Chapter Four

"The last Rolo": Love, Conflict and War in Anthony Neilson's *Penetrator*

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The 2010s has been a prolific decade for Anthony Neilson, with plays such as *Unreachable* (2016) and *The Prudes* (2018) at The Royal Court, and, perhaps more surprisingly, an adaptation of Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (2015) and a Christmas production of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (2016). Surprising because Neilson is perhaps best known as a writer of the In-Yer-Face, "Cool Britannia" genre that made its name in the 1990s, a movement that has generally been regarded, at least in critical terms, as superficially brutal and violent. Neilson's earlier plays adhere to Aleks Sierz's description of the genre in the way that it takes "the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message."[1] However, despite Neilson's own description of himself as a "purveyor of filth," his relationship with the term "In Yer Face" is problematic. He states, perhaps somewhat disingenuously: "In-Yer-Face was all about being horrid and writing about shit and buggery. I thought I was writing love stories."[2] Neilson, who both directed and acted the part of Max in the original production, describes the genre as "experimental theatre," rather than In-Yer-Face, refuting the label attributed by Sierz.[3] In keeping with Neilson's assertion that he was writing love stories, this chapter considers the themes of love, erotic desire and, as a counter-narrative, the overarching menace of war and male violence in his 1993 play *Penetrator* which first played at The Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh. It also, in line with the general focus of this collection and what the "remnants" of this contentious movement may offer, considers what the play might have to say to contemporary audiences whose cultural

frames of reference will be very different than those offered by Neilson. I ~~speak~~ write from the position of a white British woman who grew up around the time of which Neilson is concerned and would have been a similar age to the protagonists of the play when it was set. I thus recognise and appreciate the specific cultural references that he uses to ground the story in its historical era.

The opening scenes of *Penetrator* center upon the intimate relationship between Max and his flatmate, Alan. Conversation between the men revolves around the laundry, cups of Happy Shopper tea, and icons of 1980s British and American popular culture. The cultural frames of reference are numerous - Bruce Forsyth and *The Generation Game*, Laurel and Hardy, and Nestle's Rolos are just some of the signifiers that Neilson uses to ground his writing in a past to which the protagonists escape when the present becomes too dangerous for them to confront. The play looks inwards, being set entirely within a cheaply furnished living room, a domestic space in which we learn that "the credibly masculine fights with a softer influence."[4] (In fact, Neilson's plays generally tend towards the domestic, as seen in the titles *Hoover Bag*, *Stitching*, and *The Year of the Family*.) The two men, in their relationship with one another and the space that they occupy, navigate gendered representations of intimacy that dictate a normative set of learnt behaviours, Max adopting the position of "credibly masculine," whilst Alan is a far more sensitive character, or what Trish Reid, quoting John Beynon calls, "the post-feminist 'anti-sexist, caring, sharing' version of masculinity that had 'gained credibility and strength throughout the 1980s'."[5] Alan and Max play cards, smoke weed, verbally abuse one another, and behave like partners in a long-term marriage - bickering, but also caring deeply for one another. Into this space arrives Tadge (so called because of an erection he had in

the showers when he was in primary school), a childhood friend of Max's, who turns up unannounced midway through the play. From his unreliable and erratic dialogue, and physically threatening behaviour, we can deduce that Tadge has been discharged from the army, almost certainly suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder after serving as a "squaddie" in the 1991 Gulf War.

War, and associated male violence, is a central theme of the play and Max and Alan's confinement within the privacy of the flat offers them a mediated experience of war as a spectacle that is broadcast live from their television screen. As Max says, "If they'd just start bombing again we could have some *decent* telly" (67). Despite Alan's initial objection to this tasteless comment, he is quickly seduced into the possibilities that mediated war imagery has to offer, preferring this to the alternative programming of a French film. We can theorise this conflation between the reality of war and a televised, contrived version through the work of Jean Baudrillard, particularly his writing on the simulacra and hyperreality. "Simulation threatens the difference between the 'true' and the 'false,' the 'real' and the 'imaginary.'"[6] For Baudrillard, the popular media has created and shaped war, so that war is no longer a real event, but instead becomes a simulacrum of reality itself. As Baudrillard asserts: "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real."[7] Baudrillard's essay "The Gulf War will not take place" argues that, specifically, the Gulf War that Neilson references was a "virtual" war, or event, which had been carefully scripted by the media. Baudrillard states: "We are all hostages of media intoxication, induced to believe in the war […] and confined to the simulacrum of war as though confined to quarters. We are all already strategic hostages *in situ*; our site is the screen on which

