomb the Black Dog King's army. Lisa survives this strange episode, and she begins to enjoy the adventure. She is finally dropped off near the Lost Property Office. At that moment, Vince calls again and he states that he is worried about her mental state and her location.

As Lisa continues her journey through Dissocia, the world around her becomes even more unstable and unpredictable. Ordinary places and everyday logic begin to shift into strange, comic and confusing forms. At this point in the play, Neilson fully embraces the absurd atmosphere that shapes Lisa's experiences. This shift is described as "[f]rom this point the action becomes increasingly frenetic and absurd" (Reid 77). Moreover, the shift becomes clear when Lisa arrives at what should be the Lost Property Office. Instead of an organised space, she finds a hot-dog stand run by Britney and Biffer, whose behaviour is exaggerated and chaotic. Their disagreement about the sign, first "The Lost Property" and then "Lost Lost Property" immediately shows that the place has no clear purpose. The sign offers no help; it simply repeats and doubles the confusion;

Britney Yes, well, that's why I was confused. You're looking for the Lost Property Office.

Lisa Where's that?

Britney We lost it.

Lisa You lost the Lost Property Office?

Britney There's no need to rub it in! We're obviously embarrassed about it.

Lisa So what do you do here?

Britney Well, if anyone finds the Lost Property Office, they'll hopefully bring it to us.

Lisa So what's all that stuff behind the stall?

Lisa *indicates the pile of shoes and handbags.*

Britney *picks up the ketchup and mustard bottles and goes round the tables squirting it all over the men's hot dogs.*

Britney Oh, that's lost property.

Lisa So you've got lost property?

Britney Well, yes and no. (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 77)

As it can be observed in the excerpt above, the dialogue between Britney and Lisa signifies another strange situation. Britney says that Lisa is looking for the Lost Property Office, but she also claims that they lost it. Once again, this contradiction shows that words in *Dissocia* no longer point to stable meanings. Lisa tries to clarify the situation. However, every question she asks leads to another circular answer. Britney's defensive tone, "[t]here's no need to rub it in!" gives the exchange a comic but unsettling rhythm in which reactions do not match the questions asked (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 77). Objects around the stall deepen this sense of mismatch. Lisa notices shoes and handbags stacked behind the counter. These are some items that clearly look like lost property. Britney, however, refuses to give a direct explanation. Her reply, "Well, yes and no" keeps everything uncertain (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 77). Even the act of squeezing ketchup and mustard on hot-dogs while discussing missing items adds to the absurdity. Ordinary tasks and definitions melt into each other, and nothing quite fits together. Through this scene, Neilson continues to reshape the expectations of the audience. Places do not work; roles are unclear and conversations drift away from practical meaning. For Lisa, the encounter reveals the unpredictable and inconsistent qualities of *Dissocia*.

Upon moving deeper into *Dissocia*, the tone of the play becomes even more unpredictable and surreal. Lisa begins to meet characters whose behaviour, language, and appearance no longer follow any familiar logic. As Trish Reid notes, Lisa "spends the first half of the play in this extraordinarily vivid world encountering strange and wondrous characters" (Reid, *Post-Devolutionary Drama* 197):

As **Inhibitions** stands, we realise that he's naked from the waist down.

Lisa *is shocked.*

Lisa Oh my God — he's got no pants on!

Inhibitions I've lost my inhibitions.

Argument *points at Inhibition's genitals.*

Argument Now that is funny!

Ticket *nudges Laughter.*

Ticket He's right, it is!

Laughter *guffaws manically* (Neilson, *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* 86)

