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# IN-YER-FACE THEATRE: MYTH OR MOVEMENT

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by  
Research

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## Abstract

This thesis is an investigation into Aleks Sierz's coinage and categorisation of in-yer-face theatre which exploded onto the theatrical scene in England in the mid-late 1990s, and famously shocked audiences with its ruthless commitment to extremes. However, the thesis questions Sierz's designation of in-yer-face theatre and the conclusions made in his book *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama Today*. Firstly, it questions the coinage, and whether in-yer-face theatre is an apt term for the plays it is meant to encompass; and secondly, whether the plays labelled as in-yer-face are adequately similar enough to be categorised together. This thesis uses a range of methodologies in order to elucidate perspectives about this controversial theatrical sensibility. Each chapter involves a different approach. Distant reading, inspired by Franco Moretti, diagrammatically shows the disparity between the plays by quantifying the affective shock tactics which Sierz argues unite them. Close reading then analyses certain aspects of the plays to highlight similarities and differences on a micro-level. Lastly, secondary reading of the play's reviews is used to add context to Sierz's criticism, linking between his formulations about in-yer-face theatre to the notorious media storm around the ground-breaking playwright Sarah Kane. The interplay between these methodologies and chapters reveals that there is something unique about Sarah Kane and her plays *Blasted* and *Cleansed*. I argue that Sierz used Kane's success to frame a range of plays as in-yer-face theatre, yet Kane's uniqueness is such that her work is not prototypical for 1990s theatre.

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## Introduction

Theatre critic and journalist Aleks Sierz coined the term ‘in-yer-face theatre’ to describe a new theatrical sensibility. His book *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama Today*, published in 2001, is a retrospective attempt to respond and understand the phenomenon of the ‘new writing’ of the 1990s (Sierz, 2002:pp.17-24). Typically, this new coinage is a controversial process, especially when assessing new writing; nevertheless, how texts are categorised can have a major influence on how the plays are perceived and formulate any preconceptions an audience member may have. Zarhy-Levo states that groups of texts are categorised by their interconnections, their similarities and their differences and theatre is not excluded from this tendency: plays are categorised in order to define a theatrical form or style, or to establish affiliations between individual playwrights, or to trace historical lineage (Zarhy-Levo, 2011:p.316).

Sierz created the ‘in-yer-face theatre’ narrative in order to group, label and ‘brand’ some of the undefined, experimental texts written and performed between 1994-1999 (Sierz, in D’Monté & Saunders, 2008: p.24). This thesis will investigate Sierz’s original premise, and will use a range of methodologies in order to investigate in-yer-face theatre, which continues to be influential on how many first-time readers, especially students, theoretically frame these plays. Firstly, this thesis will employ a quantitative approach inspired by Franco Moretti before returning to more conventional literary practices of close reading and secondary reading.

The term ‘in-yer-face’ is described by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as ‘blatantly aggressive or provocative, impossible to ignore or avoid’ (1998). The *Collins English Dictionary* later added ‘confrontational’ (1998). By its simplest definition, in-yer-face theatre ‘takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message’ (Sierz, 2001:p.4). Hence, in-yer-face theatre is raw, powerful and undeniably visceral. Sierz chose the title ‘in-yer-face theatre’, which originates from American sports journalism, as it suggests that

something is close up; that your personal space has been invaded (Merlin, 2004:p.197).

Applying this term to a new theatre grouping suggests that these plays will violate an audience member's personal space, which will subsequently create a close relationship between the play and its audience members (Sierz, 2001:pp18-19).

Sierz states that in-yer-face theatre is predicated upon the experience of going to the theatre and that his book celebrates writers, directors and actors alike (2001:p.xi). However, this does not match his practice: it is writers he is most concerned with. Sierz continues: 'writers as opposed to directors, designers, performers are centre stage, not only because the writer is central to the process of play making but also because they have wider significance' (2001:p.xi). Therefore, Sierz suggests that it is the writers' politics and experiences which shaped the series of plays that premiered in the mid-late 1990s. Sierz identifies thirty plays by nineteen different playwrights from this time, which he says constitute the in-yer-face sensibility. He repeatedly distinguishes three main authors: Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and Anthony Nielson. Furthermore, Sierz continues to distinguish a smaller corpus of plays which constitute the nucleus of the in-yer-face theatre aesthetic: *Blasted*(1995), *Cleansed*(1998) by Sarah Kane, *Shopping and Fucking*(1996) by Mark Ravenhill and *Penetrator* (1993) by Anthony Nielson.

At the same time, though, Sierz claims that an in-yer-face theatre play is defined by its relationship to its audience: it should inspire its audience to use superlatives whether in praise or condemnation; it forces an audience to react (Sierz,2001:p.5). The writing is intentionally aggressive, which then has a palpable effect on the audience: although the audience is watching in perfect safety, the plays aspires to make the audience feel as if they are in danger (Sierz,2001:p.7). Their affective potency and their ability to make the audience feel extreme emotion can be evidenced through the number of walk outs and faintings, and the shrill tone of the reviews of premiers.



These plays attempt to make their audience ‘feel and respond’ (Sierz 2001:p.xiii). The in-yer face playwrights are often remembered for their explicit use of violence. In an interview with Aleks Sierz, Sarah Kane was asked: ‘why do you write such horrors?’ Her answer: ‘because life is like that’ (Sierz, 2001:p. 233). Kane then expands on this idea, quoted as an epigraph to Urban’s article Ethics of Catastrophe, Kane states: ‘What I can do is put people through an intense experience. Maybe in a small way from that you can change things’ (Quoted in Sierz, 2001:p.36). Although the writers are at risk of appearing to make violence seem normal or glamorous, Sierz states that it is the writer’s aim to ‘make violence horrible, and as inescapable, as possible... in order to shock the [audience] out of their complacency’ (Quoted in Aragay, 2007:p.144). General Manager of the Royal Court, Graham Cowley, stated: ‘I was shocked, but that is what the theatre is partly for. There is a feeling of horror and revulsion but my God it gives you a jolt’ (Quoted in Spencer, 1995(C)). This ‘jolt’ inspires audiences to change the world outside of the theatre.

The rationale behind in-yer-face theatre was that this extremity is utilised in an attempt by the playwright to bring about change. Sarah Kane famously stated: ‘it is important to commit to memory things which have never happened, so that they never happen. I’d rather risk an overdose in the theatre than in real life’ (Quoted in Sierz, 2001:p.233). Seeing horrors inside the theatre should prevent these atrocities occurring in everyday life: these plays enter the minds of their audience members in order to produce a change in their attitudes in the outside world (López Peña, 2009). As aptly stated by Sierz: ‘At its cruel best, it can be so intense that audiences feel – emotionally if not literally – that they have lived through the events shown on stage.’ (2002:p. 19). Therefore, these plays try to have such an impact on their audiences that they change the mindset of the population.

However, besides the playwrights and the audiences, Sierz additionally calls attention to issues of content and form. He highlights tropes which classify an in-yer-face theatre play:

‘the language is filthy, characters talk of unmentionable subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent’ (2001:p.5). These plays tend to show explicit scenes which can include rape, child abuse, cannibalism, drug injection, torture and vomiting (Sierz, 2002:p.19). In-yer-face theatre takes these taboo, provocative and controversial subjects and places them directly in front of an audience, literally in their face.

In-yer- face theatre is also innately connected to the space that it is performed in. Born in small, intimate theatres: ‘an audience found itself confronted with the images of its own society’ (Sierz, 2004:p.197). It is this personal confrontation which is key for the in-yer-face theatre sensibility. Morris states:

Watching the cruellest of these plays in a small studio theatre is like watching a simulated rape in your own living room. In very small theatres, it is impossible to walk out, so the audience is trapped in close proximity to the action, giving the playwright free reign to have his or her say in the bluntest possible terms. (1995).

This ability to confront and affect the audience provides the necessary tension in order to make the text shocking. Billington explains ‘it’s crucial to remember...[these plays] were put on Upstairs, a very intimate space, which meant there were these terrifying things happening six feet away from you’ (Quoted in Aragay, 2007:p.118). This extreme closeness amplifies the violence and affective potency of these plays.

Thus far, in-yer-face theatre does not seem to have a simple definition, rather the term is unclear as there is a multi-pronged approach to its rationale. It is focussed on a group of writers, but they are not to be understood as a movement. They are to be understood as a generation, but studied, somewhat counterintuitively, in terms of the tropes and forms of their plays instead of their historical context. The tropes and forms of their plays characteristically produce sensational effects on their audiences, yet the term’s definition is centred around playwrights rather than their readers or audiences. Even Sierz admits that the term in-yer-face

theatre needs a rethink by stating: ‘maybe it’s time to radically reassess in-yer-face theatre’ (in D’Monté and Saunders, 2008:pp.34-35).

The initial reaction to Sierz’s criticism of in-yer-face theatre was somewhat mixed. For example, Brown states that *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama Today*, offers a ‘valuable map of often difficult terrain’ and states that Sierz has produced a useful and vigorous survey of the playwrights of the 1990s (2001). However, he also argues that Sierz’s term is hardly more than a label for grouping texts. And indeed, that is its principle use: a pedagogical one, a convenient way of packaging late- twentieth century- theatre for students. Since its coinage in 2001 the term has never gained much currency or traction among academic researchers or theatre practitioners.

In 2002, the term was scrutinised at a conference, entitled ‘In-yer-face? British Drama of the 1990s’. As stated by Saunders: ‘phrasing the title with a question mark was deliberate, and arose from an need to interrogate both the validity and influence of in-yer-face theatre’(Saunders in D’Monté & Saunders, 2008:p.2). It was envisioned that speakers would challenge both the validity and influence of in-yer-face theatre, and, as a result, challenge and broaden the scholarship around British playwriting of the 1990’s. However, this was not the case; most of the proposals simply ‘worked within the framework already established by Sierz, and seemed to validate his claim that in-yer-face theatre indeed was indeed the dominant theatrical style of the 1990s’ (Saunders, in D’Monté & Saunders, 2008:p.2). Clearly, preliminary research into Sierz’s term found that it struck a chord, and consequently, was not rigorously challenged. Nevertheless, it has not enjoyed widespread uptake in the years since, which, once again, is a rather curious anomalous situation. The upshot is that Sierz’s term has yet to be subjected to extensive, methodical scrutiny.

Admittedly, the label has been sporadically challenged on two general accounts: firstly, whether the title is an adequate description of the plays which Sierz includes, and secondly, whether these plays are similar enough to be branded as having the same aesthetic.

Alternative neologisms include 'New Brutalism,' 'neo-Jacobeanism,' 'Theatre of Urban Ennui' (Sierz, 2002:p.18), 'blood and sperm' (Spencer, 2001.b) and 'theatre of sensations' (Merlin,2004:p.197). The multiplicity of terminology to describe the sensibility clearly demonstrates the academic confusion surrounding Sierz's controversial designation. This raises questions about the cohesion of the in-yer-face sensibility. The debate highlights the crux of the issue: is the in-yer-face theatre term adequate in describing the theatrical sensibility?

In-yer-face theatre also comes under scrutiny by critics such as Ken Urban. According to Urban there is a distinct disparity between the plays which Sierz classes as in-yer-face, and as a result, a case for it constituting as a 'movement' is a hard case to make. Urban states: 'an artistic movement needs a shared sense of movement, a collective will, a manifesto or at least a figurehead with whom the artist align themselves' (2004:p.354). By contrast, the In-yer-face playwrights seemed almost wilfully indifferent to each other. Although Ravenhill admired Kane's work, he did not read *Blasted* before he wrote *Shopping and Fucking* (Sierz, 2001:p.124). Ravenhill, in an article about Nielson, states that Nielson hardly ever went to the theatre to inhibit subconscious influence (2004). Therefore, rather than a movement, Urban suggests that in-yer-face theatre was just the 'norm for a brief period of time' (2004:p.354).

To mitigate such criticisms, Sierz was intentionally vague when labelling in-yer-face theatre as a movement and rather labels in-yer-face theatre as a brand, a phenomenon, a new aesthetic or a theatrical sensibility. Sierz states that calling in-yer-face theatre a movement is an understandable misconception (2008:p.32). Instead, he uses the metaphor of an arena: 'an imaginary place that can be visited or passed through, a spot where a writer can grow up, or

where they can return to after other adventures' (2001:pp.248-249). This arena is a complex phenomenon because it is both 'a sensibility and a series of theatrical techniques' (2008:p.30). Therefore, within this thesis I will use Sierz's preferred nomenclature and address in-yer-face theatre as a 'sensibility' or an 'aesthetic' (Sierz, 2002:p.21). So, rather than a movement without a manifesto, in-yer-face theatre is categorised by its use of tropes and its effect on the audience.

Perhaps the most interesting reappraisal of in-yer-face theatre has been by Sierz himself, who acknowledges that he has "unconsciously marginalized, excluded and occasionally misrepresented" (Saunders in D'Monté & Saunders, 2008:p.19) the in-yer-face playwrights. Therefore, there appears to be a great need for in-yer-face to be reassessed in order to clarify what in-yer-face theatre is and what constitutes in-yer-face theatre.. This is the academic space in which this thesis intervenes; it will attempt to assess how coherent Sierz's initial ideas were, and whether his narrative accurately describes what was happening in the plays which he discusses.

This thesis, therefore, will add to the debate surrounding in-yer-face theatre and evaluate Sierz's original claims. In order to investigate whether in-yer-face theatre is cohesive, the next chapter will employ a distant reading methodology inspired by the work of Franco Moretti. This predominantly quantitative methodology enables a critical distance to examine various interconnections, similarities and differences. The quantitative perspective also helps the discussion of in-yer-face theatre as it removes the qualitative shock value that Sierz often insists upon. Rather than focusing on the playwright's biography and corresponding interviews, an approach favoured by Sierz, a quantitative methodology can offer a new perspective on these plays. This will help establish whether these plays constitute a coherent corpus, hence whether they have been correctly encompassed under one label.

This second chapter will then adopt a more conventional literary methodology to distinguish whether the plays are similar at a micro level through the act of close reading. Not only will this subject Sierz's views to a different methodology – one which, once again, removes the playwright from the equation – it will also assess whether the macro-level findings of the first chapter hold good at the micro-level of the individual play and scene. That is, qualitative methodologies will be used in counterpoint with the quantitative methodology of the first chapter. This mixed methodological approach will help to address in-yer-face theatre from multiple perspectives. Both approaches aid the analysis of the other, therefore, ensuring a more in-depth investigation.

The third chapter will then look at contemporary secondary sources and utilise reviews of the performance's premier. I will suggest that Sierz was influenced by the media rhetoric at the time of the play's premiers. I will attempt to demonstrate that Sierz has used the media discourse in order to inform his ideas about in-yer-face theatre. Therefore, rather than being a fully-fledged movement, I will suggest that Sierz has capitalised on the sensational impact of Sarah Kane. I will then suggest that since this media frenzy relates primarily to Sarah Kane, Sierz may well have been trying to contextualise her unique work, and invented an 'aesthetic' or a 'sensitivity' with which to do so – one which does not fit the other playwrights he discusses quite so well.

## Chapter One

### A Distant Methodology

From the outset, Sierz asks: ‘how else would you write about a new theatre phenomenon except profiling its playwrights and discussing their work?’ (in D’Monté & Saunders, 2008:p.29). This foregrounds Sierz’s decision to frame in-yer-face theatre in relation to its writers. Rather than discussing the plays through their textual or formal similarities and differences, Sierz argues that his preliminary investigation cannot adopt anything other than an author-centric discourse. Sierz then gives each of the main playwrights their own chapter, which discusses their work. This approach, however, may have a limiting effect on his ability to establish cohesion between the playwrights, and by extension, their shared sensibility. As a result, I argue that new perspectives must be brought to bear on in-yer-face theatre. Sierz admits that there does need to be a new, ‘broader way of thinking’ (in D’Monté & Saunders, 2008:p.29) about in-yer-face theatre. Therefore, this chapter attempts to take Sierz’s own advice and investigate in-yer-face theatre through a new methodology.

Traditionally literary criticism is predominantly practised through close reading. Close reading requires attention to detail, a study of individual words, phrases and syntax in an attempt to understand exactly what is being described or implied. However, the act of close reading does have its concomitant effects, which are explained by Italian scholar, Franco Moretti. He states: close reading makes each individual text ‘exceptional... by emphasising the uniqueness of exactly this word and this sentence *here*’ (Moretti, 2007:p.3). Moretti proposed what could be said to be one of the most controversial moves in 21<sup>st</sup> century literary scholarship by reimagining how a scholar should analyse literature and offering an alternative mode of analysis; he proposes that we should use a quantitative discourse and method when assessing literature, which he describes as ‘distant reading’.

Moretti suggests that we should stop looking at literature through close reading and should start counting, graphing and mapping the literary text(s) instead. This innovative idea has been praised by critics as ‘ground-breaking and original’ (Perez Trujillo, 2016:p.1). Distant



reading is ‘where distance is ... not an obstacle, but a specific form of knowledge: fewer elements, hence a sharper sense of their overall interconnection. Shapes, relations, structures. Forms. Models.’ (Moretti, 2007:p.1) As a result, a critical distance from the text allows the scholar to recognise the wider picture, rather than focusing on a particular text. Distant reading attempts to place the literary field in front of our eyes and could radically redefine how people think about literature. Its proponents claim that it allows us to look at texts anew, free from pre-existing discourse which allows preconceptions about how a text should be analysed or perceived.. If so, this is a useful methodology to understand a whole group of texts such as in-yer-face theatre.

Moreover, unlike a qualitative methodology, Moretti states that this quantitative criticism ‘provides data, not interpretation’ (2007:p.7). It is this aspect of the methodology which is integral when assessing such an affective corpus of texts like those labelled within in-yer-face theatre. Distant reading data diminishes the qualitative shock value which critics and playwrights alike, too often, focus upon. More precisely, graphs, maps and trees enable us to talk about the shock value of in-yer-face theatre in a less emotive way. This is important because most of the debate surrounding in-yer-face theatre tends to be shrill.

Although praised by some critics, distant reading does have its pitfalls. The sheer scope of Moretti’s ideas may undermine his basic principles: Johanna Drucker suggests that ‘distant reading’ is oxymoronic (2017:p.628). In order to attain critical *distance*, it appears that Moretti neglects *reading* the actual text. Indeed, he freely acknowledges the sheer impossibility of reading twenty thousand novels (2013:p.67). The great distance may be useful for understanding world literature as Moretti’s methodologies are generally employed to study hundreds, or even thousands of texts. At the same time, though, Moretti does sometimes spend great effort in careful reading of a medium-sized corpus, as in his study of 19<sup>th</sup> century detective fiction in ‘The Slaughterhouse of Literature’. This is the path I will

follow in this chapter: though based on graphs, maps, and trees, it is a study of a few texts which have been read, rather than thousands of texts which have not.

Sierz mentions nineteen playwrights, but focuses on a top three, concentrating mostly on one or two plays by each. Therefore, this thesis is perforce somewhat unorthodox: it employs the techniques of distant reading on a small and selective canon, which will then be subjected to close reading in the following chapter. The hope is that this combination of qualitative and quantitative methods will help assess the cohesiveness of Sierz's ideas better, but perhaps also show up the relationship between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, too, perhaps even that close reading and distant reading are allied rather than opposed approaches.

## Tables

Distant reading allows for comparison to be made between texts by breaking each play down into its component parts. I will assess some of the main in-yer-face theatre plays by adapting Moretti's graphs, maps and trees and presenting each of the plays as readable diagrams, so a reader can compare multiple texts at once, with or without reading them. This allows me to gauge whether these texts are similar enough to be classified under one label.

Firstly, content analysis was tabulated in order to immediately see what is included and, just as importantly, what is omitted. Although this stage of quantifying the text is not presented in the work of Franco Moretti, it is a useful first step in order to see how the data was collected and collated. This table tabulates Sierz's oft-cited definition of in-yer-face theatre, providing, as it were, a play-by-play checklist. Through this statistical medium, conclusions about the genre can be made more effectively.

Throughout *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama Today* Sierz gives a clear outline as to what makes an in-yer-face theatre text. As stated in the introduction, Sierz is specific about what constitutes 'in-yer-face theatre': 'the language is filthy, characters talk of unmentionable

subjects, take their clothes off, have sex, humiliate each other, experience unpleasant emotions, become suddenly violent' (2001:p.5). These plays tend to show explicit scenes which can include rape, child abuse, cannibalism, drug injection, torture and vomiting. These tropes have been placed as headings in the following table to establish whether the play includes the trope or not. The use of a table allows a comparative analysis of which tropes or events are the most common, how common they are, and which plays include the most features. It is a preliminary attempt at quantifying the in-yer-face sensibility.