we are virtually bombarded day by day."[8] Baudrillard uses the language of war – hostages, confinement, quarters, bombardment – to position the viewer as both a spectator and casualty of war in a virtual sense. Real human suffering, or "collateral damage," as the loss of civilian life has disingenuously been termed, is transformed into a series of selected images that render the event, at best, benign. Indeed, the claustrophobic setting of the play is one of confinement and (when Tadge arrives) hostage taking, and the television screen becomes central to the dynamics of this exchange. Neilson himself reinforces both the ubiquity and anonymity of war, stating in his *Notes*; "This play was written not long after the Gulf War […] You could choose to keep it as it is and treat the play as period, or you could substitute another item of topical news, preferably a similar conflict" (118). These instructions, and further notes in relation to cultural icons and events within the play, are remarkably fluid given the playwright tends to direct and act in many of his own works, and states: "I have always kept a fairly tight authorial grip on work."[9] Furthermore, the suggestion here that all wars are synonymous or interchangeable reinforces Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality whilst at the same time revealing the nature of reported war as a constructed and circulating set of images within the marketplace, devoid of defining characteristics. Baudrillard again: "war is not measured by being waged, but by its speculative unfolding in an abstract, electronic and informational space, the same space in which capital moves."[10] In its associations with capital, war is commodified, fetishized and trivialized to the point where the lived experiences of warfare (most particularly the loss of human life) become erased, and manipulated television images are substituted for coverage of real events, which themselves are regarded as either fictionalised or, in the extreme, non-existent.

The intertextual, mediated links between war and popular culture are further cemented in the play by Max who, following a discussion with Alan about Tadge's erratic behaviour, sings a line from "The War Song," a well-known pop song by the band Culture Club: "War is *stoo*-pid and *pee*-puhl are *stoo*pid" (81). It is interesting to see a reference here to Boy George, the androgynous front man for Culture Club, who displayed and performed a highly ambiguous sexual identity, experimenting with make-up, clothing and the myriad possibilities of gender performance. By introducing Boy George, if only obliquely, into the range of cultural signifiers that the play offers, Max's reference opens up a discourse surrounding gender difference, inviting the audience to imagine alternative possibilities, and hinting at aspects of the play itself as a dialectical negotiation about the fluidity of gender performance. Furthermore, the music video that accompanied "The War Song" opens with androgynous models in military clothing dancing along a catwalk that has been constructed and immersed within the debris of bombed out streets and buildings. Military fashion and popular song are intercut with the iconic image of the Hiroshima mushroom cloud of 1945, drawing attention to the uncomfortable relationship between war, the media, and the world of fashion. The "speculative unfolding" of war to which Baudrillard refers, and its relation to capital is exposed in "The War Song," which, even if we argue is an *anti*-war song, responds particularly well to Baudrillard's argument: "The media promote the war, the war promotes the media […] it allows us to turn the world, and the violence of the world into a consumable substance."[11]