This scene demonstrates Neilson's technique of employing absurdity to create both humour and discomfort. The characters named Ticket, Argument, Laughter and Inhibitions stand in the queue like Lisa. They also wait to recover their lost belongings. Their names reflect abstract states or emotions rather than personal identities. By means of abstract names, Neilson gives them a symbolic quality instead of realistic depth. Their actions take on a playful and exaggerated character. For example, Inhibitions appears on the stage with no pants, which turns his name into a literal joke. The humour comes from the fact that he has 'lost' his inhibitions. The other characters react in such a way that increases the absurdity of the moment, for example, Argument laughs at the situation and points out Inhibitions' exposure. Laughter responds with loud and uncontrolled reactions. Their behaviour shows Neilson's transforming human emotions into physical presences that interact with Lisa. By means of this transformation, inner states appear as external characters, and Meaning moves back and forth between metaphor and simple slapstick comedy. By placing Lisa among these figures, Neilson highlights both her confusion and vulnerability. She is surrounded by characters who behave without logic and without awareness of their strange appearance on the stage. Accordingly, this environment underlines the instability of Dissocia and shapes Lisa's journey through it. The scene also shows everyday psychological experiences, such as losing one's patience, confidence or inhibitions, can be turned into theatrical images in absurdist drama. Because of this, Neilson's playful use of names and actions proves his absurdist style. Neilson employs absurd exaggeration rather than realism.

Act I of *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* is described as a surreal and illogical space and it is shaped by eccentric rules and unpredictable events. The play is

interpreted as resembling Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), particularly in its surreal humour and chaotic imagery. Mark Fisher supports this view. He notes that "behind the 'Alice in Wonderland' surrealism and groan-worthy humour, Anthony Neilson's wildly imaginative play" creates an atmosphere in which comic violence, playful wordplay, and bizarre characters generate deliberate confusion (Fisher). This disordered atmosphere reflects a typical absurdist strategy, which destabilises logic to reveal a deeper emotional truth. In Neilson's play, the chaotic pleasures of *Dissocia* unveils Lisa's fractured perception, also fantasy and disorder act as an absurd extension of her psychological disturbance. In contrast to the colourful and imaginative world of Act I, Act II moves with almost no colour. It feels detached from the freedom of *Dissocia*. Instead of strange and nonsensical characters, the audience now sees the controlled environment of a psychiatric ward. Lisa's movements are slow, and she is heavily medicated. The repetitive sounds of nurses' footsteps and the routine act of swallowing pills replace the vibrant chaos and absurd actions of Act I. In one scene, Lisa attempts to leave the hospital. She first tries to disguise it. She claims that she only needed a telephone or a cigarette but then Lisa quietly admits her desire to go home. The nurse reassures her and provides more medication and leaves her back into sedation. Although Lisa sees these nurses as part of an oppressive system, she is compelled to comply, taking the pills that dull her senses. Her short attempt to energize herself, like dancing wildly with her Walkman, ends quickly when the nurses take it away. This moment reinforces the stillness and emptiness that define this act.

Vince visits Lisa and brings a bag with some of her belongings. He agrees to collect her at the weekend. As Lisa looks through the bag, she pauses and smiles at an item at the bottom. In the final scene, she sleeps in the dark holding a small polar bear; the stage directions remind us that "*Dissocia* still exists, caged within her head. There is little doubt that she will return to her kingdom" (*Dissocia* 110). This closing image reinforces the play's broader absurdist structure, which is already established in the opening act. In *Dissocia*, the absurd dimension becomes visible from the beginning, where Neilson constructs a world governed by illogical directions, grotesque figures and comic distortions of language. The 'insecurity guards,' the collapsing logic of 'lost lost property' and the meaningless interactions Lisa experiences all evoke what Esslin identifies as "linguistic absurdity." According to Gary Cassidy, intertextual

references to *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Wizard of Oz* (1900) and *Narnia* (1950) further support this, since each of these works relies on irrational transitions, unpredictable encounters and a narrative structure driven by pure association rather than logic. His description of Act One is a sequence shaped by bizarre characters and unstable meaning, which matches absurdist framing (Cassidy). Act Two is the total opposite but still absurd; a colourless, static clinical environment where movement is limited, dialogue is minimal and scenes break into short, disconnected fragments. The imaginative world of Act One is replaced by a different form of absurdity, emptiness, stillness and the failure of meaning-making. Through this shift from chaotic humour to meaningless conversations, Neilson demonstrates how absurdity can operate both through excessive fantasy and through the collapse of emotional and narrative continuity.

2.2. Absurd Meets the Real: An Analysis of *Realism*

Realism was first produced in 2006, firstly by the National Theatre of Scotland and shortly after at Edinburgh's Royal Lyceum Theatre. The play quickly attracted attention from both audiences and critics, becoming one of Neilson's well-known works. At its centre is Stuart, a man whose emotional outbursts, strained family ties, and failed relationships shape the direction of the play. As in many absurd narratives, *Realism* is built on a simple structure of beginning, middle and end.