Table 1 shows some immediate problem with the coherence of in-yer-face theatre. Firstly, it is noticeable that no text includes all of the in-yer-face theatre tropes which Sierz describes. Secondly, there is a disparity between each play and perhaps even a hierarchy. For example, the table highlights a key problem with Sierz's claim about Anthony Nielson's *Penetrator* being the most provocative for its time (Sierz, 2000: xii). According to Table 1, *Penetrator* only includes five out of the thirteen characteristics or tropes of in-yer-face theatre; therefore, it is questionable why Sierz labels it as the most provocative. And therefore, this will be needed to be assessed through close reading, as chapter 2 explains. Nevertheless, the play was deemed too extreme by the BBC after they had commissioned him to write it (Abrahams, 2001:p.8).

For this study, I have chosen a small corpus of plays' Sierz labelled as in-yer-face theatre texts. This is because this is a way to open debate about his original claims and a methodology that could be scaled up in further research. I have chosen to use texts from all of the main playwrights with *Blasted* and *Cleansed* by Sarah Kane, *Shopping and Fucking* by Mark Ravenhill and *Penetrator* by Anthony Nielson. I have then chosen *Mojo* by Jez Butterworth from the corpus of texts as an example of the so-called 'laddish culture' (Sierz, 2001:p.165) that in-yer-face theatre embodies. I have also included Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* which first premiered in 2005: although after the mid to late nineties, it is said to be one

of the latest examples of an in-er-face theatre text and therefore, the inclusion of this play will help to identify whether these plays have become the new normalcy as stated by Sierz (2001:p.248).

**Table 1: Whether an in-er-face theatre trope is included in a play or not.**

Play	<i>Blasted</i>	<i>Cleansed</i>	<i>Shopping and Fucking</i>	<i>Penetrator</i>	<i>Mercury Fur</i>	<i>Mojo</i>
Author	Sarah Kane	Sarah Kane	Mark Ravenhill	Anthony Neilson	Phillip Ridley	Jez Butterworth
Year it Premiered	1995	1998	1996	1993	2005	1995
Use of Shock Tactics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Filthy Language	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Talk about Unmentionable Subjects	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Nudity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Characters Humiliate Each Other	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Experience Unpleasant Emotions	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Become Suddenly Violent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Rape	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
Vomit	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Child Abuse	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Drug injecting		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Cannibalism	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>					
Torture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				

Table 1 shows whether a trope is included in the play or not. For reasons that should become clear in the later ‘maps’ of in-er-face plays, these tropes will only be included if explicitly shown onstage. For example, if a rape is spoken about rather than enacted it will then be placed under ‘talk about unmentionable subjects’.

Another methodological problem with the tropes which Sierz has decided constitute in-ye-face theatre is their lack of specificity. Tropes such as ‘use of shock tactics’ are vague and subjective. Furthermore, what one audience member perceives as an ‘unmentionable subject’ may be regularly mentioned by another. Equally, the description of ‘unpleasant emotions’ is just as vague and is an understatement for plays which may involve suicide. Moreover, playwrights from Sophocles to Ibsen have built their art around unpleasant emotions, posing the question as to what distinction Sierz is trying to make. Therefore, his working definition is based partly on individual opinions, which may be a possible reason why Sierz’s investigation remains unchallenged.

It could be suggested that Sierz has left the categories intentionally vague in an attempt to include more texts. The table sheds some light on this, revealing patterns of similarity and difference between the plays. For instance, *Penetrator* and *Mojo*, which include the least tropes, both include and omit the same tropes. The tropes which the texts do include are the least specific: when the tropes become specific, such as ‘rape’ and ‘cannibalism’, the trope is absent. Arguably, then, the table shows that these two plays seem to lack the visceral extremity of the others.

In creating Table 1 it has become apparent that the definition of what makes an in-ye-face theatre text is left somewhat woolly. This intentional broadness could highlight an underlying issue with the in-ye-face aesthetic. According to Benedict, it seems that Sierz’s definition of in-ye-face theatre becomes more confused the more texts he adds (2001). In other words, the problem lies not with the quantitative methodology of distant reading, but rather in the way that Sierz negotiates the territory.

The table shows that Sarah Kane would be the zenith or acme of the in-ye-face theatre playwright, with *Blasted* including the most in-ye-face theatre tropes, suggesting that this

play provides an unrelenting bombardment of shocking material. Sierz seems to have regarded it as somehow prototypical (Bicer, 2011:p.81). However, as we will later see, quantitative methods establish the play's uniqueness, suggesting that perhaps Benedict (2001) might have been right.

## Trees

There are other ways of manipulating this data, so as to make the investigation more insightful. The 'tree' is an indispensable morphological diagram (Moretti. 2007:p.69).

Moretti dedicates a large section of his analysis to trees, inspired by Darwin's *Origin of Species*. Moretti states how Darwin's trees or 'divergence of character' can be particularly useful when assessing literature: Darwin's tree shows 'natural selection and extinction: as variations grow apart from each other, selection intervenes, allowing only a few to survive' (Moretti. 2007:p.72). The morphological tree signifies progression as each branch is intrinsically linked to the main tree: it is the height of the branch which is notable.

The following tree builds upon the data presented in Table 1, showing it in a more pictorial format. A tree is a qualitative way of processing the data: rather than asking how many times a trope is included, the tree asks which ones. In the diagram each branch is significant: they show the cumulative inclusion of tropes which established the in-yer-face designation. This will show which play is the 'most' in-yer-face: that is, the tree acts as a tiering system which indicates which play includes the broadest range of Sierz's elements. A tree allows a reader to grasp the nature of the most extreme plays immediately, whilst understanding that the 'lesser shocking' plays still have their part to play in the in-yer-face narrative. As Moretti's famous tree shows that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is the pioneer of the 'clue', this tree reveals how the in-yer-face play mutates. The branches are significant because they show what is absent, present, necessary and visible; the branches are part of something bigger than a singular text,

they constitute a genre (Moretti, 2007:p.76). As a result, this is a valuable way of assessing whether the plays Sierz classes as in-yer-face theatre hang together as a corpus.

**Figure 1: An in-yer-face theatre tree.**

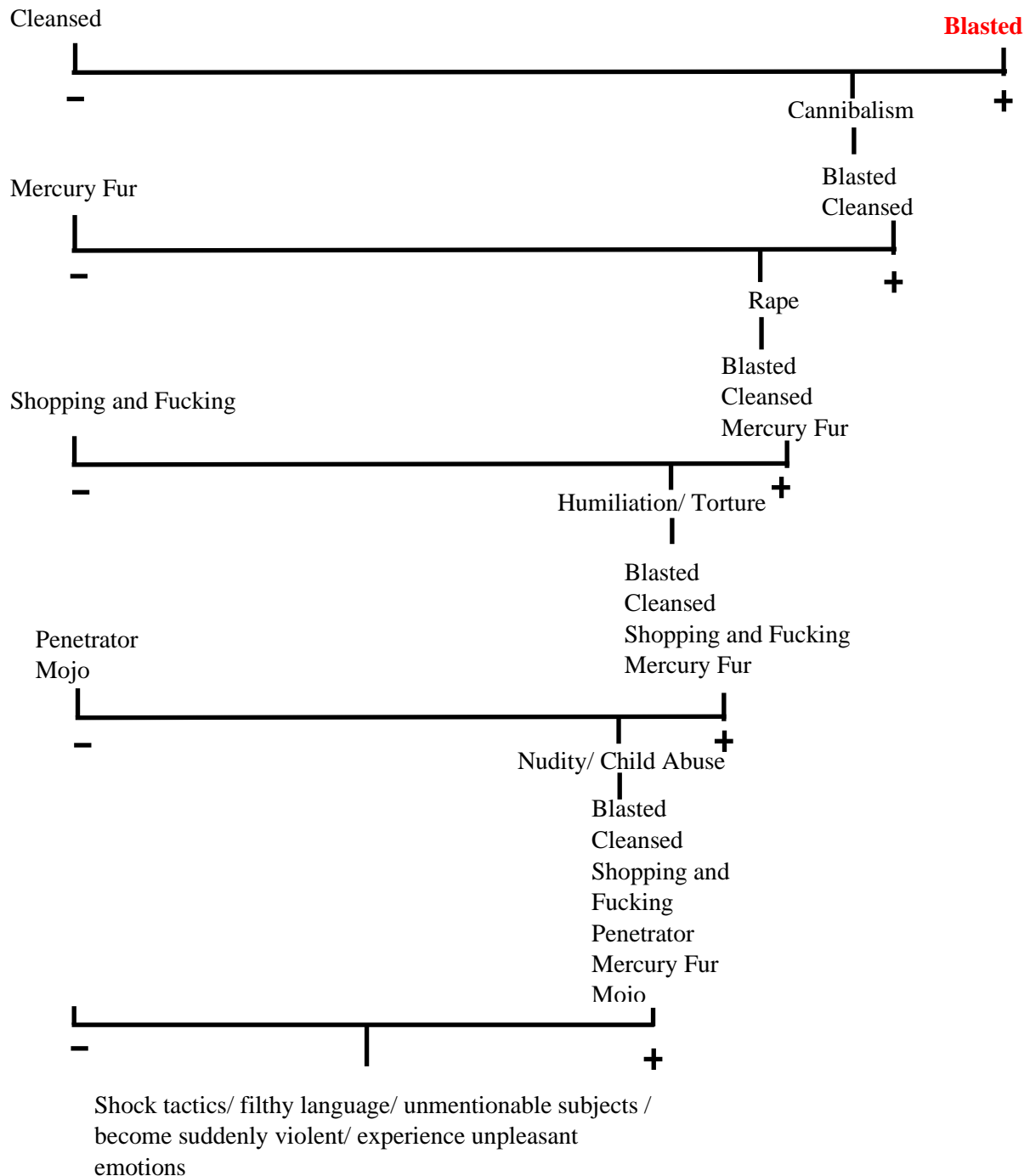


Figure 1 starting at the bottom of the tree and proceeding upwards shows whether the plays either include (on the right) or do not include (on the left) certain in yer-face tropes by taking information from table 1 to present the information in a different way. The '+' means that the text includes the trope and the '-' means the text does not. Texts situated towards the bottom of the tree include fewer tropes than those above it. Whereas, the texts at the top include the most.

The in-yer-face theatre tree better demonstrates how the tropes accumulate and therefore, shows which play is more dominated by the in-yer-face tropes which Sierz indicates. It is a way of calling attention to differences between texts, as well as similarities, and, as suggested, it could be taken to establish a kind of hierarchy. In other words, the tree shows that from a single unified point, the plays' similarities diverge in an increasing variety of ways. As Moretti uses his tree in order to show why Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has been canonised as the foremost pioneer of detective fiction, likewise, figure 1 indicates that, according to this methodology, the foremost pioneer of in-yer-face theatre was Sarah Kane and *Blasted* in particular.

As mentioned by Urban in the introduction to the student edition of *Blasted* published in 2011: this subscribes to the idea of Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblance presented within *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). Wittgenstein suggests a group can be classified not just by a single unifying feature, but by a series of overlapping similarities, with no one feature common to all things. Wittgenstein explains this idea through the analogy of games:

look and see whether there is anything common to all... we can see how similarities crop up and disappear. And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than 'family resemblances'; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, – And I shall say: 'games' form a family (1953, pp.66-67).

This means a group or collection of things, whether that is games or a literary sensibility, can all resemble each other in different ways, without all showing the same exact features. This idea implies that texts can not only be quantified through their similarities, but also their differences. Perhaps, rather than a fully-fledged genre, the plays are more distantly related though vaguer similarities.



To put the point differently: once again, the tree demonstrates that Sarah Kane's *Blasted* is the quintessential in-yer-face play, as it sits at the top of the tree. On the one hand, this should suggest that Sarah Kane's *Blasted* is unique: it lies at the utmost visceral extremity of the tree. On the other hand, though, the pictorial format of the tree equally reveals the similarities which explain why the less extreme plays have been included by Sierz within his ambit. Although these plays do not replicate the sheer extremity demonstrated in the works of Sarah Kane, they create the necessary space for Kane to thrive.

This tree is not without its problems. In order to present figure 1, the initial data collated in Table 1 had to be heavily manipulated. As well as the vague categories presented by Sierz, it seems that even some of the more specific ones are flawed. As I will argue in the next chapter, the categories of rape and drug injection appear to be too nuanced to be correctly presented in this format. However, elucidating these differences, I will try to show, is a task for close reading, not distant reading.

At the risk of pre-empting the next chapter: the tree and table could be (mis)taken to suggest that the *use* of each trope is the same. Although the plays *contain* the same trope, how each trope operates is extremely different. Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* comments upon this idea:

an action cannot be defined apart from its place in the course of narration. The meaning which a given function has in the course of action must be considered. For example, if Ivan marries a tsar's daughter, this is something entirely different than the marriage of a father to a widow with two daughters. A second example: if, in one instance, a hero receives money from his father in the form of 100 rubles and subsequently buys a wise cat with this money, whereas in a second case, the hero is rewarded with a sum of money for an accomplished act of bravery (at which point the tale ends), we have before us two morphologically different elements—in spite of the identical action (the transference of money) in both cases (1968).

For these reasons, drug injection is omitted from the tree because of the complexity of how the drugs are taken and what is administered. For example, in *Cleansed*, Tinker injects a lethal amount of heroin into Graham's eye. *Mercury Fur* on the other hand, shows multiple sedative injections used to either calm a hysterical duchess or perk up an unconscious party-piece. The difference between the two considerably affects the shock factor of injection. Moreover, the usage of drugs is a common theme throughout many of the in-yer-face theatre texts; however, they are not specifically drug *injection* and as a result cannot be included within the tree. Therefore, it seems that certain aspects of In -yer-face theatre are more complicated than can be presented in tree format.

On these terms, it would appear that Sierz's definition limits the individuality of each play. The quantitative discourse simply does not account for how different shocks, grouped under the same heading, can affect the audience. The tree cannot account for these subtle variations. That is why, *pace* Moretti, the next chapter will perforce deal in close reading.

What, then, is the value of the tree? Besides ranking quantitative data in a tiered order, it also establishes the underlying morphological coherence of in-yer-face plays. Not all of them need contain all of Sierz's tropes, and indeed, it is conceivable that the variety of intensity revealed in the tree is what drove the evolution of this 'theatrical sensibility'. This idea of evolutionary development will be put to the test in the next section.

## Graphs

Most graphs created by Moretti investigate the idea of genres and their reoccurring lifespan. This idea of a lifespan is particularly important when assessing in-yer-face theatre and how the texts resemble and differ from one another. Rather than graphs of hundreds of years, as present within the work of Moretti, this investigation focuses on a much narrower time period

of the mid to late 1990's. A graph is a purely statistical analysis and can show in-yer-face theatre in a way that qualitative data cannot. In this case, by adding a timeline to the data gathered in Table 1, we can start to track development and changes over time.

**Figure 2: Graph to show how in-yer-face theatre has evolved over time.**

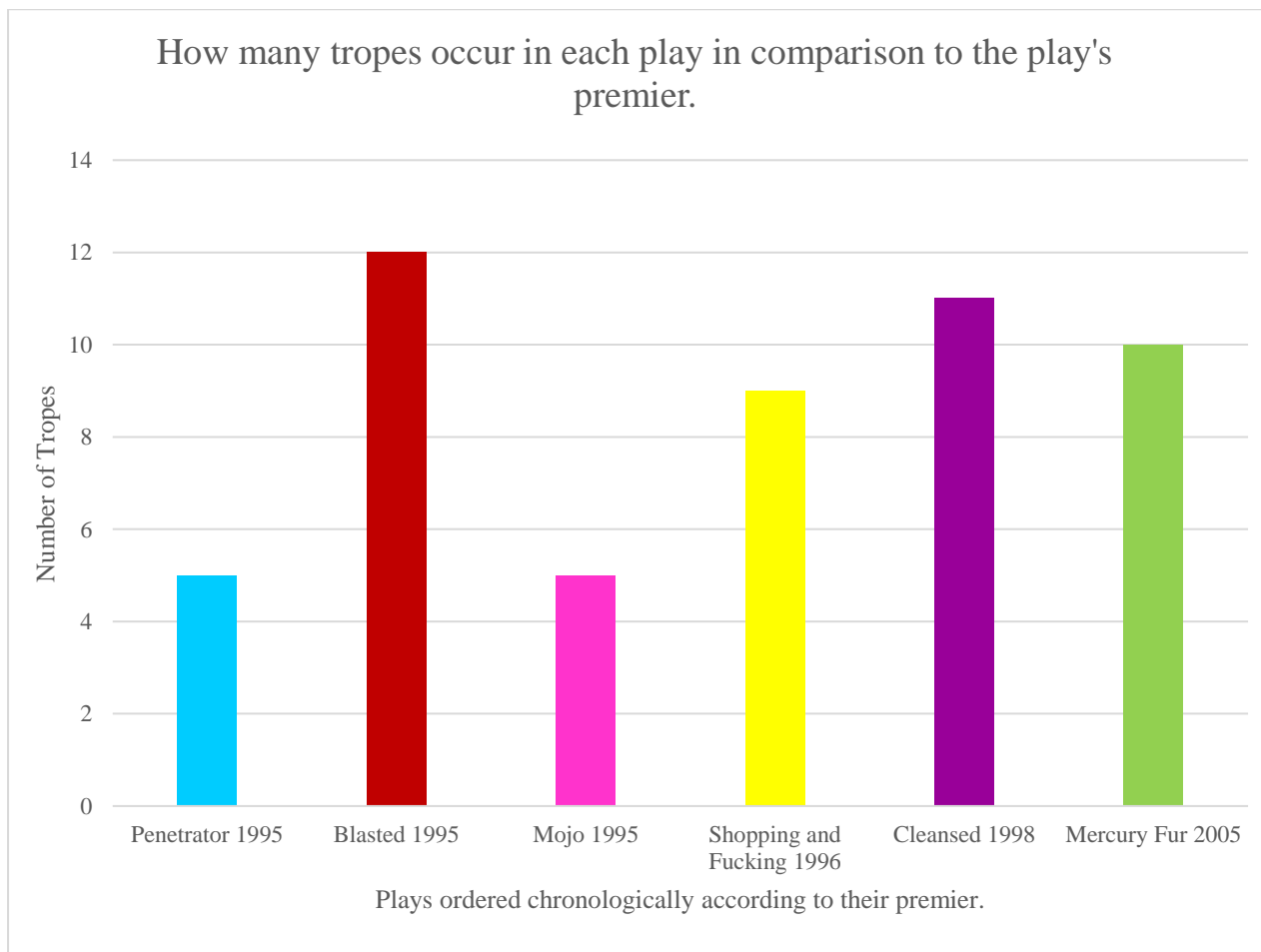


Figure 2 shows the number of tropes included within each play along the Y axis, while the X axis shows the plays arranged chronologically according to when they first premiered.

Omitting Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, the graph is indeed shaped, more or less, how one would expect a literary movement to look. It starts with early experiments, breaking the odd taboo and tentatively pushing boundaries within theatre. Then a quick acceleration occurs as it becomes clear that there are fewer and fewer limits to what can be done onstage. The trend then peaks, but does not tail off too much, because the traits of in-yer-face theatre have now

become the conventions of contemporary theatre- the ‘new normal’. ‘By 1999, in-yer-face theatre had become a new normalcy’ (Sierz,2001:248) Sierz claims.

However, the ‘key play’ (Sierz, 2001:p.234), Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*, completely disrupts the average curve of in-yer-face theatre’s development, by demonstrating diagrammatically just how ahead of its time and ground breaking the play actually was. *Blasted* is an obvious outlier, an extraordinarily shocking play within a relatively novel trend. It underscores the reason why Sierz claims, from the outset, that ‘*Blasted* was central to the story of new writing’ (Sierz, 2001:p.xii). The graph illustrates visually how this play was, quite literally, ahead of its time. Moreover, *Cleansed* being the second highest peak further reiterates the importance of Sarah Kane to the in-yer-face sensibility.

Like the tree, the graph shows the importance of the less ‘extreme’ plays as they, too, are indispensable to the natural curvature of the sensibility. They provide the necessary build-up to make the later plays more acceptable. Therefore, *Penetrator* and *Mojo*, rather than ranking lower in some putative hierarchy of shock (as in the tree), were nevertheless ground-breaking plays for the time in which they first premiered and are only seen as less shocking retrospectively, by comparison to the work of Sarah Kane.