Whilst Max and Alan's exposure to war is shaped through music videos and television highlights, it is Tadge and his traumatic first-hand understanding of warfare and its sustained long-term effects that injects a more threatening atmosphere into the

play, generating much of the conflict between the three men. Alan gestures towards the cause of Tadge's behaviour by stating: "He's been totally *brainwashed*! He's been out there learning to *kill* people" (81). Indeed, it is not until Tadge's arrival, introducing an aspect of life outside the confines of the domestic space, or "quarters," that raw emotion truly surfaces. Tadge is the only "real" victim, or hostage, of war in this play, believing himself to be pursued by "penetrators" who threaten to "stab him up the arse" with a hunting knife. He constructs an alternative identity than that displayed by his childhood friends in his attempts to make sense of the world and justify his own part in the war. As well as being preoccupied by the penetrators, he rejects his own biological father, believing himself to be the son of Norman Schwarzkopf, the American military general who led coalition forces in Operation Desert Storm in 1991. By identifying himself as the son of "Stormin' Norman," as he was popularly known, Tadge both rewrites his own personal history and also problematizes the construction of family that the play as a whole attempts to critique. Indeed, *Penetrator* can be read more generally as a socio-cultural response to a political climate that celebrated the cult of the individual and the rise of neo-liberalism under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. As Ken Urban argues, In-Yer-Face playwrights "are Thatcher's children […] There is a shared hatred for the Tories dismantling of the socialist state."[12] Specifically, Tadge's personal dismantling and reconstruction of his own family structures presents a challenge to Thatcher's definition and endorsement of the nuclear, stable, married, heterosexual family espoused by her call for the return of "traditional family values."

Although Tadge's conflation of real experiences with fabricated events echoes the illusions of warfare that Max and Alan are exposed to through media

representations, of the three protagonists, it is Tadge, in his violent destruction of Alan's teddy bear, (holding a knife to its throat and eventually, reluctantly, tearing it to shreds), who comes closest to confronting the truth about his past head on. The disembowelment of the teddy bear is a physical and symbolic enactment of the destruction of his past; of innocence and childhood; and family; and a place that can never be revisited despite Max and Alan's yearning need to recreate their own nostalgic memories of childhood. The three men navigate their gendered roles, negotiating and adapting their own place within the triangulated group dynamics as they vie for recognition and affection. We might imagine these complex relationships between the three men in terms of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's reworking of Rene Girard's formulation of the erotic triangle, which considers the relationship between two male rivals for a female.[13] Sedgwick argues that it is not simply the heterosexual coupling that is under threat in this scenario, but relations of male homosocial desire that operate by, and through, the exchange and transfer of the female. In other words, the male subject is constituted in relation to other men by way of women. Sedgwick states: "the bond that links the two rivals is as intense and potent as the bond that links either of the rivals to the beloved: that the bonds of 'rivalry' and 'love,' differently as they are experienced, are equally powerful and in many senses equivalent."[14] In this play, however, the male/male "homosocial" bond that Sedgwick identifies is constantly challenged, disturbed and reinforced, not only through the exchange of the female, but through the bonds of love, same-sex desire, and rivalry between the three *male* characters. Tadge's arrival (or penetration) into the internal space poses a threat to the domestic world created by Max and Alan and challenges the notion of what Michel Foucault, and later Adrienne Rich, labels "compulsory heterosexuality."[15] The violent form of patriarchal, and, at the same time, misogynistic power that dominates

early scenes of the play and reasserts itself through Tadge is ultimately destabilised through the interactions that the men have with one another. This is most obviously played out by Alan, the

"softer influence" that threatens to pierce the masculine veneer, challenging hetero-normative patterns of gender and sexual identity. But it is also seen in Tadge who, as Max pleads with him, holds a knife to Alan's throat, forcing Max to erase Alan from his own history.

> **Max** Alan's your friend. He's *our* friend […] We used to trip together, the three of us, remember? The three wasters, remember? […]
>
> **Tadge** But what about us?! It was *better* before! You were the brains, I was the brawn! We were friends, we were *real* friends, tell me about *that*, tell me what you remember about *that*! (p.108)