The play opens with Stuart waking up in a messy living room, still in his nightclothes, while his friend Paul appears, or perhaps it is only a phone call, asking him "Did I wake you?" (*Realism* 293). The staging makes the situation unclear, as it is stated "at no point in the following scene the actors make eye contact" (293) and Neilson states in the notes of the play that "at no point should a phone ever be present (or represented) onstage" (290). This ambiguity causes the audience to question whether Paul is actually there or if the conversation is imagined, which is quite absurd. Stuart refuses Paul's request to play football and returns to his ordinary routines. As he moves through the day, memories and fantasies interrupt his actions without warning. His mother appears to him, mentioning that the sky is "full of bombers" (297). His father follows, reading a newspaper at the table. Stuart's thoughts stroll between dreams, childhood memories, former lovers, fears of death and sexual fantasies. These images come to the surface while he does simple tasks like feeding his cat, making tea, doing laundry or watching television. He gets angry over a utility

bill. He argues with telemarketers. He thinks about Laura, his first love. He nervously waits for a call from Angie from whom he recently separated. When night comes, Stuart finally goes to bed. Later, Angie calls. They have a sad and tired conversation, as an end of a relationship. After this moment, the play slowly fades to black.

At this point in *Realism*, Neilson concentrates on everyday actions and ordinary conversations. Stuart and Paul talk about simple domestic tasks, but their dialogue indicates confusion and a sense of being stuck. Also, it slowly drifts away from realism and begins to resemble the atmosphere of absurd theatre,

Stuart Like washing, cleaning up — domestic shit.

Paul You can do that tomorrow.

Stuart I can't.

Paul Why not?

Stuart Cos I just — I haven't got any clean clothes ... I just need to get myself together. (Neilson, *Plays* 2 295)

Stuart says that he has got stuff to do but the tasks in his list are basic routines. Paul tries to reassure him by saying he can do them tomorrow, but Stuart insists that he cannot. His explanation, "I haven't got any clean clothes... I just need to get myself together" displays a clear struggle with motivation and direction (Neilson *Plays* 2 295). These small details unveil an intense emotional weight behind ordinary responsibilities. Stuart's inability to take simple action prepares the audience for the play's later sense of paralysis.

The conversation between Stuart and Paul also resembles the atmosphere of *Waiting for Godot*. Like Vladimir and Estragon, they talk about doing something. However, nothing changes, that is, their decisions remain verbal gestures without movement. This stillness is one of the main features of absurd drama. Stuart claims that he needs to get himself together but as the play continues, this does not happen. His words do not lead to any action and the gap between language and behaviour grows wider, and this gap creates a feeling of uncertainty. At this point, Charles Spencer describes this uncertainty as a state where "you are never quite sure if you are in a dream world or waking reality." (Spencer). This lack of clarity becomes one of the central effects of the play. Spencer also notes that "in *Realism* Neilson has come up with a piece that depicts the grinding mundanity of everyday life while owing a

strong debt to the theatre of the absurd” (Spencer). His comment demonstrates Neilson’s use of simple domestic situations to evaluate existential themes. The dull routines of Stuart’s life become a stage for confusion, hesitation, and emotional fragmentation. In this way, Neilson mixes realistic details with an absurd sense of uncertainty. Ordinary actions feel strangely heavy and difficult, and as the play continues, this uncertainty spreads beyond human conversation. It even appears in Stuart’s interactions with the non-human world,

The Cat ambles slowly in.

Stuart Ah, here he is. Where have you been all night? Chasing all the girl cats I bet.

Cat Fuck you.

The Cat walks straight to the bowl of cat food and smells it.

Cat Muck.