The graph in Figure 3 adds another dimension to this analysis. Whereas the first graph and the tree offer us different ways of interpreting the data from the table, Figure 3 facilitates a more detailed comparison between the plays. Rather than indicating the simple presence or absence of each of Sierz’s defining characteristics, it counts the *number* of occurrences of each characteristic in each play, as follows:

**Figure 3: Graph to show amount of times Sierz’s tropes are used in each play.**

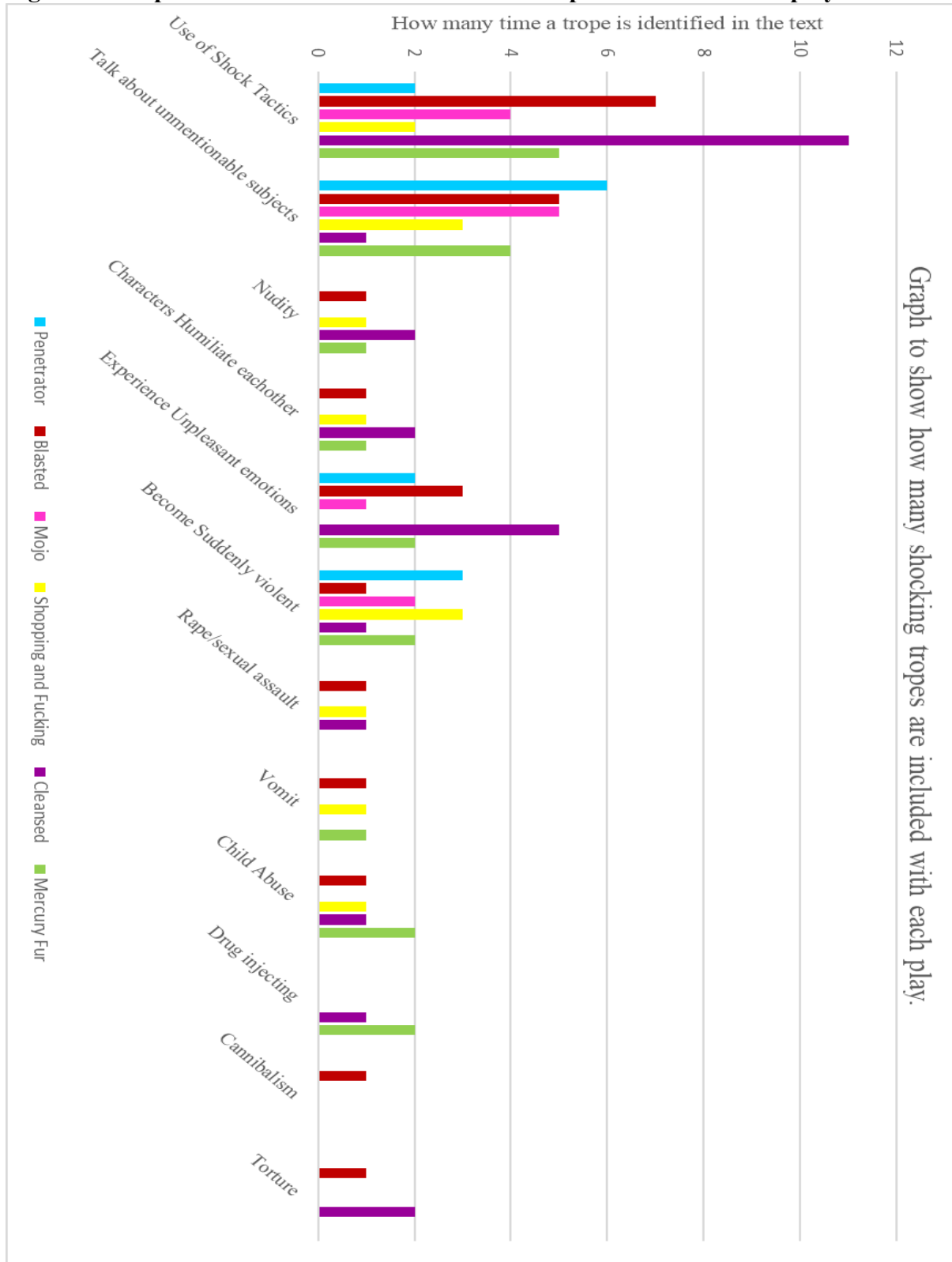


Figure 3 shows how many times each trope occurs in each play. Each play is represented by a coloured bar, if the bar is not visible then the play does not include this trope

What is immediately noticeable is this graph seems to bear out the claim that Sarah Kane was the foremost, most extreme, most shocking playwright within the in-yer-face sensibility. Her plays *Blasted* and *Cleansed* seem to be the best examples of in-yer-face theatre. *Cleansed*, by far, uses the most ‘shock tactics’ [see appendix] in order to unnerve its audience. The play included 11 different instances of shock tactics which, according to Kane, in an interview with Kate Stratton, ‘the ...[audience] hooked onto the explicit things which constitute about ten percent of the running time’ (1998). This could suggest that, unlike what has been suggested in the Table and the Tree, it is *Cleansed*, rather than *Blasted*, which is the most extreme of these plays.

An interesting category, which is impossible to notice within the table format, is ‘talk about unmentionable subjects,’ *Penetrator* talks about 6 unmentionable subjects and *Mojo* talks about 5 unmentionable subjects throughout the play [see appendix]. This seems to be the complicating factor for both *Mojo* and *Penetrator* because rather than shocking their audience from showing, they shock by what is said. This distinction, however, cannot be assessed by graphs; as said by Moretti ‘and why- is something which must be decided on a different basis’ (2007:p.9). Therefore, the next section will turn away from graphs and trees and towards another of Moretti’s diagrammatic methods – the map.

## Maps

To start his analysis of literature through maps, Moretti poses an important question: ‘what exactly can they do? What can they do that cannot be done with words?’ (2007:p.35). A page later, Moretti answers his own question: ‘you make a map of the book [or play] and everything changes’ (Moretti, 2007:p.36). It suggests that mapping literature illuminates and ignites something within the literature. Maps of locations are common and are a useful part of everyday life and therefore are easily decodable. Moreover, maps of literary worlds can

feature in novels – as in *Winnie the Pooh*, *Lord of the Rings*, or *Game of Thrones*. But they are rarely used as a means of literary criticism. Moretti states that he has ‘made maps and diagrams of fictional worlds, where the real and the imaginary co-exist’ (Moretti, 2007:p.63). Literature is intrinsically linked to the geography that it occurs in. In order to understand the text, the reader must understand the world around it and through the map, this world can be depicted.

I employ maps in a somewhat different way to how Moretti does. His maps mostly involve locating the ‘real world’ settings of novels. Rather than mapping texts’ direct connection to the real world, I will attempt to map the locations of the actions of a play in relation to the stage on which they are enacted. Moreover, these maps move away from the studies which attempt to place the action in the tangibly ‘real’ space which the stage directions state that the places correlate to, for example in the work by Kitzler(2010). My use of maps appears to be unorthodox as Moretti is yet to attempt to map space relating to a literary world which is created onstage.

Maps are intrinsically linked to space, and space is of the utmost importance in relation to theatre. In the opening lines of ‘*The Empty Space*’ Peter Brook writes: ‘I can take an empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him and that is all that is needed for an act of theatre to take place.’ (2008:p.11) However, when this action is mapped, one can see more information such as where the man came from, where he travels to, and this implies a possible motivation for his movement. Processing plays in this way means that the tension between what happens both on and offstage, what is seen and what is heard, can be examined. Therefore, my maps manipulate the data from figure 3 to bring out the spatial relations between Sierz’s characteristics. That is, they show the ‘in-yer-face components’ and equally *where* these events occur. This means

maps can show the relationship between action and audience which is of vital importance to the affective potency of the in-yer-face sensibility.

The term 'in-yer-face theatre' suggests that action should occur onstage, in front of the audience's eyes. As Horace puts it in his *Ars Poetica*: 'less vividly is the mind stirred by what finds entrance through the ears than by what is brought before the trusty eyes' (1926). It seems that the novum of in-yer-face theatre has capitalised on this distinction by showing shocking material as live action. Horace's argument encapsulates centuries of public taste that has made theatrical convention thus: 'Medea is not to butcher her boys before the people nor impious Atticus cook human flesh upon the stage... whatever you thus show me I discredit and abhor' (1926:p.185). However, the aim of in-yer-face theatre is to show the audience the atrocities of human nature, and as a result should surely depict these tropes onstage in front of an audience's eyes.

Horace states that either an event is acted on stage or the action is narrated (1926:p.179). Traditionally, the action is either performed live (and seen) or it is narrated (and heard). This dichotomy is complicated, however, by the introduction of a kind of 'third space' which is neither entirely on nor offstage. Wallis and Shepherd propose three kinds of fictional space: onstage fictional space, distant offstage fictional space and neighbouring offstage fictional space (2018:145). The third of these spaces is spatially adjacent to the onstage space but is not fully visible to the audience. For example, the bathroom in *Blasted* or the bedroom in *Mercury Fur*: the audience can see the doors to these rooms, however, the action which occurs in them is not visible. The audience can only imagine what happens, just out of sight, in the hidden, sometimes audible, space. What happens beyond the confines of this room, in the distant offstage fictional space, is only known due to narrated action reported onstage through the dialogue in the play.

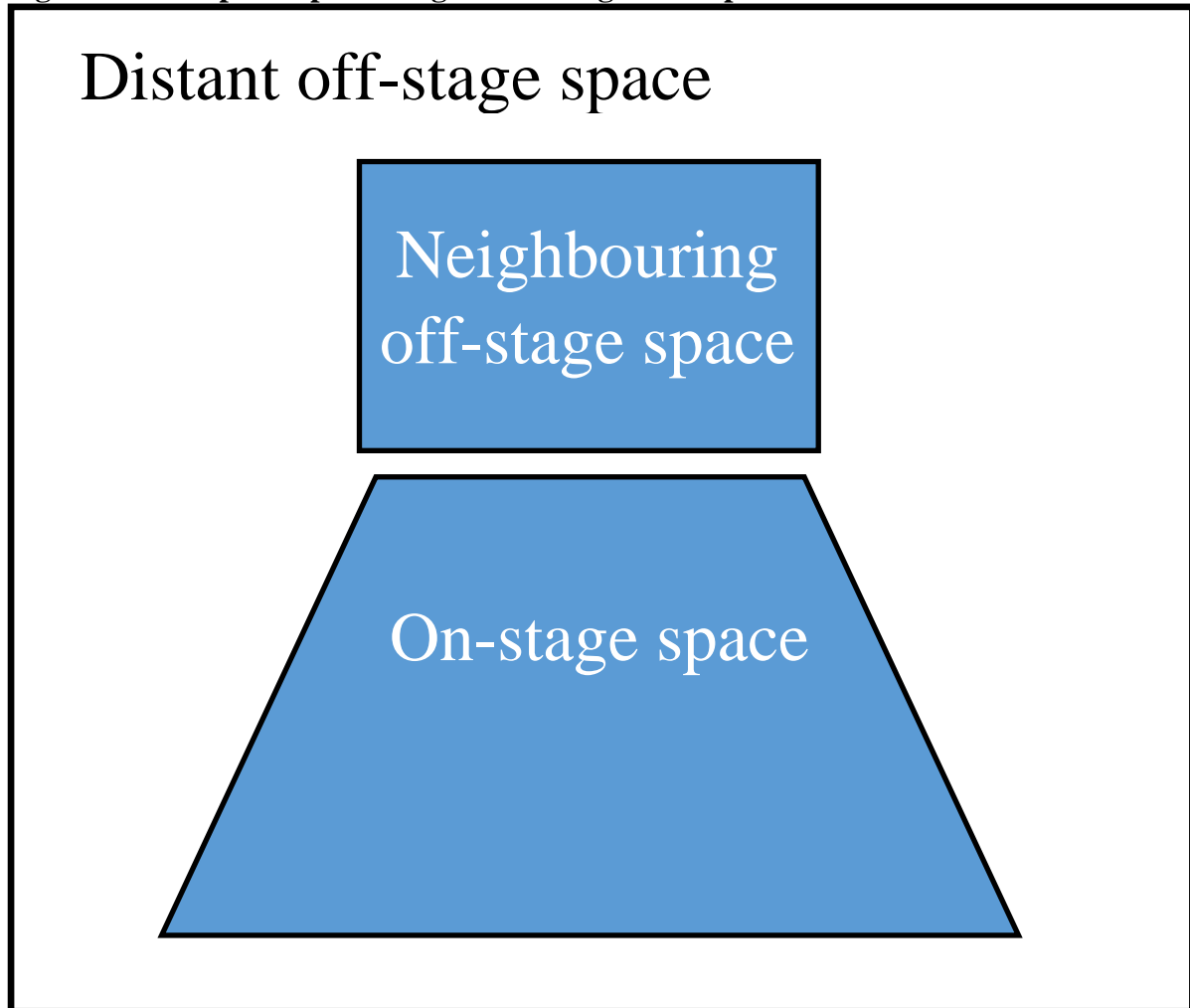


In order to create a map, one must ‘reduce the text to a few elements, and abstract them from narrative flow, and construct a new artificial object like maps’ (Moretti, 2007:p.53). As a result, mapping the plays is a controversial move, vulnerable to criticisms like Zarhy-Levo’s assertion that ‘Sierz inevitably suppresses their specific, individual characteristics and in doing so he suggests perceiving these playwrights anew’ (2011:p.325). The charge is that Sierz may have created a sensibility by ignoring plays’ individuality, and that is just what maps are alleged to do. However, in what follows, I will demonstrate the very opposite: that the abstraction of a map can *reveal* profound differences between the plays, differences ignored by Sierz.

My maps relate to the stage and how the content of the text is presented to the audience. This is especially important with in-yer-face theatre because a map of the action can show how close the danger or shocking element is. Therefore, if Horace was right about the seen and the heard, the map could help show the intensity of the play. Certainly, a map can show the relationship between action and proximity. It can show the nuances of the plays, which can influence their affective potency. According to Moretti, the map ‘offers a model of the narrative universe’ (Moretti, 2007:p.54). It shows all events which occur in the play, and more importantly, where they occur.

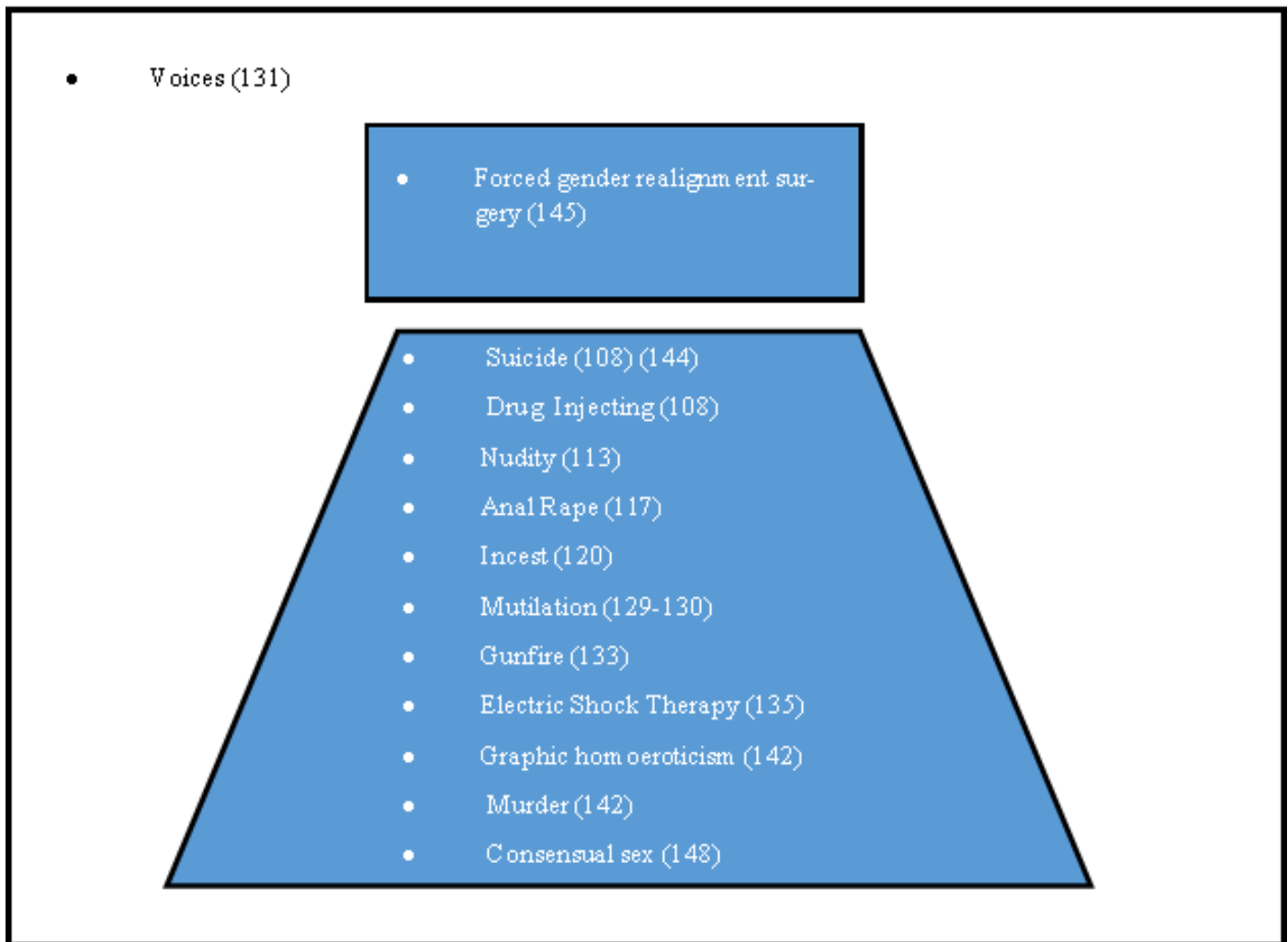
These maps have been adapted from Moretti, specifically Figure 18 (2007:p.45). However, I have adapted the shape of each map to replicate the shape of a stage. The spaces are represented thus:

**Figure 4: Example map showing how the regions of space correlate to action**



The onstage space shows the live action which the audiences will see. The neighbouring offstage space shows the action which occurs offstage, but in close proximity to the stage: for example, in the next room or in-between scenes. This space allows for action which occurs just out of the audience's view. The distant offstage space shows the action which is relayed through dialogue and narration. This example map will be adapted to show what is included in each play. This map merely shows the formatting which will be used throughout this subsection.