Yet despite the tacit homosexual connotations of Tadge's plea for Max to remember (and his assertion that it was better when it was just the two of them), he ultimately reinforces a heterosexual code of violent masculinity as he brandishes the knife that he has already used to slash Alan's childhood teddy to shreds. That the teddy happens to be Alan's is an example of the power of the homo-social bond that is reinforced through the (usually heterosexual) erotic triangle. Echoing Foucault and Rich, Sedgwick labels this performative masculinity "obligatory heterosexuality" and considers it necessary to the maintenance of the status quo and a patriarchal system. Her notion of "obligatory heterosexuality" and theatrical masculinity is evoked in this play through pornographic imagery, masturbation and misogynistic comments about voiceless, unseen women. It is "built into male-dominated kinship systems [and] homophobia is a *necessary* consequence of such patriarchal institutions."[16] Reid renders this link still more palpable in her analysis of *Penetrator*: "As the play's title

provocatively suggests male homosexuality functions as a kind of indictment in the world depicted, and while this indictment is certainly embellished with the arrival of Tadge, casual homophobia is standard fare in the first part of the play."[17] Although a violent form of patriarchal power dominates early scenes, underscoring an implicit homophobic element, the play avoids such binary distinctions through the complexities of characterization. As we come to learn, Tadge's frequent violent references to anal sex reveal a preoccupation with homosexual penetration that is at once terrifying yet also shamefully pleasurable. Although Tadge fears the imagined "Penetrators," one of whom "put his arm up my arse, right up to *here*. *He indicates his elbow*" (99), later, holding Alan hostage, he recalls a pleasurable sexual encounter he shared with Max when they were children.

> **Tadge** And I touched you.
>
> **Max** (*nods*) Yes.
>
> **Tadge** Where did I touch you?
>
> **Max** You touched my balls. You asked me to cough. You turned me over and spread my arse.
>
> **Tadge** Do you remember the smell of me?
>
> **Max** (*nods*) Yes.
>
> **Tadge** I remember the smell of you. (112)

This coaxing language, in which Tadge begs Max to remember, affirm and validate his own story, operates on a number of levels. Homosexual desire is not only made explicit in this scene, but is reinforced through childhood memories that are framed through innocence. Furthermore, as Tadge's hostage, Alan is maintained in the position of threat or rival in the dynamics of the erotic triangle to which Sedgwick refers.

Indeed, we may explore Sedgwick's thesis still further in her engagement with Gayle Rubin's argument that "[t]he suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals is […] a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women."[18] The representation of women in this play cannot go without comment. Their physical absence from the stage is not matched by their very symbolic presence throughout. The play opens with Max masturbating into a pornographic magazine. This follows an anonymous voice-over describing an explicit scene in which a girl "hitches up her tiny skirt to reveal her gash, spreading the lips of her fuck-hole like some filthy tart a flood of cunt juice cascading down her long legs" (61). As this description graphically illustrates, women are not embodied characters, but instead operate as commodities, their use-value being measured either sexually or domestically, thus functioning primarily as signs of the male characters' fragile masculinity. The faceless "girl," defined through her sexualized body parts, is one of only a few women who are briefly referred to within the play, the others being Alan's mother, who does Alan and Max's weekly laundry; a "fanny-basher [and] professional *feminist*" Max argues with at the pub; Mrs. Taylor, who helped Tadge learn to read as a child; and Max's ex-girlfriend, Laura, who is referred to by Max as a "slut." It is the absent Laura who moves from use- to exchange-value towards the end of the play, and it is ostensibly Laura who fractures the friendship between Max and Alan with the revelation that she has recently (and perhaps implausibly given the ways in which the audience is guided towards understanding his character) slept with Alan. Thus, Laura reinforces the dynamics of the traditional hetero-normative erotic triangle, although in this instance the homo-

social bond is both destroyed (Alan finally banished from the play altogether) and further cemented in the final scenes that see Max and Tadge share a packet of Rolos.