And with this, he turns and walks slowly out again. (Neilson, Plays 2 332)

This brief moment intensifies the absurd tone of the play. Stuart’s cat speaks with complete confidence. This scene receives no explanation and no reaction that would restore logic. By allowing the animal to interrupt the domestic space with crude language, Neilson pushes Stuart’s world further into a state where the boundaries between the real and the unreal collapse. “A privileging of subjective over objective experience is a recurring trope in Neilson’s work as we have already seen, but in this instance it explicitly recalls strategies employed by the group of playwrights working mostly in France in the 1950s, gathered by Martin Esslin under the heading *The Theatre of the Absurd*” (Reid 88). This observation becomes clearer when the behaviour of the characters surrounding Stuart in *Realism* is examined. Their actions begin with simple domestic routines but gradually move toward irrational, fragmented and disconnected moments. For instance, Stuart’s mother puts the kettle on to make tea, but she unexpectedly starts describing the tea cup in unnecessary detail, as if the ordinary object demands attention without purpose. His father speaks even less. He enters with a newspaper, sits down and he silently shares part of it with the mother. They read together but they have no communication. The scene highlights the emptiness of their behaviour and creates an absurd atmosphere.

Stuart also finds himself in-between small actions and abrupt memories that interrupt the flow of the scene. He remembers a dream, prepares tea, suffers a slight electric shock from the toaster and then tries to improve his mood. Other fragmented memories follow: a friend chasing him with a dirty stick, the same friend making him taste a crayon. These moments seem to be trivial, but they create a pattern of disorientation. Stuart's daily life becomes a mixture of insignificant activities and memories, and the narrative moves forward without producing coherent progress. These behaviours reflect the fundamental principles of absurd theatre. Characters speak, but their dialogue does not resolve anything. They act, but their actions do not lead to development or clarity. Routines lose meaning and memories surface without a logical connection. Neilson employs all those broken rhythms to present Stuart's fragmented and unstable inner world. The home environment, which should offer structure, instead becomes a place where logic weakens. Familiar actions start to feel unsettling. In this sense, Neilson's method is close to Esslin's idea of absurd drama. The familiar becomes strange and existence is shown through broken and concrete images. As Esslin explains, "[t]he Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images of the absurdity of existence" (Esslin 6). Neilson's staging of everyday life in *Realism* follows this idea. Stuart's world is not treated as a problem to fix. Instead, it appears as an experience which is shaped by uncertainty, fragmentation and absurdity.

Neilson presents a sequence of bodily actions that exposes the fragmented nature of Stuart's daily life. His movements, ranging from trying to masturbate, to listening to the ice-cream van, to reading a bill, to using the toilet, do not follow any logical pattern. Each action begins suddenly and ends without resolution. This creates the sense of a fragmented mind that cannot keep focus or continuity. Stuart never seems fully connected to his own world. His difficulty becomes clear in small, everyday situations, such as being unable to make toast without burning it. He also struggles to understand or perform the usual behaviours associated with romantic relationships. These simple failures show how distant he feels from the social expectations around him and how easily he becomes unsettled by basic tasks,

Yes, it was a big surprise to me. I'd always thought that you split up with someone because you'd stopped loving them, or realised you never did. But

actually none of my relationships - my serious relationships - have ended that way. I've always loved them. There's been some other issue: a different outlook, a different dream; sometimes just practicalities. Nothing you wouldn't love someone for. Just things you can't live with peacefully. But I've felt the loss of every one of them, like a little death. It gets quite tiring after a while, the accumulation of losses.

He wipes his backside and looks at the toilet paper.

The accumulated losses. The accumulated losses of life. (Neilson, *Plays 2* 320)

Stuart delivers this intimate monologue while sitting on the toilet is highly absurd. The moment combines emotional honesty with an everyday bodily action. This creates a contrast that feels both uncomfortable and revealing. His reflection on past relationships continues while he is engaged in one of the most private activities possible. Instead of a traditional dramatic setting, his confession happens in a hidden place from public view. This staging choice obscures the line between vulnerability and absurdity. It reminds the audience that deep thoughts can appear in the most ordinary, even undignified moments. In this sense, the scene reflects Albert Camus's description of the Absurd; it is a condition signifying "a divorce between the mind and the world" (27). Stuart's emotional depth and his physical setting exist side by side, but they never fully connect to each other. The following stage direction displays Stuart who wipes himself and looks at the toilet paper. The action interrupts his emotional reflection and brings the audience back to the plain physical reality of the scene. His final repetition, "[t]he accumulated losses. The accumulated losses of life" connects his emotional pain to his banal acts (Neilson, *Plays 2* 320). The stylistic use of language suggests that his personal disappointments built up slowly, just as daily routines repeat themselves. By placing these words in such an unexpected moment, Neilson shows the representation of grief, regret and the weight of past experiences in the smallest details of daily life. The scene turns out to be a mix of sincerity, physical action and absurdity. Accordingly, Stuart's inner world is represented as something felt and strangely exposed.