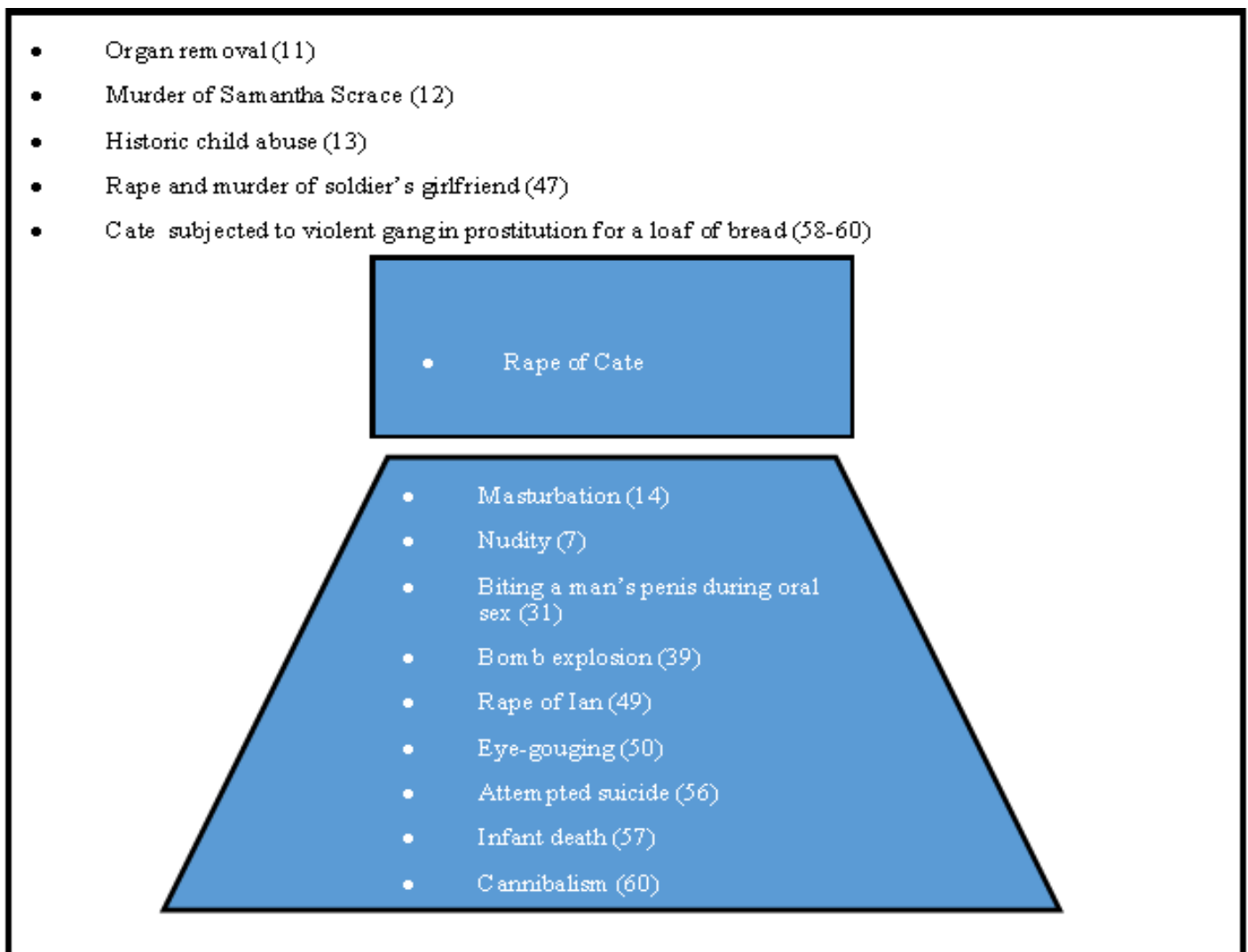
**Figure 5: Locating action in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*.**



What is immediately noticeable is that the action which occurs in *Cleansed*, by Sarah Kane, happens overwhelmingly on stage. Thus, shocking and upsetting images stare the audience in the face as they stare back. It appears that the stage and its immediate surroundings are a type of microcosm which nothing can leave or enter. Neither audience member nor character can leave: Graham demonstrates that even in death you cannot escape the horrors. As commented upon by Steve Waters, Sarah Kane presents a world without explanation (2008:p.375). This could suggest the reason why the majority of the action occurs on stage: the audience sees the horrors but is given no contextualising narration which could make sense of the violence.

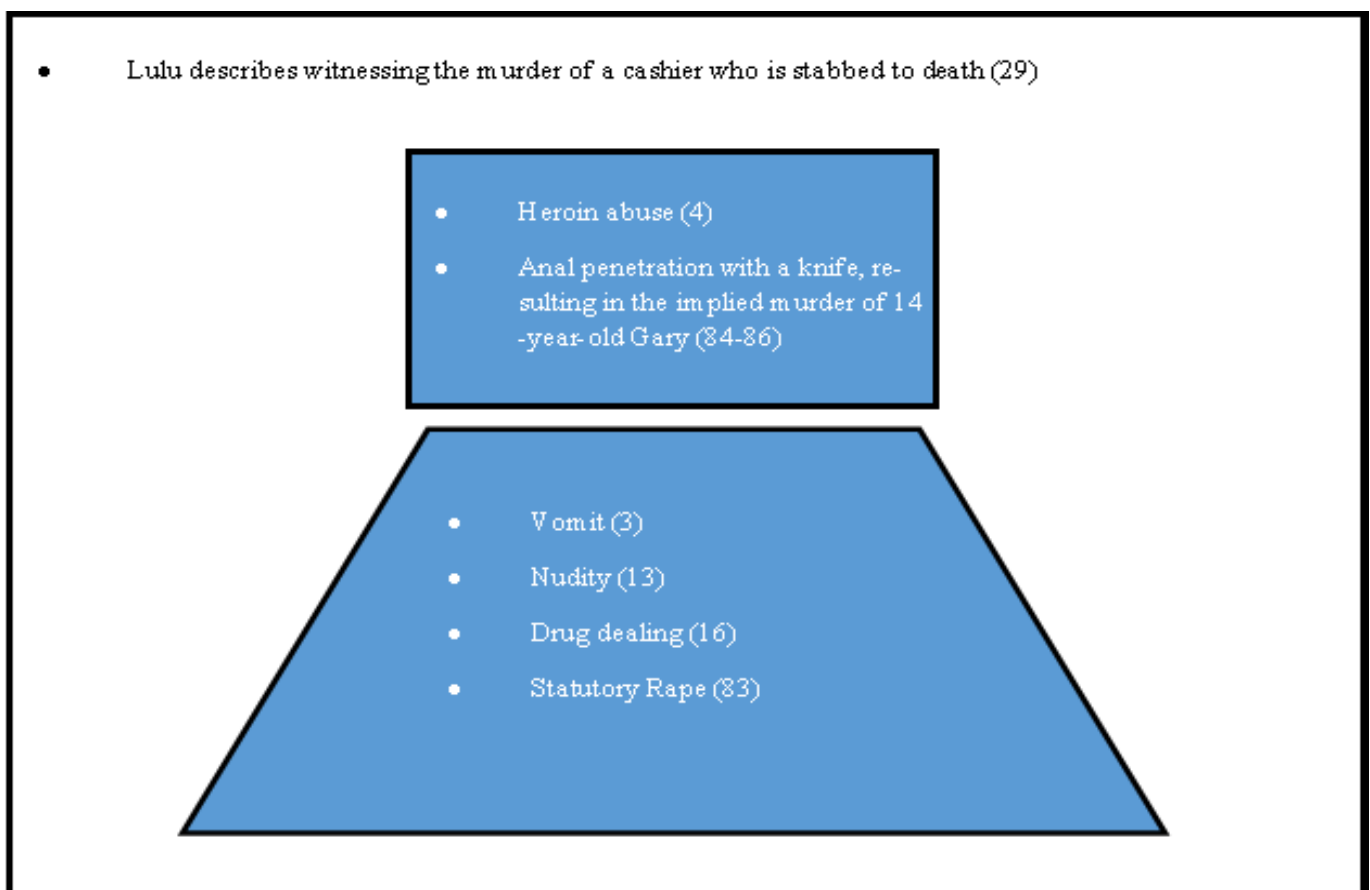
Kane was inspired by Roland Barthes' provocation 'love was akin to incarceration in Dachau' (Stratton, 1995), an image which is drawn upon in Katie Mitchell's 2016 revival which transports the action to a concentration camp (Clapp, 2016). This privacy and incarceration are extended to the geography of the play. Eyre and Wright comment upon Kane being a profoundly original playwright who rewrote the theatrical map (2000:p.374) and brought the action relentlessly in front of the audience. Figure 5 shows they were quite correct. She shows an intense, magnified horror the university halls or institution is the core of the torture which the audience are invited to witness.

**Figure 6: Locating Action in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*.**



In *Blasted*, the stories of the outside world provide context but not explanation: violence has permeated the world of the text and this is shown largely through horrors occurring on the stage. Figure 6 shows that the majority of the action which occurs in *Blasted* occurs once again on stage; however, stories from the soldier are narrated from the outside world, opening a window through which the audience can grasp some context. When the bomb explodes on stage the outside world bursts onto the stage; it is this moment where the audience are given an insight into the bigger picture as the context of the (presumably Bosnian) war is added. Then the audience witness forms of torture, rape and cannibalism. Arguably the difference between *Cleansed* and *Blasted* is who controls the action. In *Cleansed* Tinker is in control and perpetrates the shocking trauma which occurs. On the other hand, the trauma within *Blasted* is controlled first by Ian, then by the soldier, and then by no one: it is the breakdown of society which allows these shocking atrocities to occur.

Figure 7: Locating action in Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking*.



Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* also shows most of the shocking events on stage. However, an important event is omitted: the murder of Gary by anal penetration with a knife. Like events such as Medea butchering her children, it seems that this event was too horrific for Ravenhill to show to his audience. Whether the murder even occurs is never explicitly stated; however, this shock is of paramount importance to whether the text has in-*yer-face* characteristics or not. *Blasted* and *Cleansed* adopt an uncensored approach, placing trauma onstage in order to show what humans are capable of. However, the fact that Ravenhill is more evasive, and leaves this gruesome plot twist implicit, is surely enough to call into question whether his plays can really be placed in the same category as Kane's.

**Figure 8: Locating action Anthony Nielson's *Penetrator***

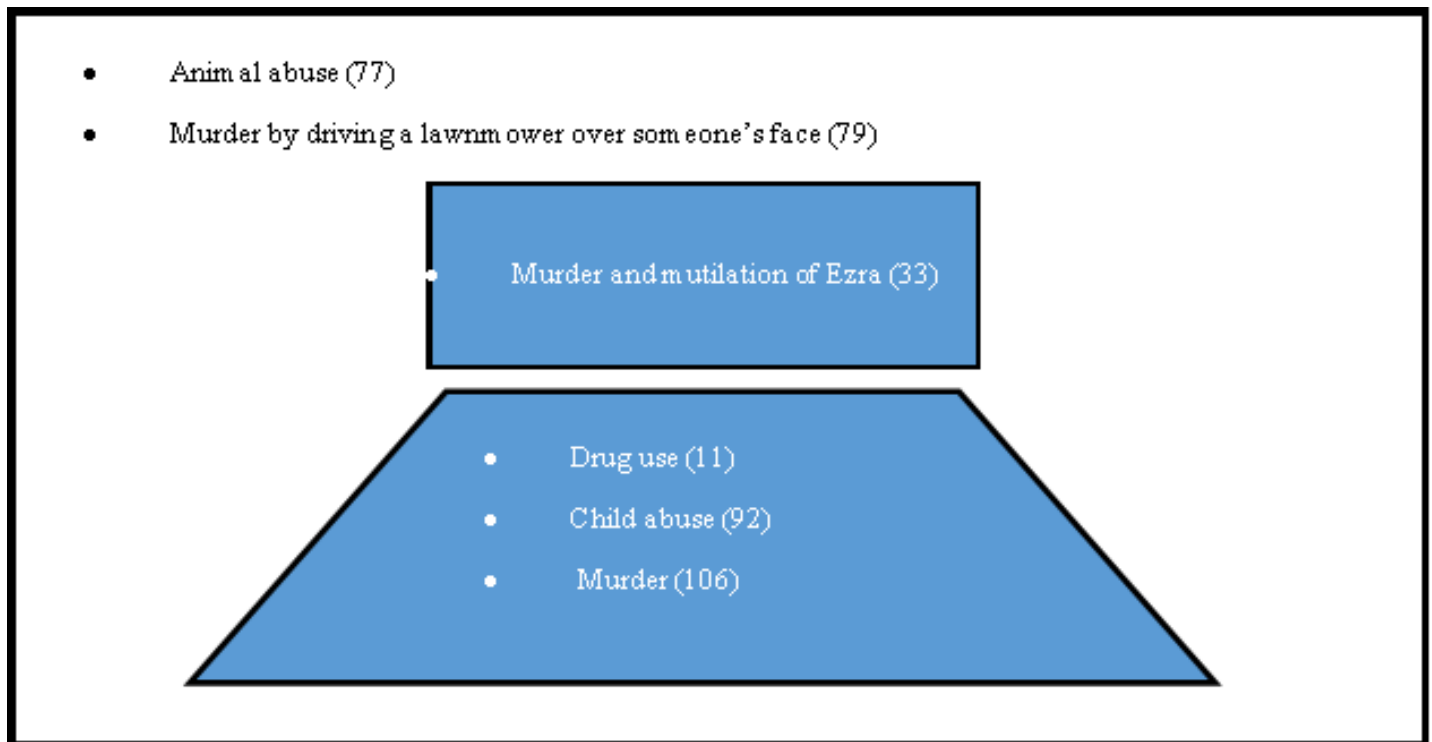
- Voiceover describing erotic encounters with women (67)
- Masturbation with 3-month-old liver, causing infection (82)
- Tadge describes how the Penetrators drugged, tortured and anally raped (85)
- Statutory rape (89)
- Vivid descriptions of scenes of murder and mutilation (101)



- Masturbation (62)
- Attempted knife crime (105)
- Abuse and sodomy of teddy bears (73-74)

Neilson's ground-breaking *Penetrator* was one of the most provocative plays of his time. And yet, its provocative content was not well illustrated by the tables and graphs earlier. This is because the audience hears accounts of shocking tales which are not explicitly shown and therefore, these were not included in Figures 1 or 2: they were classed as 'talk about unmentionable subjects.' Unlike what is shown in the maps of both texts by Sarah Kane, this play is the pinnacle of being shocked by what is heard. The use of maps shows how the text uses distant offstage space to produce its effects. Throughout the play, the audience is bombarded by shocking stories, whether that is the voice overs of sexual encounters which punctuate the action of the friends who live together, or from the introduction of Tadge and his storyline. The description of the 'Penetrators' haunts the character Tadge and through his narrative the audience can hear the atrocities that have occurred to him. Although the action seldom occurs on stage in the audience's view, the tales which Tadge describes are harrowing. Where Tadge provides the violence (onstage), the voiceovers provide the sex (offstage). The voiceovers which introduce pornography into the play have been more aptly described as 'in-yer-ear rather than in-yer-face' (Sierz, 2001:pp.76-77). Indeed, hearing this porn fantasy, which is a thing that is normally read in private, breaks a powerful social taboo. This distinction is of paramount importance to this investigation. In other words, mapping the plays in this quantitative way brings into relief the important qualitative difference between in-yer-ear and in-yer-face theatre.

**Figure 9: Locating action in Jez Butterworth's *Mojo*.**



Pivotal points of Jez Butterworth's *Mojo*, as shown in figure 9, also occur outside the inner circle; for example, the murder of Ezra occurs offstage. Jez Butterworth states: 'the real juice lies in the tension between what's onstage and what's off. It's what's left off which ignites what's on' (Sierz, 2001:p.164). This spatial distribution allows for tension within the dialogue as a threat to what could happen to the characters. However, fleshing out the findings of the graph in Figure 3, this map suggests that *Mojo* appears to be lacking the visceral extremity of the other plays due to a relative lack of shocking elements enumerated by Sierz. Once again, presenting quantitative data suggests a qualitative difference in this play.



**Figure 10: Locating action in Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur*.**

- Animal abuse:
  1. Killing monkeys at the zoo (31)
  2. Killing a zebra in the streets (58)
- Gangrape and murder of Naz's mother and younger sister (38-39)
- Graphic descriptions of mass suicide at an organised suicide party, including that of a boy aged 10 (69)
- Descriptions of a father attempting to murder his children, then setting himself alight (92-)
- Bombing of a hospital (57)
- Mass bombing intending to annihilate the human population (132)

- The corpse of a dead dog (9)
- Attempted murder, using a meat hook, while enacting a 'snuff' style torture and rape fantasy. The intended victim is a child, the actual victim is the protagonists' friend, and the crime is perpetrated by a rich 'party guest' who has paid in advance to kill the victim in this way (120)

- Child abuse (55)
- Murder (122)
- Nudity (118)
- Vomit (104)
- Drug injecting (61)
- Recreational 'drug' use (11)

Philip Ridley's *Mercury Fur* relies far more on offstage spaces than the other plays. As shown in figure 10, the audience hears the action rather than sees it. It seems most of the play's really shocking moments do not occur on stage; stories of betrayal and gang brutality means the audience hear about the societal breakdown which is undoubtedly occurring. The action which occurs on the stage appears to be tame when compared to the horrific narrative of the outside world. The 'Party Guest's' wildest fantasy of skewering a young boy with a meat hook would have occurred offstage, just out of the audience's view. It seems that in this instance, the world beyond the stage is more horrific than the enclosed, abandoned room which the audience can see.

Unlike the other in-yer-face theatre playwrights, Ridley uses an interplay of narrated and live action to shock his audience. More specifically he relies to a considerable extent on the neighbouring offstage space of the bedroom, in which the murderous snuff-style torture takes place. This play, in particular, draws upon the imagination of its audience. It induces what Martin Meisel explains as 'a visual evocation- indirect seeing' (2007:p.49). The audience simultaneously see the action which occurs onstage whilst imagining the action which occurs within the neighbouring offstage and distant offstage fictional spaces. The audience must understand the atrocities in the outside world to enhance the onstage action. However, Ridley confines the most gruesome action to the neighbouring offstage fictional space in what Pfster describes as hidden action:

hidden action, especially the kinds of spatially hidden action that takes place at the same time as the action presented scenically, can have an extraordinarily powerful effect on the audience and can create a situation of extreme suspense if the events are hinted at acoustically rather than presented directly. It is precisely the fact that these events are not presented scenically that allows the audience to anticipate or fear the worst (1988:p.205).

Therefore, the audience sees the characters enter the room, they hear the screams, they see Lola's reaction onstage and it is this tension which makes the horrific, fantastical ordeal plausible.

This combination of spatial distribution is unique amongst the sample of plays mapped. It is qualitatively different from the onstage shock of *Cleansed*, or the offstage shock of *Penetrator*. Thus, showing each play through maps shows their unique individuality, through both what each play includes and where the action takes place. Two vital conclusions can be made from this: firstly, Sierz's list of 'tropes' is inadequate to accurately describe each play; and secondly, each playwright has their own stylistic geography. The stark contrast between Kane's choice of performed live action, Neilson's preference for narrated action and Ridley's use of the neighbouring offstage space reveals the many different approaches the so called in-yer-face theatre playwrights use to shock their audiences. This, consequently, could raise questions about the coherence of Sierz's term in-yer-face theatre. Such obviously different methods call into doubt the extent to which these plays can be grouped together.

In-yer-face suggests that action occurs literally in front of the audience's eyes. Although the label seems apt for the plays of Sarah Kane, it is not applicable for the plays which prefer the use of offstage spaces whether that be neighbouring or distant spaces. Indeed, it seems that Sarah Kane is the only author to embrace the in-yer-face theatre aesthetic fully and really show the audience an abundance of shocking and violent images onstage. The action that occurs onstage occurs literally in the audience's face, especially in the small, intimate theatre which the plays were initially housed in. The central importance Sierz attached to the work of Sarah Kane might suggest that he has tried, perhaps misleadingly, to read the work of other 90s playwright in her light and attempted to co-opt other likeminded, young and undefined playwrights of the decade in order to argue for a cohesive sensibility that did not in fact exist.

The use of maps helps to investigate the connections that the plays have with the space which they occur in; in reference to both the theatrical stage and the world of the text which is placed upon it and beyond it. The map allows a visual representation of the impact that staging the events of the play can have.

More importantly, maps show that the *modus operandi* for shock is not universal throughout the in-*yer-face* theatre playwrights. The vastly different ways that space is used in each play questions whether the label of in-*yer-face* theatre is useful. Thus, whereas the table, the tree and the graphs seem to confirm that Sierz's term has coherence, the maps suggests it does not.

## Diagrams

The use of maps innately shows the proximity of the action in relation to the distance to the audience. What the previous maps do not show, however, is how audience size can affect the impact of the action. Sierz implies that with a close proximity between the audience member and the action occurring onstage can make the plays appear more extreme and taboo. The diagrams in this section show the difference in audience sizes from the plays' premier to their subsequent revivals, as shown in Figure 11.

The use of onstage action is exaggerated by the small theatres in which the plays premiered. Morris states: '[the in-*yer-face* plays form] part of a distinct trend in London small theatres to exploit the intimacy of the environment with savage violence' (Morris, 1995). This intimacy allows the audience to be involved with the performance. In being so close it allows an audience member to believe that the action which occurs on stage is almost touchable because the action occurs, literally, in an audience member's face. As said by Sierz: 'despite the comparative safety of the second row, its ninety minutes with no break were relentlessly frightening because of the acute sense of imminent danger and the real possibility of actors

injuring themselves or one of the spectators' (Sierz, 2001:p.75). Therefore, this sense of immediate danger adds to the theatrical sensibility which constitutes in-yer-face theatre.