Penetrator ends as follows:

> *Tadge gets up. He wanders into the kitchen. Pause. He comes out with two packs of Rolos. He kneels down beside Max, handing him some Rolos. Max looks at them. Pause. He opens a packet. They sit there eating them.* (116)

There are at least two ways of reading this final scene. The telling absence of dialogue is perhaps best explained by looking at Roland Barthes' treatise on the dilemma of language in representing the experience of love. Pre-empting Baudrillard's work on the simulacra, he writes: "To try to write love is to confront the muck of language; that region of hysteria where language is both too much and too little, excessive (by the limitless expansion of the ego, by emotive submersion) and impoverished (by the codes on which love diminishes and levels it)."[19] Language – and its very absence in this scene – is exposed as a postmodern device, never really telling the truth, or being able to tell the truth, finally and definitively deferred. Furthermore, if we consider the connections between love and confectionary through this postmodern perspective, the reference to a brand name that sells the promise of love as a commodity (in a similar way in which war is also commodified), blatantly reveals itself as the very simulacrum of love that it hopes to eschew. It is only in the intimacy of the relationships between these men that we can escape the cult of the commodity and move some way towards an understanding of the value of intimate friendship. Whilst this scene is made the more poignant by its relation to the cultural framework from which it emerges, only British audiences of a certain generation will understand the

cultural signification of the Rolos. Indeed, the tube of Rolos, which Max initially shares with Alan, is a highly significant popular cultural reference. The very successful UK television advertising campaign that began in the 1980s, with the tagline: "Do you love someone enough to give them your last Rolo?" is silently played out in this final scene.[20] Yet although modern audiences may well be unfamiliar with the Rolo advertising campaign, this poignant, almost homoerotic take on a classic heterosexual love story is as pertinent today as when the play was written. Kneeling beside Max, Tadge becomes the wooer, taking the place once occupied by Alan and enacting the scene of a conventional marriage proposal. Reid asserts: "the plays closing image of unlikely domestic harmony between Tadge and Max opens up a place of possibility that at least potentially destabilizes the wider social order."[21]

The wider social order is, of course, the heterosexual norm and Reid's analysis allows us to imagine not just the homoerotic connotations of this final scene, but the way in which the play as a whole potentially destabilizes a social order that is nurtured and reinforced by the politics of Thatcherism. Written at the end of ten years of Thatcher's administration, the reconstruction of familial structures (as shown, for example, in Tadge's perceived familial connection to Stormin' Norman) is a recurring theme in much of Neilson's work and, as argued earlier, challenges Margaret Thatcher's ideology that the traditional nuclear family is paramount to a civilized society. In a speech at the Conservative Party conference in 1981, Thatcher declared: "the family is the basic unit of our society. It is within the family that the generation is nurtured."[22] It is noteworthy that Thatcher refers to the family as a "basic unit," a term of currency closely associated with capital and exchange. Neilson's own work persistently challenges assumptions about the family as the primary site of nurturing. In his play *Year of the Family*, the character Sid asks: "Why do you think they call it a

nuclear family? Because they're burning alive."[23] Similarly, in *Penetrator* Max subverts the idea of the family as a place of nurturing and trust with the comment, "[f]amilies are *built* on fucking. Fucking and secrets" (74). He recounts the story of his friend, Pete, who "is selling his *jism* for fifty quid a shot […] he sells some *here* and then gets the cheap bus over to Glasgow and sells some *there*. So that's a hundred undeclared quid a week for *two* hand shandies" (68). Like the faceless woman in the early pornographic scenes of the play, the body is displayed as a site of capital and commodification, but in this case it is a virile male body. Pete's entrepreneurial skills are dependent upon his body as both use- and exchange-value. Although the families that Pete creates are not actually built on fucking (through the medicalization of fertilization and pregnancy), they may well be built on secrets. Again, through the erasure of the biological father, the concept of the nuclear family is challenged, becoming fragmented and dispersed and opening the possibility of alternative definitions of family than that espoused by the ideology of Thatcherism.