In her review of *Realism*, Lyn Gardner highlights the play's thematic tension between the everyday and the irrational. She describes it as "Anthony Neilson's surprisingly moving musings on mundanity, the absurdities of modern life" (Gardner

2011). This observation describes the basic paradox that shapes the play: the banal surface of Stuart's routine hides an unstable interior world. In that world, logic collapses and memory, fantasy and anxiety intermingle without structure. In *Realism*, Neilson shows how alienation emerges not from extraordinary crises but from the quiet, persistent pressures of routine, isolation. This tension between ordinary routine and irrational interruption becomes even clearer in the following scene, where Stuart encounters an unexpected and unsettling moment in the middle of a simple domestic task,

He opens the door of the washing machine and starts bundling the clothes in;

*but, from inside the machine, he hears his **Mother's** voice:*

Mother (*muffled*) Have you checked the pockets?

Stuart What?

Mother (*muffled*) Have you looked in the pockets?

He removes some of the washing.

Stuart What are you saying?

Mother I said, have you checked the pockets of your trousers?

Stuart Yes...

Mother Are you sure? (Neilson, *Plays* 2 322)

In the second act, Stuart opens the washing machine to load his clothes, but he is suddenly startled by the sound of his mother's voice coming from inside the machine. Her repeated question, asking whether he has checked the pockets, interrupts an action that should be entirely ordinary. This moment creates humour because the voice appears in an impossible place, but it also suggests the psychological weight his mother holds over him. The disembodied voice feels like a reminder of her influence as if her criticisms and expectations followed him into adulthood. After Stuart checks his pockets and restarts the machine, the repetitive sound of the wash cycle overwhelms him again. The noise seems harmless, but it slowly pulls him into a trance-like state. This change from a simple task to disorientation shows that Stuart's reality becomes quickly unstable.

Neilson throughout *Realism* uses an unsettling form of language. In his 2004 interview with Dominic Cavendish for *The Telegraph*, he states, “I want to disturb people” (qtd. in Cavendish). It reflects his intention to challenge comfort and routine in his life. The play includes crude humour, sexual conversations and explicit remarks, especially in Stuart’s speeches. These moments break the polite side of domestic life. It is intended to demonstrate to the audience the turning of everyday language into a harsh and unpredictable reality. Against this background, Mother’s calm tone appears even more unusual. While Stuart and other characters speak in chaotic, sometimes quite rude ways, she consistently responds with patience. Instead of reacting emotionally, she quotes Jesus at several moments: “You know what Jesus said: ‘Suffer the little children’” (Neilson, *Plays* 2 337) and later, “You know what Jesus said: ‘Respect your mother’” (338). Her use of religious language feels out of place, especially when surrounded by the confusion and crude behaviour of the household. Instead of offering real support, her words sound like a rehearsed script. They feel detached from the emotional reality around her. The disconnection between her moral advice and the world she inhabits creates an absurd contrast. Her religious quotations do not restore meaning; they highlight its absence.

As Ionesco explains, the absurd emerges when life becomes “devoid of purpose... cut off from his religious... man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (qtd. in Cornwell 3). Mother’s attempts to use biblical wisdom in trivial or inappropriate situations underline this condition. Her guidance does not resolve anything; instead, it becomes another example of language that fails to communicate, like much of the dialogue in the play. The characters move through their lives with little sense of coherence or direction. This condition reinforces the fundamental absurdist notion of a reality lacking meaning.

In the closing parts of *Realism*, Stuart wakes to Angie’s phone call and their conversation shows the fragile and directionless aspect of his emotional life. He begs her not to leave him but even here the language of the absurd appears. He wants to end the relationship but still begs her to stay. This reflects the void at the centre of his emotional life. His reactions do not match his words, and this uncertainty demonstrates the unstable characteristic of his self. Romance offers no stable meaning for him. The scene ends with Angie asking about his day and Stuart’s final response is simple and empty “fuck all” (Neilson, *Plays* 2 355). This reply shows his sense of

disconnection from his own life. He has no progress, no purpose and no clear emotional direction. His answer almost becomes a summary of the meaninglessness he carries. He has a life lived but it is not experienced.