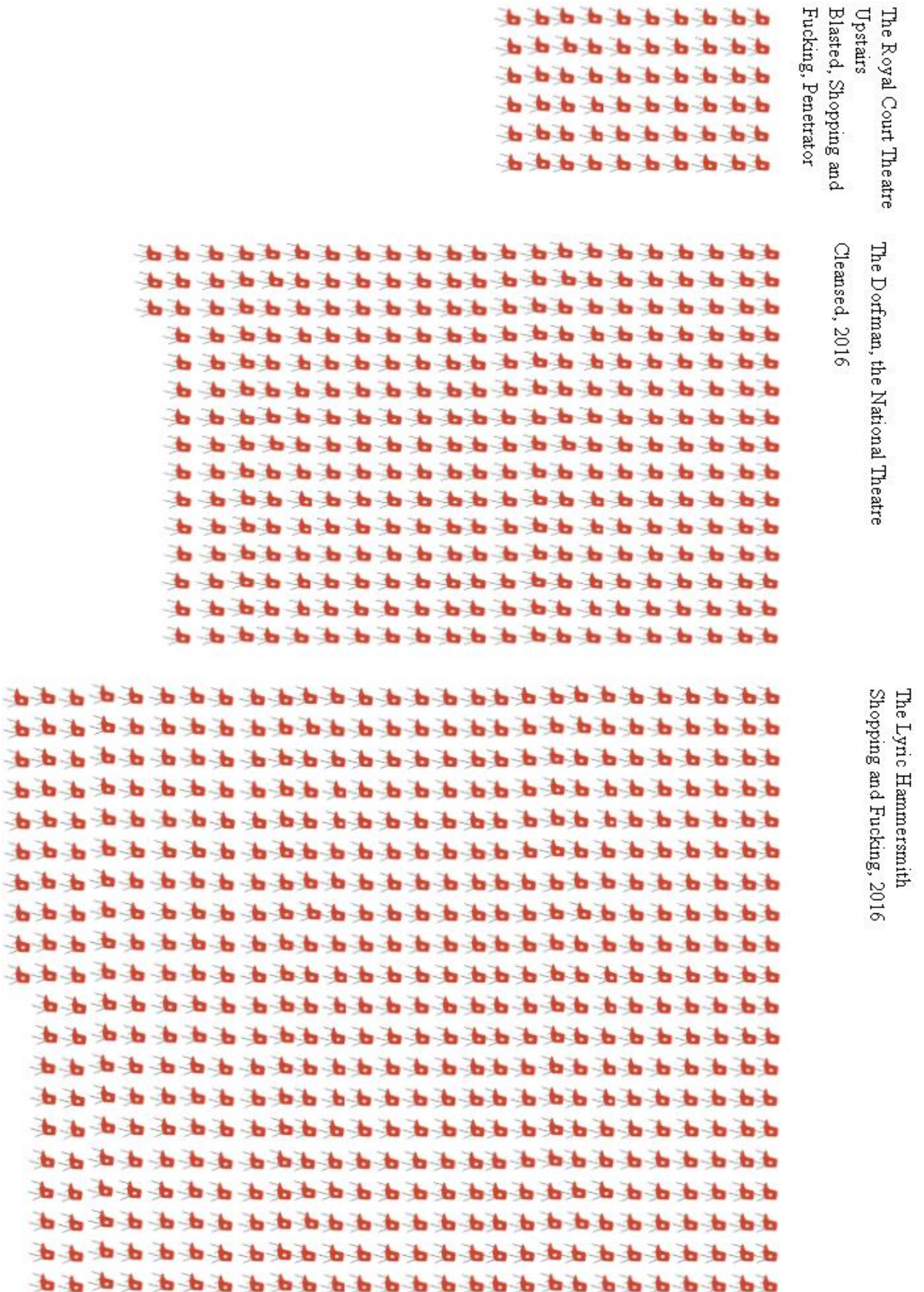
Therefore, although diagrams are not strictly used within Moretti's work, I believe they are a useful aid in order to diagrammatically demonstrate some of Sierz's ideas and exemplify how they further complicate his definition of in-yer-face theatre.

Although it seems that the in-yer-face theatre plays started in small, intimate theatres, these plays did not stay within the confines of small theatres for long. Sierz categorises this movement as he describes the difference between hot and cold versions of in-yer-face theatre:

The hot version-often performed in small studio theatres with audiences of between 50-200 people- uses aesthetics of extremism. The language is blatant, the actions explicit, the emotions heightened. Here, the aggression is open, and the intention is to make the experience unforgettable. Cooler versions mediate the disturbing power of extreme emotions by using a number of distancing devices: larger auditoriums, a more naturalistic style or a more traditional structure. Comedy is the most effective distancing device and can sometimes completely diffuse an emotionally fraught situation' (2001: pp.5-6)

This shows how an in-yer-face play can be manipulated to make it more or less extreme with the variance of audience capacity. Most of the plays premiered at the Royal Court Theatre upstairs which had a total capacity of 60 in 1995 meaning that this theatre is a hot version which would have very strong reactions from the audience. Brown comments: 'for Thatcher's children, the theatre became vital by revisiting its tradition of emotional ferocity while jettisoning debate and ideology. The result is horror in a small room, with little of the broader social, historical or intellectual vision' (Brown, 2001). It is within this small room which the audience can see the atrocities of the world outside of the theatre. The small room allows the play to capitalise on its horror and intensify the experience.

**Figure 11: A diagram to show the change in theatre sizes from the play's premier to later revivals.**



Sierz suggests that *Penetrator* can only be done in a small, intimate theatre: ‘as theatre, *Penetrator* could only offer intensity of experience “really shaking its audiences, really putting them through something” by restricting the size of the venue.’ (Sierz, 2001:p.80).

This may be because *Penetrator*’s prevalence of action occurs in the offstage fictional space which in relation to the earlier maps has the greatest distance between an audience member and the action. Therefore, to intensify the experience the audience size must be restricted.

Moreover, Mark Ravenhill says he wrote *Shopping and Fucking* for a close up audience of 65 people (Sierz, 2001:p.127) in Upstairs Theatre in the Royal Court where this play premiered. Much like figure 11 suggests, this allows the audience to be close to the action, where they can easily read facial expressions and feel as though they can be affected by the action which is occurring onstage; it is the pinnacle of a hot version of in-yer-face theatre. However, in a 2016 revival of the production at the Lyric Hammersmith, the audience capacity was 550 (Lyric Hammersmith London, n.d) as shown in figure 11. This shows that the demand to see an in-yer-face play meant that revival adaptations would change the original aim of the piece of theatre. This expansion of the audience had a dramatic impact on the affective potency of the play which is documented in reviews of this revival of *Shopping and Fucking*. Gilmour states that what once was a painful experience to watch, has now become ironic and as a result: ‘This production is not upsetting. It may shock, it may provoke laughter, but few will cry because few will care deeply enough’ (2016). This is reiterated by reviewer, Henry Hitchings, who states ‘this revival ... is less immediately shocking than the 1996 production’ (2016).

Furthermore, after watching both the premier of *Blasted* in 1995 and its subsequent revival during Sarah Kane Season in 2001, Sierz was asked about the difference between seeing the play in the intimate upstairs theatre at the Royal Court and in the larger downstairs theatre

with a total audience capacity of 380 and the addition of a proscenium arch. He noted that although the 2001 revival was still shocking the play seemed a lot funnier. Sierz also documents that he was surprised when someone actually fainted in the second row (Quoted in Aragay, 2007:p.149). This shows a key issue with transporting an in-yer-face theatre play from a small intimate theatre to a larger auditorium; the majority of the audience is further away from the action and therefore the violence is less in their face. As a result, the majority of the audience do not feel the sense that they are in danger. However, as noticed by Sierz, the front rows are closer to the action and therefore more greatly affected by the performance. Therefore, in larger auditoriums the distance that each individual audience member is from the stage may affect their view of the performance. Moreover, the portion of the audience that experiences in-yer-face theatre up close and ‘in their faces’ is proportionally much smaller – just the front couple of rows, instead of the whole auditorium.

However, *Cleansed*, also by Sarah Kane, when revived by the National Theatre at the Dorfman retained its shock value, regardless of the increase in audience capacity. During the run faintings and walk outs were fairly commonplace (Ellis-Petersen, 2016). The audience, therefore, are still so overwhelmed by the sadism they, either voluntarily by walking out of the theatre or involuntarily by fainting, stop witnessing the carnage. *Cleansed*, as shown within the previous maps within this chapter, is extremely visceral because of its tendency to show the horrors on stage through action and therefore, elicits extreme reactions. That the play should not only have this physiological effect, but retain it for twenty years, is something quite remarkable.

Therefore, although the maps of what happens in the play are vitally important to understand whether the play encompasses the in-yer-face mentality, the map becomes much more complicated when thought of in the context of a full production rather than just the script. This adds a complicating factor to this methodology as so far the focus has been upon the



script rather than the play. Therefore, the third chapter of this thesis will utilise reviews of the performances in order to understand reactions to the play within its intended format, regarding the play as a performance and noting reactions from audience members who experienced the performance.

The distinction between hot and cold versions of in-yer-face theatre could suggest that in-yer-face theatre as experienced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is qualitatively different to the plays which premiered in the mid-late 1990s, and this is because they are quantifiably different things. Rather than small, intimate viewings of the play which allows a close relationship between the play and its audience seen in the early showings of these plays, the ensuing popularity has allowed audience sizes to grow meaning there is greater distance between play and audience member. Therefore, rather than a collective audience experience, spectators towards the stage may have a more intense experience than the audience members who are further away from the action. As a result, it appears that after the plays' premiers, the in-yer-face theatre plays have changed and become non-standardised because one audience members experience will not be the same as another's. To what extent this change has upon the play's affective potency, however, cannot be quantified, because much could depend on where an individual spectator is seated.

## Conclusion

Through quantitative analysis, inspired by Franco Moretti, Aleks Sierz's preliminary investigation and coining of in-yer-face theatre has been analysed in order to assess whether it is as cohesive and coherent as Sierz's work suggests. Using Moretti's approach of distant reading, and adapting his work from *Graphs, Maps and Trees*, I have demonstrated how the texts can be analysed in relation to each other.

This chapter has highlighted a key problem with Sierz's definition and navigate the difficult terrain of the theatrical trends of the 1990s. The discourse is problematic on two accounts: firstly, some tropes seem to be too vague and therefore are easily applied to a multitude of texts and secondly, other tropes are too specific and as a result only apply to the most extreme of the sensibility. The overarching problem, however, resides in the fact that Sierz appears to ignore the uniqueness of each individual text. Sierz appears to have created a sensibility with broad statements meaning he could collate and co-opt texts and this will be further explored in chapter 3 of this thesis. It is important to challenge Sierz's terms, because the individual plays he applies them to can be shown to be quite different, and because the longer those terms go unchallenged, the harder it will be to modify them.

This chapter has also highlighted a difficulty in dialogue between qualitative literary texts and Moretti's quantitative methodology. The analysis through the table, tree and graphs grouped the texts together in ways that suggested that Sierz was right to see the texts as fully cohesive. They bore out his view that the texts are similar enough that they are connected.

The maps, however, demonstrate how divergent these texts actually are. The map is liberated from the discourse which grouped the plays in the tree and graphs, and so can show where the majority of action occurs in relation to the stage and therefore, that action's proximity to the audience. The maps demonstrate that, contrary to Sierz's belief, the plays are vastly different, and this in turn reiterates the need for in-yer-face theatre to be re-evaluated.

What this statistical analysis has shown is the importance of writer, Sarah Kane, and specifically her two plays *Blasted* and *Cleansed* to the in-yer-face sensibility. These two plays have consistently been a frontrunner in all of the different modes of statistical analysis; including having the most in-yer-face theatre tropes and showing the majority of its shocking

material onstage in close proximity to its audience. It appears that Sarah Kane is the only one of the identified playwrights whose plays truly embrace the in-yer-face theatre aesthetic.

This chapter has also questioned the coherence of in-yer-face theatre. By comparing the texts together rather than in separate chapters, the similarities and differences are made more apparent. This methodology, however, is also problematic: in order to create the quantitative elements, the qualitative shock value, which critics insist upon, had to be removed. Moreover, what classes as a use of a certain trope can be vastly subjective and therefore, I have shown the examples of the tropes in an appendix. What this quantitative analysis does do, however, is it provides a new way to look at in-yer-face theatre and evaluate the texts anew.

The last section of this chapter further complicates in-yer-face theatre, showing two strains depending on the size of the theatre. The cold version of in-yer-face theatre, according to Sierz's discourse, would not produce the palpable effect on their audiences in order to be classified as an in-yer-face theatre text. Although Sierz would not be able to foresee the drastic move from small scale to large scale theatre when writing his criticism in 2001, it has had a profound impact upon the sensibility. Therefore, it appears that the sensibility has morphed and changed and is now mostly unrecognisable from its small scale beginnings, apart from, once again, Sarah Kane who, even in an expansive theatre venue, has retained the capacity to emotionally trouble her audience.

This distant reading methodology, however, has not provided conclusive evidence which is needed to critique or support a theatrical sensibility. Therefore, in order to support and corroborate this chapter a more conventional methodology must be used in order to make sensitive conclusions about the in-yer-face sensibility. As a result, a mixed method approach is central to this investigation, rather than using only the quantitative method, in order to investigate in-yer-face theatre thoroughly.

## Chapter Two

More similar than a graph can suggest? A close reading perspective.

Chapter 1 focused on quantitative research inspired by Franco Moretti's *Distant Reading*. This chapter, however, turns to qualitative research in order to support and extrapolate the graphs, maps and trees. Moretti comments that: 'data-centric analysis does not ask *why* something happens, it presents literature as a statistic, or a "bunch of facts" which can be analysed 'and why- is something that must be decided on a different basis' (Moretti, 2007:p.9). This chapter, therefore, will attempt to analyse the why by using close reading analysis. It will then determine whether the texts are similar on a micro level – i.e., at the level of the individual scene, or episodes within scenes.

During sections of Moretti's work, such as 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature', a more conventional approach to literary criticism is adopted to support the quantitative claims. Rather than the extremely distant reading which makes conclusions about thousands of texts which Moretti admits that he has never read, 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature' demonstrates a much closer reading technique on a smaller corpus of texts. In this chapter Moretti attempts to investigate why Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is the most enduring, and most canonised, form of detective fiction. In order to do this Moretti had to establish how the 'clue' was used in each text to establish whether this trope of detective fiction is visible, decodable (etc). In order to make these conclusions, Moretti admits he read these texts in detail in order to understand how the clue operates in the story. Therefore, Moretti would have to use close reading techniques in order to aid his distant reading approach.

Like Moretti, in order to investigate how in-yer-face tropes operate in each text, this chapter, unlike the previous chapter, will employ close reading techniques. Despite Moretti's claim that close reading makes each text individual, this chapter attempts to utilise close reading techniques in order to show how each 'in-yer-face' text portrays or uses a trope. This will help identify whether the in-yer-face theatre texts have a particular *modus operandi* or

morphology when portraying violence or shocking material. Close reading will help investigate the premise highlighted by Ken Urban that although the plays do not represent a cohesive artistic movement, they do share many political and aesthetic concerns (Urban, 2001:p. 37). This chapter will take the tropes of drug injecting and rape to show nuances of how each trope is used within each play, because Chapter 1 observed that the graphs, maps and trees could not fully investigate how these two tropes, in particular, are used within each play. Close reading overcomes a key problem with distant reading because it defines an action within its course of narration. As Vladimir Propp explains, a trope in one story may be vastly different to the use of the same trope in another story. Therefore, close reading can corroborate whether tropes which are grouped together within Chapter 1 are helpfully labelled.

Close reading is defined as: ‘the kind of intensive reading and re-reading that calls for heightened attention to literary language and form considering both as semantic structures that mediate authors’ and readers’ perceptions’ (Moya, 2019:p.9). This method of analysing literature has dominated literary criticism from the anglosphere. It focuses upon language and how the author uses techniques in order to affect their audience, whether that is a reader or a spectator. This will help evaluate whether the authors have a generational voice which connects the in-yer-face theatre plays. This chapter will assess both the similarities and differences of the subject matter of the speeches and how language is used in order to induce emotion from the audience.

This chapter will also build upon the distinction of on-stage and off-stage trauma in extrapolating a loosely Wittgensteinian point that its meaning is a function of its use. It will assess the playwrights use of dialogue in their depiction of off-stage trauma and action or on-stage trauma through stage direction and interrogate the difference between ‘in-yer-ear’ and ‘in-yer-face’ theatre. This will help to fully examine how the playwrights employ certain

techniques and whether the use of action and dialogue is similar between playwrights. This chapter aims to corroborate or support the findings of the previous chapter by investigating the plays in much greater detail than distant reading can allow. Therefore, this chapter will also scrutinize whether the plays are more similar on a textual level than distant reading can assess. It will focus upon the three main in-yer-face writers and their predecessors.

### Drug Abuse.

The use of drugs within in-yer-face theatre plays is relatively commonplace: playwrights tend to use this trope in order to accentuate the taboo breaking behaviour which these plays are often known for. Chapter 1 highlighted that the trope of ‘drug injection’ presented in Sierz’s discourse is not nuanced enough in order to fully compare how the trope is used in each of the individual plays. Therefore, using close reading and qualitative research, this section attempts to explore how the taboo of drugs is explored in ‘in-yer-face theatre’.

The use of drug taking within the theatre cannot be adequately discussed without mentioning one of the in-yer-face theatre’s predecessors, *Trainspotting* adapted by Harry Gibson from Irvine Welsh’s original novel. Labelled as ‘in-yer-face’ by its author (Quoted in Cripps, 2005), it is also mentioned in the ‘Welcome to the Shock-Fest’ chapter of Aleks Sierz’s *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama Today*.

The play starts with Mark confessing: ‘Ah’ve had a longstanding problem wi heroin addiction. Ah’ve bin trying tae combat this but it has curtailed ma employment activities. I fell it’s important tae be honest and mention this tae you...’ (22). Unlike the other in-yer-face plays, Mark uses direct addresses and speaks personally to the audience and tells them his problems with addiction. The direct address instantly creates a relationship between the audience and Mark.

Dialogue is extremely important in *Trainspotting* as it is used to intensify some of the horrific drug injecting scenes which Gibson, himself, warns has made audience members faint (62).

Gibson seems to combine both dialogue and action in order to intensify these scenes:

Mark: Sick Boy picked up the leather strip and tourniquayed Ali above her elbow, obviously staking his place in the queue, and then tapped up a big blue vein oan her thin ash-white airm.

Simon: Want me tae dae it?

Mark: She nodded. Alison nodded. He droaps a cotton ball intae the spoon n blows oan it, before sucking up about 5 mls through the needle, intae the barrel ay syringe. He's goat a fuckin huge blue vein tapped up, which seems tae been almost coming through Ali's airm. He pierces her flesh and injects a wee bit slowly, before sucking blood back intae the chamber. Her lips are quivering as she gazes pleadingly at him for a second or two... His face looks ugly, leering, reptilian, before he slams the cocktail towards her brain! She pulls back her heid, shuts her eyes and opens her mooth, givin oot an orgasmic groan. She sais... She sais...

(*Trainspotting*, 26)

Within the script what is immediately noticeable is that there are no stage directions, the direction appears to come from Mark's dialogue, itself. Mark appears to be a narrator of the action whilst it is happening, rather than a character involved and interacting in the scene.

Mark's dialogue adds detail to what is happening. For example, his description of a 'big blue vein oan her thin ash-white airm' brings the image of drug injection to the intimate space of the audience's imagination. The monosyllabic alliteration and use of colour imagery intensifies the scene in order to unnerve the audience. Moreover, violent imagery paired with the dynamic verb: 'he slams the cocktail towards her brain!' suggests that injecting heroin is brutal; it makes the drug unappealing and possibly makes the audience imagine that the drug injection is happening to them. This is an extreme example of what Meisel explains as indirect seeing (2007:p.49). The audience can see the action occurring in front of their eyes but simultaneously imagine the close-up details, which add to the extremity of the action.

Moreover, when Alison is injected, she says: 'That beats any meat injection. That beats any fuckin cock in the world!' (26). This hyperbolises the euphoria insinuating that heroin is



better than sex. The anaphora reiterates how pleasurable the drug is; the immediate relief also shows the reliance that addicts have upon drugs, and perhaps the relief the audience feels when Mark's graphic description of the process ends allows them a small share of the addict's pleasure.

This scene is in total contrast to drug injection seen within Sarah Kane's *Cleansed*. *Cleansed* relies heavily on live action. A clear difference between the drug injection in *Trainspotting* and *Cleansed* is consent. When taking drugs Sickboy asks 'want me tae do it?' whereas this question does not arise in *Cleansed*. Rather after Graham 'searches for a vein with difficulty,' Tinker 'injects into the corner of Graham's eye' (108). Although it is clear that Graham wants the drugs after repeatedly asking for more, the mode of injection is not discussed. Injecting the drug into Graham's eye immediately shocks the audience as an unconventional, extreme measure to administer the heroin. The action occurs without dialogue meaning there is no prior warning to the violent act which escalates the audience's trauma; they can only watch in utter dismay. This also being the opening scene indicates that shock will most likely occur throughout. Unlike *Trainspotting*, *Cleansed* does not focus upon addiction rather this injection is used to show extremity and ultimate control.