The men in the play create their own idea of family, built on their nostalgic memories of childhood. True to form, Alan is probably the most sensitive of the three in his nostalgic romanticizing of the past as a place of comfort and familiarity. Childhood is the place to which all the protagonists alternately return, their memories often unreliable and fractured. Tadge's rejection of his biological father rewrites his own experiences of childhood, whilst Alan and Max turn to popular culture to strengthen their memories of the past. Alan is emphatic in his wistful recollections, telling Max: "I *refuse* to believe that *Starsky and Hutch* was shite" (66) (Starsky and Hutch, Laurel and Hardy, iconic male/male partnerships that were built on homoerotic foundations.) However, Max is far more critical and dismissive of these shared

childhood memories, challenging Alan's memory, and reducing the past to a series of low-quality television shows. Yelling theatrically from the off-stage kitchen, Max argues:

> *Rrrriiinnngg*!! This Is Your Wake Up Call. It was shite *then* and it's shite *now*. It was all shite. *The Persuaders, The Protectors, The Invaders, The Avengers, The* fucking *Waltons, Thunder*-fucking-*birds, The Man from Bollocks, The Hair-Bear Fucks, Mary, Mungo and* fucking *Midge, all* of it – *shite*. (66)

Perhaps anticipating Tadge's later obsession with "The Penetrators," Max's response questions the reliability of memory and how it rewrites the past in our own desire to create a recognisable identity. His blanket assertion that "it was all shite" devalues and undermines all of Alan's nostalgic recollections, which are more nuanced and thoughtful. Max's conflation of the names of television shows that actually aired with those he has fabricated blurs the boundaries between fantasy and reality, between truth and fiction in the same way that "highlights" of the Gulf war complicate our perceptions of reality. The fictionalized nature of television informs many of Alan and Max's verbal exchanges, anchoring their relationship to an unreliable past and complicating the boundaries between a simulation of truth, and the truth itself. The television, as a focal point of their claustrophobic lives, enables them to fortify their own memories of their past, and their inner reality is constructed and reduced to a fictionalized narrative. And although they regard themselves in an altogether alternative psychological category than Tadge, Alan and Max's differing accounts of childhood television are constructions that they have built in order to make sense of

themselves in the same way that Tadge's rejection of his biological father is a strategy that he uses to rewrite his own past.

I move now, in this final section, to address the sub-title of this collection, *Remnants of a Theatrical Revolution.* What are the remnants of such a revolution? What do In-Yer-Face plays have to say to us today? Are they products of a particular socio-political period that cannot translate for today's social media savvy audiences? Given the culturally and historically specific signifiers that pepper much of Neilson's work, how might *Penetrator* translate for a new generation of theatre goers who may feel alienated not just from graphic sexual language, but also an unfamiliar socio-political landscape that has no recognisable frames of reference? What does this play have to offer audiences of today and how can references to characters such as Hambel from *Play School,* or the firemen Cuthbert, Dibble and Grubb from *Camberwick Green*, or Nestle's Rolos, speak to a twenty-first century audience? These questions address this notion of remnants, responding directly to the subtitle of this collection. As I have argued, audiences today will be unlikely to recognize the weight of specific signifiers from popular culture, nostalgic reminders of childhood in the 1970s. Neilson himself is generous in his recognition for the need of adaptation. He comments in the *Notes* at the end of the play: "change them as you see fit […] adapt to suit [….] you might find that all references can be lost […] bear in mind that disillusionment with childhood is a theme of the play […] You might want to leave this open so as to react to topical events" (118). Neilson's recognition of the need to adapt the play to suit, however, may not be as straightforward as he suggests. For example, as I have argued, the tube of Rolos that is first shared by Alan and Max, and then, in the final scene, shared between Max and Tadge, is a highly significant

popular cultural reference. The cultural signifier of the Rolos does, indeed, add a historiographical layer to the meaning of the play. Yet although this anchoring to a specific cultural framework may enhance audience experience, without this knowledge, audiences are still able to understand the tenderness inherent in the scene. The Rolos were initially shared by Max and Alan, and this exchange continues throughout the play despite a change in partners. The enduring signifier in each case is the Rolos, it is the Rolos that cement the bonds of love.[24]

Thus, given the quantity of cultural signifiers in this play, the question of whether *Penetrator* can successfully translate for a contemporary audience is complex. The play is seldom performed, last being staged in 2015 at The Hope Theatre, a 50-seat venue in London. Popular cultural signifiers from the original are substituted with contemporary references to ISIS, nerf guns and internet porn. In her online review of the production, Verity Healey asks:

> one questions whether the update can have the same social significance as it did in the Royal Court's 1994 production. Other than the exploration of crude male fantasies and repressed homosexual feelings that show difference only in the way in which they find expression and outlet, is there anything else this play can give?[25]

Although Healey provides no answers to this question, she does end her review by asserting that this play is about love. I would agree with this and look back at Neilson's quotation, cited earlier, which asserts that he thought he was writing love stories. Finally, despite the extreme sexually explicit opening scene, and physical violence and misogyny throughout, *Penetrator* is a play about loyalty and love, enduring topics that have as much resonance today as they did in the 1990s. There is a

nostalgic yearning for a seemingly innocent return to childhood, a past that was, at least in the minds of the protagonists, untainted by war; debates about sexual identity; and the proliferation and celebration of materialism and individualism. The play asks us to consider our own childhoods, both as a nostalgic yearning for something past, but also as an unreliable and potentially threatening place that ultimately disappoints. As Neilson himself argues: "We all believe ourselves to be the directors of our own lives. We are all trying to batter the chaos of our lives into some kind of shape and the other people in that are actors in a sense of our drama."[26] Dominic Dromgoole echoes this in his analysis of Neilson's work: "You can hear behind his work the wish that the world was all roses, blue skies and the missionary position, but it isn't and it grieves him that it isn't. As well as the violence, the fragility and the anarchy, there's an overwhelming feeling of sorrow."[27] Neilson's work is at once shocking, violent, tender and lonely, yet is, at heart, an exploration of the vulnerability of human existence and an often-futile search for meaningful human connection. These themes are just as sensitive and pertinent today as they were when Neilson was writing *Penetrator* twenty-five years ago.

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[1] Aleks Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), 4.

[2] Anthony Neilson, "Don't be so boring," *The Guardian*, 21 March 2007. https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/mar/21/features11.g2.

[3] Sarah Kane also rejects the label, describing her own understanding of the genre as "experiential" in a letter to Aleks Sierz, 4 January 1999.

[4] Anthony Neilson, *Plays: 1* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 1998), 62. All further references to the play *Penetrator* will be cited within the chapter.

[5] Trish Reid, *The Theatre of Anthony Neilson* (London: Methuen, 2017), 23.

[6] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 3.

[7] Ibid., 2.

[8] Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War will not take place*, trans. Paul Patton (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 25.

[9] David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 89.

[10] Baudrillard, *The Gulf War*, 56.

[11] Ibid., 31.

[12] Ken Urban, "An Ethics of Catastrophe: The Theatre of Sarah Kane," *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 23, no. 3 (2001): 39.

[13] Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel. Self and Other in Literary Structure* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1965).

[14] Girard's erotic triangle theory is cited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men. English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (Columbia University Press, 1985), 21.

[15] Adrienne Rich, 'Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence', *Signs*, [ejournal] 5(4), 631-660.

[16] Ibid., 698.

[17] Reid, 21.

[18] Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the Political Economy of Sex", in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 180.

[19] Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* (London: Vintage Classics, 2002), 99.

[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x8z9I3mu0o [Accessed 4th December 2019]

[21] Reid, p.26.

[22] Margaret Thatcher, Speech at Conservative Party Conference, 1981 (plus address to overflow meeting). https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104717 (Accessed 30th May 2018).

[23] Neilson, *Plays 1*, 145.

[24] It is worth noting that many In-Yer-Face plays end with the exchange or theme of food and feeding, for example Mark Ravenhills's *Shopping and Fucking* (1996), Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (1995), and Joe Penhall's *Some Voices* (1994).

[25] Verity Healey, Review of *Penetrator*. http://exeuntmagazine.com/reviews/penetrator/ (Accessed 22 July 2018)

[26] Neilson, Anthony. www.unreachabletheplay.com (Accessed 22 July 2018).

[27] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/what-to-see/career-suicide-or-the-role-of-a-lifetime-matt-smith-on-why-his-n/ (Accessed 22 July 2018).