According to Trish Reid, “Neilson creates a deliberate haze about Stuart’s past, and indeed his present, which although sometimes confusing, never becomes so opaque that we are entirely bewildered by it” (95). She also notes that “If we never quite catch a complete view of Stuart, this is because we are not intended to” (95). Her observation reflects the uncertain space Stuart has throughout the play. His identity moves constantly between memory, dream and meaningless attempts at reality. This movement prevents him from forming a coherent sense of self and leaves him suspended in a state of quiet disconnection. He lives in a kind of emotional void in which his actions do not lead to change and where no stable meaning emerges. In the final scene, Neilson demonstrates the play’s main concerns; meaninglessness, uncertainty, fractured identity and silence. *Realism* closes in the manner of absurd theatre as nothing is explained, nothing is resolved. The ending simply exhibits that meaning is unstable and that ordinary life can be as disorienting as any absurd place. For Stuart, this lack of direction becomes the closest thing to an ending. The audience does not receive clear end. Instead, it is left with the same uncertainty that defines Stuart’s world. Cornwell states that “absurdity is not just a theme but a condition, something embedded in the structure of human existence and perception itself” (3). This view illustrates the atmosphere surrounding Stuart; his confusion is not only personal, because it reflects a broader struggle to make sense of routine, memory, identity and the passage of time. Gardner’s remark that “we are killing time, in reality time is killing us” highlights this exhaustion. Stuart lives inside repetitive days in which nothing progresses, but everything continues to press on him. Small tasks feel heavy, expectations collapse and his emotional energy slowly drains away. In this sense, Stuart becomes a figure who is shaped more by absence than presence. His emotional life is defined by what he cannot hold together; meaning, direction, identity, purpose. The void within him reflects the wider absurd condition that Neilson presents; a world without a standard meaning and a world with timeless circles. The final silence of the play does not offer comfort, yet it confirms the instability that follows Stuart throughout the play. The audience is left not with closure but with the

same uncertainty that governs Stuart's existence, an uncertainty that lies at the centre of absurd theatre.



CONCLUSION

In this study, it is aimed to analyse the absurd elements in Anthony Neilson's *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*. Especially, the themes of meaninglessness, uncertainty, disconnection and the instability of identity are examined. Through these plays, it is revealed that Neilson adapts absurd to contemporary experiences of mental fragmentation, emotional isolation and the failure of logical selfhood. This study showed that Neilson's drama reflects the breakdown of the fixed meanings, suggesting that people constantly look for their places in changing emotional and psychological conditions. Earlier absurdist playwrights used illogical worlds to question the reliability of language, reason and identity. Neilson continues this tradition and also adapts it to a culture shaped by emotional instability, exhaustion and a sense of inner fragmentation. Neilson's characters like Lisa and Stuart embody these pressures. They show how individuals struggle to hold themselves together when the promised coherence no longer functions. By means of the stories of those characters Neilson implies that absurdity is not an abstract philosophical condition but a lived emotional state; it emerges in moments of confusion, hesitation and disconnection. Accordingly, it shapes the way people speak, think and act.

As a result, it is revealed that *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* presents a condition through a dream-like world in which logic collapses and identity shifts without warning. The colourful surface of the play does not provide comfort, but instability that governs Lisa's life. No matter how amusing or chaotic every encounter she has, it points towards a deeper void. The second act exposes this void with clarity. The controlled setting, the clinical stillness and the emotional distance show the other side of her fractured mind. The contrast between the two acts demonstrates that absurdity can appear either loud and chaotic or quiet and slow. It does not depend on form but on the absence of stable meaning. On the other hand, *Realism* takes these concerns into a domestic setting; Stuart's day consists of routine gestures, but none of these gestures produces direction or understanding. His body moves, but his inner life remains suspended. The fragmentation in *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* appears in a fantastic world, while in *Realism* it appears as repetition, hesitation and emotional paralysis. However, both of these different forms show that the self is unstable and memory is unreliable. The ends of both plays strengthen this perspective; neither

offers closure. Both plays are unable to explain the condition of the protagonist; Lisa's quiet hospital scene and Stuart's suspended moment in the kitchen mirror each other. Each ending shows a paused life rather than a completed. Each leaves the audience in a void. The characters do not reach clarity, and the audience is not guided towards a stable interpretation. Instead, the two plays insist that uncertainty is essential in the absurdity of the human condition.