Unlike Alison, Graham does not seem to outwardly enjoy the dose of heroin. Instead the audience sees Graham become confused and losing consciousness. When counting back from ten Graham says 'five... four, four five' (108). This shows Graham is now unable to perform simple tasks like counting back from ten. Immediately afterwards he 'slumps' implying that he has now lost consciousness. The use of intermittent dialogue from Graham helps the audience understand his mental state, they can see the immediate effects of the drug.

However, the effects are in complete contrast to *Trainspotting*. Rather than appearing to enjoy the drug, it causes Graham's death. The opening scene of *Cleansed* ends in ambiguity: the audience does not know if Graham's death was accidental via overdose or calculated by

Tinker. *Cleansed* deglamourizes heroin use and drug injection by showing the unpredictable consequences. Rather than finishing in elation, Graham dies because of his drug use.

The allegation that, by contrast, *Trainspotting* glamorises drug use is, however, highly debatable, since it can be seen to do the very opposite. Mark also frankly tells the audience the horrific aftereffects which addicts have to deal with. The play starts: ‘Mark: Fuck!... Ah woke up in a strange bed, in a strange room, covered in ma own mess. Ah hud pished the bed. Ah hud puked up in the bed. Ah hud shat masel in the bed’ (15). The first word of the play is a profanity which may shock the audience and aligns itself with in-yer-face theatre because of the immediate use of filthy language. The anaphoric triple which follows shows the gruesome side of a drug habit and echoes the habitual repetition of drug use. The lack of hedging reinforces Marks frank tone as he tells the audience exactly what his life is like which the audience can then imagine.

This is incredibly similar to the anecdote told by Max in *Penetrator*. Although relating to drug injection less specifically, Max tells Allan about his night on ecstasy: ‘Max: Got stoned, got pissed, took some E, ate a kebab, puked up a kebab, I presume it was the same one... woke up at 7 this morning in Mikey’s toilet in a puddle of piss with speed cramps’ (*Penetrator*, 67). These two stories have parallels: both characters wake up in their own mess creating very similar imagery which will disturb the audience. Although Mark’s and Max’s speeches are entertaining it is also uncomfortable for the audience hear and imagine.

*Trainspotting* shows a world in which everyone is using. This is also seen in Jez Butterworth’s *Mojo*. The men in this play are addicted to pills, usually synonymous with the dance culture which the play encapsulates. The line ‘my piss is black’ (11) is repeated throughout the play and shows what drugs can do to a person’s body, yet regardless the characters continue taking the substance. However, the cultural connotations of popping pills

and shooting up smack, as well as their physiological effects, are so very different that ‘drug taking’ is a broad and possibly unhelpful category. Audience members that squirm through injection scenes might laugh at pill-popping.

The in-yer-face theatre plays use the taboo of drugs in order to show their effects, whether that is through dialogue or action. Through addiction, an audience can see a person’s desperation to feel better. *Cleansed* by Sarah Kane shows drug injection at its most extreme: the encounter is relatively quick and silent due to intermittent dialogue only used to help the audience understand what is happening to the character. *Trainspotting*, however, does the opposite because it tells the audience many aspects of drug addiction, from being affected by the drug in everyday life to the thrill to being injected. The dialogue, in this instance, magnifies the action allowing the audience to imagine intimate details bringing them psychologically closer to the action.

Sierz maintains that the use of drugs in these plays exemplifies the authors’ experiences with the ecstasy and dance culture of the 1990s. Whilst this may, perhaps, be true, the only play that seems to bear out a direct link is *Penetrator*. The carefree 1950s amphetamine-popping of *Mojo* is very different to the sordid realities of 1980s heroin addiction in *Trainspotting*, and neither seems to have much to do with the ecstasy, raves, and clubbing of the 1990s. It could be argued, then, that Sierz is simply not grouping like with like, and perhaps that his grasp of youth subculture was weak and based on generalisation. But above all, it seems clear that, as we saw in the distant readings, Sarah Kane’s use of these tropes is fundamentally different from those of any other playwright at the time.

## Sexual Violence.

Like the use of drugs, chapter 1 highlighted that the trope of rape is far too complicated for a distant reading approach. The highly emotive act is better explained through purely

qualitative research. In-yer-face theatre plays are known for their tendency to show the atrocities of the real world. Rape is often depicted within these plays as a brutal form of sexual violence. How these atrocities are shown, however, differs from play to play.

Showing sex and sexual violence in the theatre is known to cause uproar. *The Romans In Britain*, by Howard Brenton, first premiered in 1980, and sparked a vicious debate about what should and should not be shown on stage since censorship was abolished in 1968. The play shows a Druid being raped by three passing soldiers. Public outrage ensued, and Mary Whitehouse famously took director, Michael Bogdanov, to court under the Sexual Offences Act (Freshwater, 2009:p.85). What made the play so shocking is its depiction of male rape which is less often seen within the media. The play was a climactic moment in theatre, and a full fifteen years before the premier of *Blasted* would raise similar ethical questions of showing rape within a theatre. By showing male rape, *The Romans in Britain* and the in-yer-face theatre playwrights critique society's views on sexual violence and combat certain rape myths which affect the way society perceives rape.

It is important to note that the problem here is not with showing sex on stage, as commented on by Patricia Williams: 'sex is not a bad thing, It is how sex is done that can be problematic' (1987:p.401). Only Sarah Kane shows consensual sex on stage, and, as if to underscore the point, uses the euphemism 'make love' in *Cleansed* (148). This epithet, especially when supported by adverbs such as 'slowly' and 'gently', shows how intimate the act of sex can be. It reminds the audience that sex can be loving. The fact this intimate moment can be shared with a full, witnessing audience, is extremely public for such a private scene. However, this image of consensual sex is not common within the in-yer-face sensibility.

Societal views of what rape is historically conceptualised that there are male perpetrators and female victims (Walfield, 2018:p.2). This assumption would create various myths about rape,

which the in-er-face theatre playwrights attempt to prove wrong. Myths are ‘false beliefs that are widely accepted’ (Walfield, 2018:p.1). Rape myths, in particular, ‘These myths are not simply present among a minority of individuals, but are embedded within our laws, language, policies, media messages, and even within our training and education.’ (Turchik, 2012:p.220). These myths can have a detrimental effect on how the victim reacts to the rape and how society may treat victims and perpetrators.

Turchik explains common male rape myths thus:

(a) men cannot be raped; (b) ‘real’ men can defend themselves against rape; (c) only gay men are victims and/or perpetrators of rape; (d) men are not affected by rape (or not as much as women); (e) a woman cannot sexually assault a man; (f) male rape only happens in prisons; (g) sexual assault by someone of the same sex causes homosexuality; (h) homosexual and bisexual individuals deserve to be sexually assaulted because they are immoral and deviant; and (i) if a victim physically responds to an assault he must have wanted it (2012:pp. 211-212).

In an attempt to tackle the perception of rape and subsequently change society’s views upon sexual violence, the in-er-face playwrights focus upon male victims of sexual violence, who are largely ‘overlooked, dismissed and ignored’ (Ratner et al, 2003:p.73) by the media. The in-er-face playwrights, by showing this issue, make the audience challenge their own perceptions of rape.

Two rapes occur in Sarah Kane’s *Blasted*: the rape of Cate by Ian and the rape of Ian by a Soldier. The play was written in response to the mass rape seen within the Bosnian war (Bayley, 1995). Urban states: ‘Sarah Kane herself famously said “the logical conclusion to the way society expects men to behave is war”’ (2001:p.66). The two rapes which are seen in the play are very different: one is the rape of a man and one the rape of a woman.

The rape of Cate occurs first in the part of the play. Cate, however, is not aware that the rape took place. At the point of the rape Cate is unconscious after a fainting episode which sporadically occurs when Cate is stressed throughout the first and second scene of the play:

Cate trembles and starts gasping for air. She faints. Ian goes to her... He puts the gun to her head, lies between her legs, and simulates sex. As he comes, Cate sits bolt upright with a shout (26-27).

Through the repetition of Cate's fits, during the second seizure, Ian seizes the opportunity to take advantage of Cate's altered state (Iball, 2015:p.19). This exploitative rape of Cate shows Ian's opportunistic nature; when Cate cannot give consent or refuse his advances, Ian rapes her. Ann Cahill explains 'rape is a crime that epitomises women's oppressed status' (2001:p.2). At the moment of fainting, Cate is at her most vulnerable, and instead of caring for her, Ian takes advantage of her vulnerability. The unexpected nature of the rape shocks the audience because it appears to occur without warning. Moreover, after the rape it appears that Ian is able to immediately switch to caring for Cate by using the epithet 'Cate? Catie?' and then 'he kisses her and she comes round.' (27). The image of Ian kissing Cate as she regains consciousness is very jarring due juxtaposed images of sexual violence to caring love. Furthermore, it appears that Cate is oblivious to the rape's occurrence. The act is never mentioned again, almost forgotten, like it never happened. This combats two prominent rape myths against women. Firstly, it demythologises the idea that 'it is only rape if someone is physically forced into sex and has injuries to show for it.' (Rape crisis centre, n.d). Cate did not have any defensive injuries. The rape therefore is a cruel dramatic irony, as the audience is aware of Cate's ignorance. Secondly, the myth that 'if two people have had sex before, it's OK to have sex again'. It is clear that Cate does not want to have sex with Ian as she denies his advances throughout the first scene. Ian demonstrates that perpetrators are influenced by the prevalence of rape myths as a type of justification for their actions.

The rape of Cate 'sets up its victim/good girl, Cate, and perpetrator/bad man, Ian' (Iball, 2009:p.24). By using these archetypal character foils the audience can clearly see the difference between victim and perpetrator, which will later be complicated by the introduction of the soldier character. The image of Ian putting a gun to Cate's head

foreshadows Ian's rape by a soldier. This rape, however, seems more violent because it is less personal: the soldier does not know Ian and yet sees the opportunity to rape him. Before the rape the soldier warns 'going to fuck you' (48), the ellipsis makes the exclamation potent, the soldier tells Ian of his planned action in the quickest way possible. After saying: 'You smell like her. Same cigarettes', action takes over as the soldier imagines having sex with his late girlfriend Col:

The Soldier turns Ian over with one hand. He holds the revolver to Ian's head with the other. He pulls down Ian's trousers, undoes his own and rapes him- eyes closed and smelling Ian's hair. The Soldier is crying his heart out. Ian's face registers pain but he is silent (49).

Ian's silence in the rape mirrors Cate's unconsciousness however, the audience know that his silence is out of fear. It also disproves that 'a man cannot be forced to have sex'. Although the soldier did not attempt to physically overpower Ian, by holding a revolver to his head, the violence is heightened to the point at which no physical restraint is necessary. Like Cate, Ian will have no visible injuries, which shows, once again, that a victim of rape can appear physically unharmed even though they have been subjected to sexual violence. Moreover, 'in *Blasted*, all the emotion is packed into short and spare exchanges' (Sierz,2002:p.21).

Therefore, the short dialogue from each character heightens the emotion of the scene, then action takes over and makes it more dramatic.

The rape of Ian also disproves the rape myth that 'all raped men must be gay'. The audience know from his relationship with Cate and the fact he has an ex-wife and son that Ian is heterosexual. Moreover, to exaggerate this Ian is both perpetrator and victim within this play. This problematises what makes a perpetrator. Greig comments 'Ian is a journalist, bystander who becomes a perpetrator and finally a victim' (2001:p.xvii). This tripartite identity complicates who a perpetrator is rather than thinking of a person as having a single identity Ian shows that their psychology is much more complicated.

The soldier's emotions are also quite striking: when performing an act of violence, the hyperbolic 'crying his heart out' shows the extreme emotions that the soldier is feeling. The nameless soldier is not raping Ian out of anger or passion, which further indicates that society may need to reconsider the stereotypical image of a perpetrator. The soldier then could possibly be a metaphor for an everyman, suggesting that sexual violence can be committed by anyone. The mention of the smell of 'cigarettes' makes the experience multisensory; the audience can imagine what he smells like making the experience even more uncomfortable for the audience to endure. The fact that his eyes are closed is a psychological distancing effect (Iball, 2015:p.21) by which the soldier can imagine his Col. By raping Ian, the soldier is transferring Col onto Ian by replicating the atrocities done to her (Iball, 2015p.21). It shows that although the audience sees a rape happen onstage the rape is a metaphor for all rape which is happening in the world of the play and the outside world: a cycle of violence in which a rape victim's partner avenges her by raping a rapist.

The aftermath of Ian's rape also combats societal views on how a man will emotionally deal with being a victim of rape. Myths suggest that 'men are unable to be traumatised by rape'. Immediately after the rape, the nameless soldier sucks Ian's eyes, a possible allusion to castration. The soldier's actions leave Ian traumatised and ultimately emasculated. In the next scene the audience sees Ian's attempted suicide where he attempts to fire the gun 'again and again and again and again.' (56) The repetition shows how quickly Ian turns to sheer desperation in an attempt to end his own life which heightens Ian's vulnerability as he wants to die now and yet is unable (Iball, 2008:p.42). This demonstrates the emotional trauma of being raped, not only at the time but also the prolonged trauma of being a victim.

The detail, which Kane goes into to explain how the rape occurs, indicate the length of time which these acts take. Both the rape of Cate and Ian occur with little to no dialogue meaning the audience must watch the rape occur in silence. This heightens the experience because the



audience see the uninterrupted horror of sexual violence. Kane stated: 'I wrote [Blasted] to tell the truth. Of course, that's shocking. Take the glamour out of the violence and it becomes utterly repulsive' (in Benedict, 1995). This uninterrupted horror demonstrates the abhorrent violence which occurs during rape.

Sarah Kane's other play *Cleansed*, however, uses dialogue to add to the victim's torture. When Tinker sexually assaults Carl by pulling down his trousers and 'pushing a pole a few inches up his anus' (117), he torments Carl, asking him questions: 'what's your boyfriend's name?'. Tinker then commands Carl to 'Close your eyes imagine it's him' (117). This belittles the assault, in a way that makes it even more humiliating and homophobic. The imperative demonstrates how barbaric Tinker can be: this will be discussed further in chapter 3. The act has Sadeian echoes as Tinker tortures to test Carl and Rod's relationship. Tinker, therefore, does not commit the atrocities for sexual gratification or the enjoyment of violence. This complicates the stereotypical identity of a 'perpetrator'.

The character of Tinker separates *Cleansed* from the other plays labelled as in-yer-face. Tinker has full control of the world which is presented to the audience. The audience see an institution that is unaffected and untouched by the outside world. Instead, the stage shows a microcosm in which no one can enter or leave. In *Cleansed*, the violence which occurs is only perpetrated by Tinker at no point is the audience shown why Tinker commits these atrocities. Its level of unexplained evil is unprecedented in the other in-yer-face theatre texts.

The rape within *Shopping and Fucking* however, is extremely different to those described in the work of Sarah Kane. The scene shows the statutory rape of fourteen-year-old rent boy, Gary. Although the audience is aware that Gary has no objection to sex with older men, and begs them to take part in his fantasy, the audience also know that he is not of the legal age to consent. The description of the action is very methodical 'Robbie unzips his fly. Works spit

onto his penis. He penetrates Gary' (83). The short, simple sentence structure shows how emotionless Robbie is just before the rape. The rape, unlike *Blasted*, is punctuated by dialogue in which the characters talk through the action making sure that the action is what Gary 'paid for.' This prolongs the experience for the audience and makes the audience aware how the character is feeling throughout the rape as a type of free indirect discourse. Unlike *Blasted*, where the audience must decode the image in order to understand how the characters feel, in *Shopping and Fucking* the characters discuss their feelings throughout.

In showing Gary being raped by both Mark and Robbie the audience simultaneously learn about Gary being previously raped by his Stepdad. Robbie states:

I don't want to do this.  
 Lulu: Darling.  
 (Robbie takes off the blindfold)  
 Gary: Why are you stopping?  
 Lulu: He wants to carry on.  
 Robbie: I can't if he says that (Ravenhill, 80).

Therefore, although it is Robbie perpetrating this rape fantasy, he is the one who is made uncomfortable and Gary, the victim, is the one who 'wants to carry on'. This creates an extremely confusing dynamic for the audience. It changes the usual victim/perpetrator dynamic to demonstrate how capitalism has infiltrated every situation. Because Gary is paying for the transaction the perpetrator must obey his command and fulfil his fantasy in a curious reversal the phrase 'I don't want to do this' (82) suggests that it is the active partner, not the passive victim, who is forced to engage in sex he does not consent to. The character of Lulu is also not blameless in this rape scene; although she does not physically assault Gary herself, she encourages the other characters. The audience is presented with a person who blatantly ignores the action occurring in front of her, which suggests that although men are the usual perpetrators, women are not blameless by virtue of their sex.

A similarity in the narrative between Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and Mark Ravenhill's *Shopping and Fucking* is that after the rape of a victim a threatening object is also used in order to sexually assault the victim. In *Blasted*, after raping Ian, the Soldier 'pushes the revolver up Ian's anus' (49). This image is extremely unnerving to the audience: after watching the rape they would think that the ordeal is over; however, in an attempt to further shock the audience, they see that Ian is still in immediate danger. The sexual assault in *Shopping and Fucking*, however, is not as explicit as that in *Blasted*. Instead of the action occurring onstage, it occurs offstage and is discussed through dialogue. In order for Gary to complete his fantasy he states that his father 'fucks me with a knife. So...' (84). The ellipsis creates suspense for the audience as they are unaware whether Mark and Robbie will go as far as to penetrate the fourteen year old with a knife that as Lulu points out will lead to his death. Therefore, both plays attempt to heighten the violence and brutality of the rape to make the action more extreme. Sarah Kane chooses to show this as onstage action using imagery in order to shock the audience. Ravenhill, however, confines the most extreme and violent aspects of Gary's fantasy and rape to the dialogue within the play in the neighbouring offstage space.

Rape and sexual assault, however, is prevalent in the dialogue of most of the in-yer-face theatre plays. The way the plays use dialogue to talk about these atrocities is extremely similar. The dialogue heard in the in-yer-face theatre plays also adds to the debate around rape myths and rape culture.

The voice or narrative of the victim is seldom presented within in-yer-face plays. Authors, instead, tend to focus upon problematising the perpetrator and therefore, silence the victim. This is best exemplified in Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* when the perpetrator Tinker cuts out Carl, the victim's, tongue (118). This literally takes away the victim's ability to tell their story. This demonstrates a major barrier to helping male victims, as male victims tend to be silenced, often not reporting cases of sexual abuse. King and Woollett suggest that this

refusal to report cases of sexual abuse is largely down to the prevalence of rape myths (1997).

By not allowing the victims to have a voice, the in-her-face playwrights show the plight of the victim.

Furthermore, when Ian becomes a victim in *Blasted* Buse comments:

it is only after he has been raped and his eyes have been removed that Ian realises about the importance of witnessing and bearing testimony, but at this point his words fail him and he undergoes linguistic collapse as a result of being unable to assimilate and articulate the trauma he has just experienced (2001:p.185).

Ironically the journalist, now victim, is unable to report the violence which has directly occurred to him but is somewhat blasé when dictating what happened to a young girl in scene one (Kane, 2001:p.11-12).

*Penetrator*, however, shows that even when a case of sexual violence is reported, the male victim may not be believed. *Penetrator*, which has been deemed grimmer and more frightening than Sarah Kane's *Blasted* (Morris,1995), disturbs its audience mostly by the use of violence through the character Tadge. A war veteran, Tadge tells his old friends Alan and Max what has occurred whilst he was in the army. He speaks of the Penetrators:

You don't know what it was like. In the dark all shrivelled up. Just my hatred keeping me alive. Their hands all over me. And you never came for me. Their dirty cocks in my mouth, up my arse (109)

The credibility of Tadge's narrative is immediately questioned because Tadge is an unreliable narrator in *Penetrator*. Then the audience can see a paradox of simultaneously believing and disbelieving a story and how this is problematised within society. It appears that Alan and Max do not believe Tadge's stories about the Penetrators although they do believe that 'something' has happened to him, they dismiss his sexual assault allegations. The audience too, can understand Tadge's unreliability due to the constant change in the amount of compensation he (says he) is being paid. Therefore, if an audience member wished to believe his outlandish claims, they cannot because of Tadge's constant contradictions. The play

creates an intense moral dilemma: Tadge's story is clearly not credible, but disbelieving a rape victim, especially one so distraught, is problematic. This debate has massive repercussions in the #believeyou era which is a movement to create a group of women survivors of sexual assault (Hillstrom, 2019:p.1). Men are excluded from such movements and are less widely believed when claiming to be victims of sexual assault. This exemplifies two rape myths; firstly, that real men do not get raped and secondly that men cannot be traumatised.