The final moments of *Realism* sharpen the reference point to uncertainty. Stuart's closing expression reduces the complexity of his emotional life to a tactless statement that rejects meaning, direction and hope. It functions as an anti-resolution. It dismisses the expectation that a narrative should end with insight or growth. This refusal illustrates the absurd tone of the play. It also connects Neilson to a broader cultural context.

Many playwrights of Neilson's generation, often described as 'children of Thatcher', grew up in a climate shaped by economic restructuring, individualism and unstable social frameworks. Their works frequently express scepticism toward coherent identities, fixed values and stable futures. Therefore, Stuart's final gesture reflects this sensibility; it conveys a view shaped by uncertainty and by the erosion of collective narratives that once promised security. In this sense, the ending of *Realism* is not only a personal failure for Stuart but also a cultural symptom. This context also clarifies the relationship between Neilson and the tradition of the absurd. He belongs neither to the post-war existential moment nor to classical absurdism. However, his plays echo the concerns of the post-war Theatre of the Absurd, as theorised by Martin Esslin. The absurd emerges through some questions that cannot be answered, through some actions that do not lead to progress and through identities that resist definition. At the same time, Neilson shows these concerns in contemporary conditions: mental illness, emotional labour, unstable relationships and changing social expectations. *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism*, thus, shows how the logic of absurd theatre continues to evolve. The absurd emerges from everyday life, from bureaucratic pressures, from clinical environments, from domestic spaces and from the increasing difficulty of forming coherent narratives about the self.

Through Lisa and Stuart, Neilson also demonstrates that absurdity is not limited to philosophy; it reflects the psychological problems of people. Lisa's divided mental world and Stuart's emotional immobility both reflect environments in which individuals struggle to recognise themselves. The plays do not suggest solutions;

instead, they reveal how people move between fragments of identity, uncertain memories and contradictory desires. The tragic and comic elements of these movements are inseparable. They form the basis of Neilson's dramaturgy.

In conclusion, both plays expose the instability of meaning in modern life. They show how identity collapses under pressure, how memory becomes unreliable and how emotional survival requires constant negotiation. *The Wonderful World of Dissocia* and *Realism* present different worlds but share the same absurdity. Their protagonists search for clarity but find only further uncertainty. Their journeys do not end with enlightenment, but they end with suspended states of being. Therefore, Neilson's theatre fits in the absurd tradition. His plays simply present the instability of human existence, void of the human condition, meaninglessness and alienation, which still dominate our world, too.

WORKS CITED

Acarlıoğlu, Abdüllatif. *Saçmanın Tiyatrosu: Ionesco – Kel Şarkıcı*. Mitos-Boyut Yayınları, 2003.

Amer, Matthew. *Anthony Neilson*. Official London Theatre, 17 April 2008.

<https://officiallondontheatre.com/news/anthony-neilson-72324/> Accessed 12 September 2025.

Baker, Richard E. *The Dynamics of Absurd in the Existentialist Novel*. Questia Media America, 1993.

Barnett, Laura. *Portrait of the Artist: Anthony Neilson, Playwright*. The Guardian, 3 March 2009.

<https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2009/mar/03/anthony-neilson> Accessed 25 August 2025.

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*. Grove Press, 1954.

Billington, Michael. *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945*. Faber and Faber, 2007.

---. *One Night Stands: A Critic's View of Modern British Theatre*. Nick Hern, 1993.

---. *Unreachable Review – Matt Smith Searches for the Magic Hour*. The Guardian, 10 July 2016.

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/jul/10/unreachable-review-matt-smith-anthony-neilson-royal-court> Accessed 4 September 2025.

Brecht, Bertolt. *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Translated by John Willet, Eyre Methuen Ltd., 1988

Broich, Ulrich. "A Theatre of Blood and Sperm: New Trends in British Theatre."

Britain at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century. Ed. Ulrich Broich and Susan

Bassnett. Rodopi B.V., 2001. pp 207-226.

- Bull, John. "Anthony Neilson." *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights*. Ed. Martin Middeke, Peter Paul Schnierer and Aleks Sierz. Methuen Drama, 2011. pp 343-363.
- Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Alfred A. Knoph, INC. 1995.
- Cassidy, Gary. *Psychological Liminality in Anthony Neilson's The Wonderful World of Dissocia*. The International Journal of Scottish Theatre and Screen, vol. 6, University of Glasgow, <https://ijosts.glasgow.ac.uk/volume-6/psychological-liminality-in-anthony-neilsons-the-wonderful-world-of-dissocia/> Accessed 21 September 2025.
- Cavendish, Dominic. *Inspired Lunacy in La-La Land*. The Telegraph, 6 April 2007. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3664268/Inspired-lunacy-in-la-la-land.html> Accessed 12 September 2025.
- *Edinburgh Reports: "I Want to Disturb People*. The Telegraph, 16 August 2004. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3622348/Edinburgh-reports-I-want-to-disturb-people.html> Accessed 12 September 2025.
- Cornwell, Neil. *The Absurd in Literature*. Manchester University Press, 2006.
- Edgar, David. *State of Play: Playwrights and Playwriting*. Faber, 1999.
- Eradam, Yusuf. The Theatre of the Absurd and Jean Genet. *Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi* 36.1-2, 1992, 157-169.
- Esslin, Martin. The Theatre of the Absurd. *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1960, 3-15
- . *The Theatre of the Absurd*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Fisher, Mark. *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*. Variety, 9 March 2007. <https://variety.com/2007/legit/reviews/the-wonderful-world-of-dissocia-1200509788/> Accessed 15 September 2025.
- Gardner, Lyn. *Realism*. The Guardian, 20 June 2011. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/jun/20/realism-soho-theatre-review> Accessed 27 September 2025.

- . *Matt Smith Took a Huge Risk With “Unreachable” – The Result is Unmissable*. The Guardian, 14 July 2016.
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2016/jul/14/matt-smith-unreachable-royal-court> Accessed 12 September 2025.
- Ionesco, Eugene. *Notes and Counter Notes: Writings on the Theatre*. Trans. Donald Watson. Grove Press, 1964.
- Kitchin, Laurence. *Drama in the Sixties: Form and Interpretation*. Faber and Faber, 1966.
- Logan, Brian. *Everyday Madness*. The Guardian, 14 August 2006.
<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2006/aug/14/theatre.edinburgh20062>
 Accessed 10 September 2025.
- McMillan, Joyce. [Article Title Unknown]. The Scotsman, 11 August 2006.
- . *Theatre in Scotland: A Field of Dreams*. Edited by Philip Howard, Nick Hern Books, 2016.
- Neilson, Anthony. *The Wonderful World of Dissocia*. Introduction by Trish Reid. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2007.
- . *Plays: 2*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2008.
- Reid, Trish. *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson* Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017.
- . “Post-Devolutionary Drama” *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Drama*. Ed. Ian Brown. Edinburgh University Press, 2011. Pages 188-200
- Shenton, Mark. *Anthony Neilson: Writing Can Become Very Isolating and Depressing*. The Stage, 15 July 2016.
<https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/anthony-neilson-writing-can-become-very-isolating-and-depressing> Accessed 1 September 2025.
- Sierz, Aleks. *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s, Voices, Documentations, New Interpretations*. Methuen Drama, 2012.
- . *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today*. Faber and Faber, 2001.
- Smith, Caroline. *Anthony Neilson Interviewed by Caroline Smith* Bran Literary Magazine, No. 2, 2008, p.77
<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/50726248/anthony-neilson-download-pdf-sample-brand-literary-magazine> Accessed 6 June 2025.

Spencer, Charles. *What Men Are Really Like*. The Telegraph, 17 August 2006.

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/3654592/What-men-are-really-like.html?ICID=continue_without_subscribing_reg_first Accessed 30 August 2025.

Yiğit, Merve. *Absurd Tiyatronun Aktarımı*. Bahçeşehir University, 2017.