Tadge being an ex-soldier has a clear link to the soldier in Sarah Kane's *Blasted*, and the two characters have very similar stories of their experience of war. Tadge states: 'I know how to kill a man. I'm not afraid. I've seen guys get their ears cut off. I've seen lassies with their cunt shot out. I'm not scared of blood on my hands, hot blood pouring on my hands.' (*Penetrator*, 109). The repetition of blood on his hands paired with the added description of 'hot' and 'pouring' suggests that Tadge enjoys reimagining the atrocities that he apparently committed.

Tadge mentioning that he saw men with their ears cut off immediately links to the death of the Soldier's girlfriend Col, in *Blasted*, who had her ears 'hacked off' (47). The experience also included the same subject matter of the Soldier's experience of going to a house outside of town:

All gone. Apart from a small boy hiding in the corner. One of the others took him outside. Lay him on the ground and shot him through the legs. Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men whilst I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn't cry, just lay there. Turned her over and- Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of- Shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles (43).

The use of ellipsis to omit most of the personal pronouns makes the atrocities less personal to the soldier. The audience know what has happened without relating the war crimes directly to

the character they see onstage. Moreover, the audience do not know the soldier's name and instead he is an allegory for every soldier, which suggests that the soldier could be anyone. This, however, is in complete contrast to Tadge, who uses an anaphoric sequence of personal pronouns in order to exaggerate his involvement, possibly in order to intimidate Max and Alan. Both anecdotes, however, have the same sentence structure, preferring the deliberate use of short sentences. A short sentence gives a sense of urgency and makes the speaker appear more erratic and dangerous.

The similarities between Tadge and the soldier show that the in-her-face theatre plays may be similar in ways that Chapter 1 can account for, just as the contrasts between the handling of rape in the other plays shows they are too different to be grouped together as they were in Chapter 1. Even small details about their stories show a similar background. For example, Tadge exclaims: 'I shagged two girls at once... I did. In west Germany on the base. Two of them, about thirteen years old each.' (89). This has syntactic parallelisms to the Soldier's omission in *Blasted* 'They held the men whilst I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve' (43). Both anecdotes leave the age of the victim until the end of the statement. This allows for a secondary shock to occur and makes the anecdote more emotive. Iball explains, however, that the point is not that atrocities are equivalent in all contexts, but that we should be wary of our tendency to afford them different values (2015:p.39). Therefore, the action, however similar, enacted in the distant offstage space should shock its audience.

The link between *Penetrator* and *Blasted* shows a key insecurity around sexual violence. Both focus upon soldiers and their attitude towards violence and in this respect are direct descendants of Brenton's *The Romans in Britain*. It appears that both plays suggest that the violence that the soldier endures in war permeates society and victimises the most innocent. Children, who should not know about violence, experience the violence from the soldiers

who should be protecting them. It brings the violence of Bosnia, Rwanda and Iraq to British audiences.

## Casual Violence

The obtrusive use of violence within an in-yer-face theatre text is not the only reason why the texts are shocking. For example, Kritzer suggests that ‘even more than the scenes of violence, what often shocked audiences about the in-yer-face theatre plays was their cynical attitude toward wrongdoing. Acts that in reality would produce horrified condemnation were presented with casualness or even glee’ (2010:p.58). Therefore, it appears that rather than the explicit violence shown with an in-yer-face theatre play, the audience is also shocked by the characters’ attitude towards violence. Within most in-yer-face texts violence, instead of an emotional outburst, is calm, planned and sadistic. It suggests that violence is part of everyday life which is an extremely unnerving comment upon the human condition.

Tinker’s kind of calm, unnerving, sadistic behaviour echoes Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. In this she states: ‘The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal. From the viewpoint of our legal institutions and of our moral standards of judgment, this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together’ (Arendt, 1963:p. X). Tinker, although seen to be the leader of such a violent institution, appears extremely ordinary. Throughout *Cleansed* Carl is repeatedly dismembered by Tinker, cutting off his tongue, hands, feet and eventually his penis. This violence, however, is not met with an outburst of emotion from Tinker or any other characters rather rats enter the stage and eat the dismembered limbs and then ‘exit stage left’ (p.130). This shows the violence which occurs within the play emotionless. Moreover, as stated by Urban: ‘Kane, however, refuses to allow Tinker to be the source of all evil’ (2001:p.

43). Scenes of horrific violence are punctuated with scenes of Tinker going to see a peep show. During these scenes the audience can see another, more sensitive side of Tinker, in which he repeats childlike questions such as ‘can we be friends?’ (121) and begs the stripper for affection: ‘please. I won’t let you down’ (122). This humanises Tinker from a violent, unemotional dictator, to someone who has the same needs and desires of any audience member. Although these exchanges are not violently shocking, by humanising Tinker, the audience may be shocked that he could carry out such heinous crimes. Therefore, *Cleansed* shows what life could be like if society was completely desensitised to violence; the potential callousness of the human condition. The link between Tinker and Eichmann, suggesting that this has happened in real life before, is nothing if not terrifying.

In *Blasted*, the violence represents violence which has occurred in human history. For example, the violence of war which occurs in the distant offstage fictional space, is mimicked onstage directly in front of an audience. Kane is explicitly reminding the audience that this violence could happen anywhere. This should ignite, in the audience, a willingness to do something about the violence in the outside world. Langridge and Stephenson quote Kane: ‘what does a common rape in Leeds have to do with mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia? And the answer appeared to be ‘Quite a lot’’ (1997:p.130). By assimilating the war violence of Bosnia to a hotel room in Leeds which is expensive enough to be anywhere in the world (Kane, 2001:p.3) the audience’s awareness should increase and inspire them to act against violence in near and distant places (Lopes Pena, 2009).

## Conclusion

This chapter relies on close reading analysis in order to evaluate and extrapolate tropes which cannot be fully appreciated through the use of distant reading seen in chapter 1. This chapter attempts to overcome one of the main problems with Sierz’s summation: that he ignores the



individuality of each in-yer-face theatre text. By using a more conventional mode of literary analysis, the individual workings of each play are highlighted, revealing an individual politics to each, rather than the texts being reducible to the same in-yer-face theatre discourse.

This chapter researched two in-yer-face theatre tropes in detail, in order to understand whether the in-yer-face theatre texts are more similar through textual analysis. It appears that although the texts may have similarities between each other there is no definitive *modus operandi* which unites the in-yer-face aesthetic. This chapter also highlights that in-yer-face theatre is heavily inspired by its predecessors, especially by *Trainspotting*'s trope of drug use and Brenton's use of the soldier-rapist figure. Then the question arises: how are the in-yer-face texts aesthetically different to their predecessors?

In-yer-face plays seem to be more explicitly extreme when showing sexual violence than any other social taboo. Yet it is perhaps their casualness which has the curious ability to haunt the audience. Howard Brenton once said of *The Romans in Britain* that 'what startles about [the rape scene] is its casualness, its rough squaddie humour. It is a brutal scene, and its casual tone is unnerving' He continues: 'it reads like an account of an all-too-common war crime' (Quoted in Sierz, 2006). This reiterates that although the violence in these plays is innately shocking, their ability to recreate the unceremonious, unpremeditated, reality of violence is even more disconcerting. In-yer-face plays tend to amplify this: they go far beyond 'rough squaddie humour', dwelling on horrific, even lurid, details. But it remains the case that the affectless tone which these plays create is almost as shocking as the violence itself. By contrast, however, the taboo of drug taking within the in-yer-face theatre text is lacking the sheer extremity of its predecessor, *Trainspotting*. None of the in-yer-face texts – not even *Cleansed* – replicates the extremity of the drug addiction seen in Harry Gibson's adaptation. This could suggest that it is the multitude and range of different kinds of shocks (seen in the table 1) which distinguishes an in-yer-face theatre text.

Another key finding of this chapter is that *Penetrator* and *Blasted* appear to be much more similar through close reading analysis than they do through distant reading. It is thus not true that distant reading merely recapitulates the intuitions of close reading. Both plays show a singular room occupied by two people which is then invaded by a soldier character. The dialogue and narrative of these two soldier characters are extremely similar as they explain how they are both perpetrators of sexual violence. Both of these plays also commit to problematising rape myths and attempt to change the audience's perception about rape and their ideas about victims and a perpetrators. Showing the stereotypes in a complicated way proves these people are more than just a label which suggests that discourse around sexual violence may need a rethink.

In the final analysis, there is one respect in which close reading is an ideal, even necessary, way to approach in-her-face plays, and that is because it does not rely upon pre-existing scholarship, which is sorely lacking. There is little sustained literary criticism about the works of Mark Ravenhill or Anthony Neilson, while studies of the work of Sarah Kane have tended to be overwhelmingly dominated by biographical criticism, which does not afford much space to detailed discussion of the script as text. This lack of criticism and scholarship means that Sierz's label still goes unchallenged almost 20 years after he coined it. Close reading – and, in different ways albeit for similar reasons, distant reading – offer the student the best way around this challenge. The absence of a critical discourse means that the next chapter will explore the plays through non-scholarly reactions to them – by their audiences, and the theatre critics who reviewed them.

### Chapter Three

The Reception of In-yer-face Theatre: contemporary reviews  
as secondary sources.

This chapter aims to examine initial reviews of the in-yer-face theatre plays' premiers in order to argue that these reviews have had a direct impact upon the coining of the in-yer-face theatre narrative. These reviews can also be used to corroborate the findings of chapter 1 and 2 by providing an alternative and more varied set of scholarship. Chapters 1 and 2 focus upon the plays in their textual format and follow Sierz's precept to focus upon the writer and their text. A reviewer, on the other hand, sees the plays in their intended form, as they comment upon the play as it is performed live in front of an audience and therefore, can provide a unique view of these plays. This chapter, therefore, will utilise another methodology in order to interrogate Sierz's criticism. Thus far, this thesis has used both distant and close reading techniques to understand whether Sierz's assertions were correct. This chapter, however, will focus on secondary reading, primarily of reviews, in order to ensure a more rounded investigation.

Reviews of a performance, particularly of a play's premier, are extremely important to the play's success as they show the audience's initial reaction to the production. In reviews critics can express their thoughts and feelings towards the production and, more importantly, note their reaction to the play. As Sierz's methods claim to be predicated upon the audience's experience, the inclusion of the reviews of the performances will help assess whether his initial investigation into in-yer-face theatre was correct. A review allows a person to reflect on their experience and document the event. In doing so, a review will then inform others about how a particular person felt during the performance. This, in turn, creates a narrative surrounding the play which I will later suggest helped to create and mould the in-yer-face theatre narrative created by Aleks Sierz.

The use of reviews, as secondary reading, in a study such as this one, is paramount because of Sierz's assertion about an in-yer-face theatre play:

subjects that might seem bearable when you read about them in private suddenly seem electrifying when shown in public... Compared with the rather detached feeling of reading a play text, sitting in the dark surrounded by a body of people while watching an explicit performance can be an overwhelming experience (Sierz,2001:p.7).

Therefore, Sierz suggests that there is something unique about seeing these explicit texts live which can make the texts more potent. This may be 'because every performance is different, there is always the risk that something unexpected might happen... [and] this feeds into the tension of what is happening on stage' (Sierz,2001:p7). It is this tension which is highly important when creating the intense emotion needed to make the audience and critics use superlatives in order to describe it. In an attempt to measure this potency, I will use an array of reviews to evaluate how people, the press, and by extension society, reacted to the in-yer-face theatre plays initially. Equally importantly, I will see how reactions to the plays have changed and developed over time.

The use of this methodology, I will argue, helps demonstrate Sierz's misjudgement of the in-yer-face theatre texts. Firstly, I will argue that Sierz was heavily influenced by the media discourse (reviews) at the time of the plays' premiers in order to create a 'movement'. It was this discourse that influenced Sierz and informed his diagnosis of in-yer-face theatre, rather than the texts having a similar style, genre or aesthetic. Secondly, I will investigate whether Sierz's prognosis of what will happen to in-yer-face theatre was accurate.

## Media Influence

The media storm which followed the premier of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* made the play an instant success. Benedict suggests that it was the corresponding backlash which popularised the play (1996), leading a theatre spokesman to defend the play from its shrill reviews, saying: 'it will be sold out for every performance until the end of its run' (Quoted in Spencer, 1995). This popularity purely because of the preceding discourse is incredibly important for

this investigation as it shows the media's power and influence: this media frenzy inadvertently popularised the play and enticed people to go to watch the play – an example of the so-called Streisand effect.

Many of the early reviews of a Sarah Kane play tend to simply list the horrors which the audience, and the actors onstage, had to endure. Reviews of *Blasted*, for example, review the play thusly: 'scenes of male and female rape, mutilation, bodily functions and cannibalism' (Sunday Express, 1995). 'Defecation, urination, masturbation, fellatio, sodomy, eye-chewing, sleep-rape and cannibalism' (Morris, 1995). This inclination to list violence is later repeated with the premier of Kane's later play, *Cleansed*: 'A man injects heroin into the corner of his eye; another is impaled on a stake and his tongue cut out; there's incest, a hard-core peep-show and rats that run off with dismembered limbs' (Christopher, 1998). De Jongh adds that an audience member is 'force fed Kane's theatrical banquet of cruelties and violence... fatal injecting of heroin into an eye, violent amputation of a homosexual's tongue, hands and feet, cutting of a throat, two beatings [and] one suicide by hanging' (1998). This inclination to list shocking material or 'use of shock tactics', presented in Table 1, suggests that the audience was completely overwhelmed by the shock tactics used during the performance. As aptly said by Charles Spencer: 'you'd need to be deaf, dumb and blind not to be disturbed by that' (Spencer 1995). It seems plausible that the lists found routinely in these early reviews were influential on Sierz's critical formulation of in-yer-face theatre, since they tend to list the very tropes he uses to categorise it. The response of the audience to exaggerate the sheer number of shock tactics may suggest why Sarah Kane is seen as the prototypical in-yer-face theatre playwright. The description of in-yer-face theatre seems to be moulded in large measure on critics' descriptions of her plays.

In listing the violence, it appears that the violence in the plays of Sarah Kane has been decontextualized and subsequently sensationalised by the British Press (Carney, 2005:p.275).

For example, *Blasted* has some of the most hostile reviews of recent history. When reviewing *Blasted* in 1995 the notorious Jack Tinker, who famously labelled the text as a ‘disgusting feast of filth’ (1995), stated: ‘until last night I thought I was immune to shock in any theatre. I am not.’ (1995). This sentiment is reiterated by Charles Spencer who stated: ‘Hardened theatre critics looked in danger of parting company with their suppers’ (Spencer, 1995). This suggests that *Blasted* is unlike anything which has been seen onstage before and does not only move its audience emotionally but almost physically, too. The *Independent’s* Paul Taylor likened the experience of *Blasted* to having ‘your face rammed into an overflowing ash tray... and then having your whole head held down in a bucket of offal’ (Quoted in Spencer, 1995). The play obviously put its audience through an experience in which they were traumatised by what they saw enacted onstage. The vast majority of these views show complete disdain, which in turn reveals how dramatic a theatre experience can be.

This reiterates the notion that Sierz may have been influenced by the media discourse when creating the definition of in-yer-face theatre. These reviews use superlatives in order to exaggerate the affective potency of the play. Interestingly, Sierz states that an in-yer-face theatre text should inspire its audience to use superlatives, further suggesting that Sierz has utilised these reviews in order to inform his diagnosis. Rather than forming his description from textual evidence about similarities in the plays, it could be suggested that Sierz has utilised the reviews, primarily of the Sarah Kane plays, to construct an identity for the in-yer-face sensibility.

The use of superlatives and brash anecdotal responses to watching Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* is not the only reason to suggest that the play troubled its audience. Polly Graham comments on how eight people are known to have walked out of the theatre within its first week of performances (1995). According to Braid, ‘Mr Tinker suggests the reason only one person left the 65 seat theatre during the performance was that the British were too polite and stoical

to do anything but grin and bear it' (1995) The *Mail on Sunday* comments on how the applause at the end of the play was muted (1995). *Blasted*, therefore, has the innate ability to alienate its audience by confronting them with images which are inconceivable, if ultimately truthful.

Interestingly, few playwrights in recent history have produced palpably traumatic effects on their audiences to anything like the extent that Sarah Kane has, suggesting that there is something innately different about Kane and her plays. Indeed, there are plenty of records to indicate that some spectators were so traumatised by what they saw that they removed themselves from the source of the trauma, both physically, by walking out of the theatre, and physiologically, by passing out. Sierz's observation that these plays 'have an unusual power to trouble the audience emotionally' (2001:p.2) is somewhat of an understatement.

Kane's second play, *Cleansed* was deemed more extreme than her first play (Armistead, 1998), and also riled its audience and critics to write scathing, anecdotal reviews in order to show the psychological turmoil *Cleansed* creates. The reviews focus upon the effect that the play had on them, showing readers of reviews how they felt about watching an explicit performance. James MacDonald, the director of both *Blasted* and *Cleansed* suggests that *Cleansed* has the ability to be worse than *Blasted*. He says 'if you were to stage *Cleansed* realistically you would burst a blood vessel [as] it would become unwatchable' (Quoted in Christopher, 1998). This may suggest that, as shown by the maps, *Cleansed*, could be even more shocking than *Blasted* because of its preference to show quantitatively more material.

When *Cleansed* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 1998, the *Evening Standard's* theatre critic, Nicholas de Jongh, remarked 'watching... *Cleansed* was one of the most repellent experiences of my theatre going life. I averted my eyes. I longed to do the indecent thing and leave' (1998). In the Show Report of *Cleansed* on the 7th May 1998, the stage



manager, Jon Howard, wrote ‘not such a warm audience tonight. One man shouted: ‘Thank God!’ in response to Mr Marquez’s [Graham] line ‘it’s over’ in scene 18, and then booed and shouted ...during the curtain call (only one curtain call tonight)’(Howard, 1998). This shows that *Cleansed*, like *Blasted*, had the innate capacity to trouble its audience to the point of outrage. The play affected the audience enough to make an audience member physically act upon their emotions.

This media frenzy caused by the critic, deemed both *Blasted* and *Cleansed* as something which had not been seen before in theatre due to its visceral extremity. This exaggerated discourse may have helped to create the in-er-face theatre narrative which attempts to make sense of the undefined texts of the 1990s. By using media discourse, Sierz was able to create a sensibility predicated upon audience reaction to the play. Therefore, rather than being a ‘movement’ or ‘sensibility’ in-er-face theatre simply becomes a branding exercise; one that seems ill informed and heavily influenced by the work of Sarah Kane and the subsequent media frenzy which followed her work. It appears that the media storm which created the academic space for in-er-face theatre, does not reflect the whole sensibility and rather applies to Sarah Kane. The other so-called in-er-face theatre plays do not seem to create the notoriety which disturbed audiences.

For example, the other in-er-face theatre plays did not have such an abhorred reaction from the reviewers who projected *Blasted* and *Cleansed* into the media. Rather the reviewers noted their ability to disturb. *Penetrator* is described as ‘a hard play to sit through with humour that ruptures like a blister’ (Szalwinska, 2002). Similarly, *Shopping and Fucking* is described as: ‘burst[ing] onto the London stage like an angry boil’ (Lawrence, 2016). Moreover, *Shopping and Fucking* shows a world which is rife with gratuitous violence (Wolf, 1996). The rhetoric, about both plays, suggests rather than being overwhelmed by shock, the audience notice its grotesque unpleasantness. Although the experience is irksome, it was not felt to be

overwhelming or unnerving like the work of Sarah Kane. Rather than the hyperbolic reaction to *Blasted* and *Cleansed* the other main in-yer-face theatre texts do not affect the audience in the same way. The reviews acknowledge their ability to shock the audience by the use of violence, but the reviews do not have the same horrified tone which is definitely apparent within the reviews of *Blasted* and *Cleansed*.

Rather than being shocked by the play *Shopping and Fucking* itself, Sierz suggests that the audience was shocked by the title of the play by asserting that ‘that word is too shocking to be seen in the public realm’ leading to some advertisements using asterisks instead of the profanity (2016). However, the initial reviews did not focus upon anecdotal responses of the audience and rather mention the political message as mentioned by Rebellato, a ‘witty and shocking look at a corrosive disposable world and a numb, desperate generation... the play shows the lives of disconnected youth reduced to transactions by a dysfunctional consumerist society.’ (n.d). Therefore, the play seems to lack the visceral extremity required to shock its audience into condemnation. It is interesting to note that the plays identified as less extreme in Chapter 1 seem to have fewer problems in getting critics to make the connection between their use of shock tactics and their political point than the more extreme plays of Sarah Kane.

This suggests that Sierz may have been wrong to use the media discourse to inform his decisions about creating the in-yer-face theatre narrative. The hysteria which presented itself in the high-profile media condemnation of both *Blasted* and *Cleansed*, informed much of Sierz’s decision making when creating the in-yer-face sensibility and instead does not seem to apply to other texts which he has included in his criticism.

It appears that this hysteria, however, did not last forever. The critics’ abhorrence for Sarah Kane’s work was not a prolonged response but rather an initial reaction from a few of the audience members who, because they were established critics, had the capacity to influence a

theatre-goer's, and eventually society's, perspective. And it is this phenomenon which would have influenced Sierz's criticism which was later published in 2001. It shows the importance of Sarah Kane to the in-yer-face sensibility and I will argue that Sierz uses in-yer-face theatre as a way to contextualise the outrageous work of Sarah Kane.

## Desensitisation?

In *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama Today*, Sierz starts with the epigraph from Howard Barker's *Scenes from an Execution*: 'It offends today, but we look harder and we know, that it will not offend tomorrow.' This suggests that although these plays did initially have the capacity to shock their audiences, Sierz believes that these plays will not retain their shock value. Sierz later suggests that the sensibility was born in 1995 -with the premier of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* - and subsequently died in 1999 (Sierz, 2016). Even in the two years between 1999 and 2001, Sierz claims, in-yer-face theatre lost 'much of its intensity' (2016).

This proposed change in reviews could be explained by the psychological process of desensitisation. 'In general terms, desensiti[s]ation refers to the gradual reduction in responsiveness to an arousal-eliciting stimulus as a function of repeated exposure' (Krahé et al, 2011:p.631). Responsiveness to violence is often debated along with the rise in mass media as it allows society to have constant access to violent material through news channels, television, the internet and videogames. It could be suggested that this may lead to prolific, systematic desensitisation. Excessive and continued exposure to violence also may have implications within real life, as a desensitised person will feel less sympathy for a victim of violence (Krahé, 2011:p. 631). Therefore, desensitisation can have a radiating effect upon a person's everyday life and their response to violent or distressing images.

Eyres, writing for the *Spectator*, states: 'sensationalism is predicated on insensitivity. The idea is that dulled audience response must be jerked into life by whatever violent means are

necessary. In fact, sensation merely entrenches the insensitivity it is supposed to challenge' (1998). Therefore, as suggested by Sierz, by writing and producing their plays, the in-yer-face theatre writers are adding to the problem of desensitisation. Showing their audiences the violence which occurs outside the theatre helps to normalise the violence. Therefore, like Sierz, Eyres would expect audiences to become desensitised over time.

It may appear that Sierz is correct to label the texts as less potent after their premiers. This is best exemplified with the progression of reviews about Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. At the time, the play was fiercely attacked by critics, who viewed it as an immature attempt to shock the audience (Graham, 1995). What once made reviewers list the shocking material that they see onstage, can later be appreciated for more than just its shock tactics. This change is best exemplified within the Royal Court's description of the play:

Sarah Kane's first full-length play, *Blasted*, caused a media storm, making front-page headlines and outraging audiences with its depiction of rape, torture and violence in civil war. At the time, it was fiercely attacked by critics, who viewed it as an immature attempt to shock the audience. However, when the Royal Court revived the play in 2001, it was drastically reassessed and has since been praised as a powerful statement about the parallel between domestic and war-related violence (Royal Court Theatre, n.d).

This shows a distinctive change within the reviews of *Blasted* only six years after it first premiered. Critics, who first loathed the play, could now appreciate what Kane was trying to achieve with the shocking play, the play becomes a political statement. In a sense, all theatre is political: it exposes problems, explores issues, advocates for change, experiments with power and participates in social debates in both direct and metaphorical ways (Kritzer, 2008:p.1). This may be a reason why Kane has chosen to be so extreme within her plays which somehow masked the political message. For example, Charles Spencer who famously hated both *Blasted* and *Cleansed* wrote: 'seeing the play six years on, there is no doubt that it is an impressive, and serious, piece of work. I still don't like it but I now admire it.' He then

ends the review by apologising to Sarah Kane's ghost for getting her, and her plays, so wrong (2001). This shows a dramatic change in opinion from Spencer about *Blasted*. It seems when an audience member is less concerned about her shock tactics, Spencer could appreciate other aspects of the performance.

However, a clear rebuttal of this very notion is when Sarah Kane's *Cleansed* was revived at no less a venue than the National Theatre. Even Sierz, who had known the play well for almost eighteen years, admitted that he spent most of the vile torture scenes with his eyes shut (Sierz, 2016). The auditorium (the Dorfman) has a capacity of just over three hundred. During the first six shows, forty people are said to have walked out, and five fainted, needing medical attention. One review documents a man fainting 30 minutes into the performance. In response, a member of the production team wryly commented: 'if the audience faints, the play is doing its job' (Razaq, 2016). The ensuing news coverage ensured that many performances sold out, but theatre critic Matt Trueman argued the media discourse had 'turn[ed] the play into a gauntlet to be run by audiences – a kind of London Dungeon endurance test. Can you handle the horrors? Can you remain conscious?' (2016) That the play should not only have this physiological effect, but retain it for twenty years, is something quite remarkable and something quite unprecedented within the theatre.

## Conclusion

This suggests that Sierz was ultimately wrong about marketing in-yer-face theatre as a fully-fledged movement or aesthetic - although he does state that it only presents itself as thus- on two main accounts. Firstly, it appears that in-yer-face theatre was born from a media discourse which was innately hysterical and secondly, Sierz has used in-yer-face theatre as a way to contextualise the unique genius of Sarah Kane. To further elaborate on this, the hysteria and disdain created by *Blasted* sparked interest in the theatrical community. Each

critic claimed outrage and added to the moral panic which Kane caused; this continued with her second full length play *Cleansed*. At their premiers it appears that reviewers and audiences were outraged and ultimately incapacitated by the effect of the plays. It appears Sierz may have capitalised upon this and used the media discourse in order to construct a retrospective narrative about what was happening in theatres in the mid-late 1990s. The rhetoric used in defining in-yer-face theatre is astoundingly similar to the discourse which is evident in the media which followed Sarah Kane's *Blasted*. However, it also appears that Sierz may have been premature in exploiting the moral panic which first surrounded Sarah Kane. It appears that this moral hysteria eventually dispersed and in turn changed the narrative surrounding Sarah Kane from being a playwright who only wished to shock to being a unique genius who can only be appreciated after you have accepted her use of shock and gratuitous violence. Moreover, it appears that Sierz may have taken other plays which were premiering around the same time as *Blasted* and *Cleansed* in order to try and make sense of Sarah Kane's extremity.

Twenty years on, it appears that the canonisation process of Sarah Kane is well underway: *Cleansed* plays at the National Theatre; 4:48 Psychosis is studied at A-level and has been made into an opera (Christiansen,2016); there is a steady stream of scholarly books, articles, and PhD theses about her work. However, none of the other playwrights Sierz labels as in-yer-face has received anything like this level of canonisation. Those that have found mainstream success (Jez Butterworth, Martin McDonagh) have done so with plays less visceral than their early work. How could we account for this situation? Perhaps because, as this chapter has argued, Sierz developed the critical discourse of in-yer-face theatre from the reception and reviews of Kane's plays first and foremost, when in fact, as chapter 1 argued, they are quantitatively different and, as chapter 2 argued, qualitatively different from the plays of her so-called in-yer-face contemporaries.

## Conclusion

### Towards a Critique and a Summation

Shortly after publishing *In-yer-face theatre: British Drama today* (2001), Aleks Sierz wrote a journal article entitled: *Still in-yer-face theatre: Towards a critique and a summation* (2002).

In this article Sierz questioned his original criticism and asked a series of seven questions which, Sierz believes, would serve as the beginnings of a thorough criticism of in-yer-face theatre (2002:p.22). However, these questions remain largely unanswered, to this day.

Though his coinage is often used in textbooks and lectures aimed at undergraduates, it has not been developed and extended by researchers to anything like the extent of other coinages like Theatre of Cruelty, Theatre of the Absurd, Postdramatic theatre, and so on.

This thesis has sought to address in-yer-face theatre by delving into Sierz's original formulations of the term. It has attempted to challenge Sierz's ideas about in-yer-face theatre by asking whether the texts designated by this neologism are similar enough to be classified as having the same aesthetic. Ultimately, this thesis has concluded that 'in-yer-face theatre' is not an adequate or fully coherent name as the vast majority of the plays included in the coinage do not embrace the same aesthetic and therefore, should not be labelled as such.

This thesis has argued, from the outset, that Sierz's ideas about in-yer-face theatre are somewhat confused. A clear problem for in-yer-face theatre is Sierz denies the fact that this grouping is a movement and yet presents his criticism as if it were. Certainly, he does not clarify what in-yer-face theatre was if *not* a movement. Rather than being specific, Sierz uses metaphors and ambiguous nomenclature in order to attempt to elucidate theatre of the 1990s. The introduction highlighted the curious definition of in-yer-face theatre as being two pronged; simultaneously focusing on the figure of the writer and yet making bigger claims about the effect these plays have on their audiences. This immediately shows that there is not a definitive definition of in-yer-face theatre and rather, as my findings have acknowledged, the coinage is an attempt to group together a few controversial texts of the 1990s.



This thesis has attempted to examine in-yer-face theatre through Sierz's perspective by analysing the play as a text and the play as a performance in order to account for Sierz's mixed definition. In order to do this, this thesis has adopted multiple and ranging methodologies- distant reading, close reading and secondary reading- in order to investigate whether his ideas were a representative narrative of theatre of the 1990s. The in-yer-face "sensibility" has been shown to be problematised and polarised; suggesting, maybe, that Sierz was incorrect in labelling the group of texts under one, unified denomination.

The first problem with in-yer-face theatre resides within Sierz's discourse which describes the sensibility. In the first chapter, it was concluded that the tropes that are used to categorise in-yer-face theatre were often too vague or sometimes too specific and therefore only apply to the more extreme end of the sensibility i.e Sarah Kane. Therefore, plays which include similar scenarios to *Blasted*, such as *Penetrator* which has a very similar narrative structure, would be assimilated and therefore included within the sensibility. As chapter 2 demonstrated, there was no unified modus operandi of in-yer-face theatre even within how each trope operated within each play. This suggests that Sierz has constructed in-yer-face theatre and made it appear more cohesive than it actually is. It can hence be argued that Sierz has misrepresented some of the included plays and ignored the uniqueness and individual politics of each playwright and their play.

The term in-yer-face theatre does not seem to be applicable to much of the sensibility as it suggests that the action is literally in the face of the audience. Although this may have been a more apt name when these plays premiered, the phenomenon which changed these plays from hot to cold versions of in-yer-face theatre, as shown in the diagrams of chapter 1, ensured that this name has more recently become outdated. The move to larger theatres has meant that the audience experience is not unified, as more people are further away from the action.

Moreover, with a somewhat dulled audience experience these plays may not have the same

impact upon their audience in order to induce change, and therefore, it is difficult to compare the productions of today with those that premiered in the mid-late 1990s because of the vast unforeseen changes in the sensibility between then and now. Therefore, the simplest definition of in-yer-face theatre is nulled when these plays move into a larger auditorium. However, what may be a more useful label would be in-yer-ear theatre because, as shown by the maps in chapter 1 and the close readings in chapter 2, most of these texts evoke indirect seeing and therefore, although the majority of these plays do not show action directly, they can still induce an intense experience. It is important to note, though, that this term does not accurately describe the work of the most famous of the in-yer-face playwrights, Sarah Kane, because her plays do not deploy in-yer-ear indirect seeing.

Related to this, a strange paradox in Sierz's criticism is he tends to focus upon the effect that these plays have on their audience and yet Sierz insists that in-yer-face theatre is not simply about shock tactics (2002:p.19). The diagrams in chapter 1 demonstrated that *Cleansed*, in particular, has retained the ability to shock its audience by causing an unusually high number of walk outs even in what Sierz would call a cold version of in-yer-face theatre. However, as Chapter 3 suggests, the other keystone writers of in-yer-face theatre, Anthony Neilson and Mark Ravenhill with their plays *Penetrator* and *Shopping and Fucking*, did not seem to shock their initial audiences to anything like the extent of Sarah Kane, nor did they retain their shock value in subsequent revivals. A possible reason for this is demonstrated in chapter 2, as these plays tend to narrate action, which although it might evoke indirect seeing, is not as extreme as showing the violence.

The qualitative shock value, however, has been largely removed from this investigation as that is beyond the scope of this thesis. This thesis has corroborated Sierz's claim that these plays can trouble their audiences, but why particular passages of particular plays shock particular individuals may be too subjective to account for. However, this is not to discount

the importance of shock to this thesis because chapter 3 suggests that Sierz, like many reviewers at the premier of *Blasted* and *Cleansed*, was in fact deeply influenced by the shock. Perhaps, this thesis has suggested, in-*yer-face* theatre has misrepresented plays because of the construction of the in-*yer-face* narrative born out of media hysteria- or shock- as a direct result of the uniqueness of Sarah Kane.

An overarching conclusion throughout each chapter of this thesis is the fact that there is something different about the work of Sarah Kane. It appears that she is somewhat of a theatrical anomaly because of her extremity and therefore, Sarah Kane is an extremely dominant force in the in-*yer-face* theatre aesthetic. This is best exemplified by the maps in chapter 1, which diagrammatically demonstrated the unique footprint of her plays. Kane's extremity was consistently reinforced throughout chapter 1 in each section of the chapter. Kane appears to be the only playwright included in in-*yer-face* theatre to really embrace the in-*yer-face* aesthetic due to her preference of live action over narrated action. In each section of this thesis it was concluded that Sarah Kane's plays are quantifiably different: chapter 2 demonstrated that not only did Kane's plays tend to use stage directions in order to direct the production team to how to show the violence, but also had a certain casual tone which intensified the callousness and therefore, shock of the violence. It appears, therefore, that Sarah Kane would be the best example of an in-*yer-face* theatre text, however I argue that Kane is more important to the sensibility because she is, as it were, the prototypical version. Chapter 3 proposed the tropes that Sierz use to classify in-*yer-face* theatre are extremely similar to lists that dominated the early reviews of both *Blasted* and *Cleansed*. Therefore, in-*yer-face* theatre may have been constructed as a way to contextualise the uniqueness of the keystone writer, Sarah Kane.

A key problem for this thesis and any further investigations into in-*yer-face* theatre is the amount of scholarship about the array of plays included in the sensibility. None of the plays,

apart from that of Sarah Kane, have been canonised by scholars and therefore scholarly research is fairly elusive. Though the seven questions Sierz posed in 2002 gave critics and academics plenty of cues and prompts, rigorous follow-up analysis has not been forthcoming. Therefore, it is harder to challenge Sierz's assessment of the texts because there is no alternative framework in which to situate the texts. Hence, a completely new discourse is needed in order to make sense of the new writing of the 1990s. The in-yer-face theatre frame seemingly appropriated the majority of the plays which it included and since the term has remained largely unchallenged it remains the accepted account of what was happening.

An MA thesis is not a big enough canvas to formulate such an alternative discourse, and no claims to have done so are made herein. I hope, though, to have shown above all that bringing new methodologies like distant reading to bear on the subject, alongside traditional methodologies of textual analysis like close reading and a historically or archivally grounded second reading, might be a better, more rounded, more systematic way of setting out an alternative discourse than Sierz's narrow focus on the playwright at the cost of the plays.

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## Appendix

In order to defuse some of the subjectivity to a study such as this one, or at least to document it, referenced examples are provided to show the rationale behind the identification of tropes in each play while compiling the quantitative data. Some examples are direct quotations from the play in order to show where a trope was used. Alternatively, the example has been paraphrased if its length is unwieldy. In both types of examples, page numbers for the trope in the play have been used in order to make the findings verifiable. In the interests of space, only one example of ‘use of filthy language’ is shown to demonstrate that this trope is used in each play.

## **Penetrator, Anthony Nielson: Referenced Examples.**

### **Use of Shock Tactics**

- ‘A tension goes out of him as he ejaculates.’ (62)
- ‘(Max is nowhere to be seen, but on the back of the settee, two ragged soft toys are simulating copulation) Max: Shoot you full you puppet fuck. Oooh. Oooh yeah. Tighten that puppet butt. That soft-toy butt.’ Smiling evilly, [Max] makes threats to unzip his flies and sodomise one of the teddies) (73-74)

### **Use of Filthy Language**

- ‘Tadge: Cock cunt cunts cocks cock cock cunt cocks cunts cocks’ (116)

### **Talk about Unmentionable Subjects**

- Voiceover: I got into the car. My cock was like a truncheon in my jeans. I saw her looking at it, licking her sluttish red lips... and then to my amazement, she took off her T-shirt. Her nipples were like big stiff strawberries. ‘You like them?’ she asks, pulling on them hornily until she came... She hitched up her tiny skirt to reveal her gash, spreading the lips of her fuck hole like some filthy tart, a flood of thick cunt juice cascading down her long legs. She sobbed with pleasure.’ (61)
- ‘Max: Got stoned, got pissed, took some E, ate a kebab, puked up a kebab, I presume it was the same one. (sighs), went to the Archers, got dragged along to Sub Sonic where I became as one with a faceless mass of space cadets dancing to a three-hour-long song which sounded like various international dialing tones and woke up at 7 this morning in Mikey’s toilet in a puddle of piss with speed cramps.’ (67)
- ‘Tadge: There was a guy in my thingmy, guess what he did?.. He chored some liver from the kitchens, raw liver and he fucked it into his thermos and shagged that and he was in the bunk



by me and every night he was like that with his flask and he didn't change the liver for three months, like, disease that made his cock drip pus.' (82)

- 'Tadge: They stick things up you. Up your arse... All sorts of things. I found out about them and they kept me in this... black room. They drugged me. I never saw their faces. They'd bring me round every now and then so they could do more things to me. It must have been weeks. I don't know how long. Maybe months.' (85)
- 'Tadge: I shagged two girls at once... I did. In west Germany on the base. Two of them, about thirteen years old each.' (89)
- 'Tadge: You don't know what it was like. In the dark all shrivelled up. Just my hatred keeping me alive. Their hands all over me. And you never came for me. Their dirty cocks in my mouth, up my arse. I know how to kill a man. I'm not afraid. I've seen guys get their ears cut off. I've seen lassies with their cunt shot out. I'm not scared of blood on my hands, hot blood pouring on my hands.' (109)

### **Experience Unpleasant Emotions**

- 'Alan: He's freaking me out a bit, Max. I'm a bit stoned he is freaking me out.' (101)
- 'Tadge: Took it off your kind so I could penetrate the penetrator. Funny, eh? Penetrate the penetrator. Make you cry like I cried in the black room. Make you beg like I begged you. Let you feel steel in your arse.' (107)

### **Become Suddenly Violent**

- '(He quickly spins round jabbing [the pole] in Alan's eye...Another quick movement and he grabs Alan by the hair. Alan yelps. Max stops laughing. He jerks Alans head back. He croaks. Tadge mimes striking hid throat with the pole. Each blow comes dangerously close.)' (87)
- '(Lightening fast Tadge reappears with the knife in his hand, grinning. Both of them get a fright... He sees the teddies and grabs one of them, holding the knife at the throat.' (104-105)
- 'Tadge points the knife square at Alan's chest. Alan stops frozen... [Tadge] backs Alan onto the settee. Alan sits with a thump. Tadge pins him down, holding a knife to his throat.

## **Blasted, Sarah Kane: Referenced Examples**

### **Use of Shock Tactics**

- Racism: 'tip that wog' (p.4)
- Fainting (p.9)
- 'Last year. When I came round, surgeon brought in this lump of rotting pork. My lung' (p.11)
- 'He masturbates until he comes with some genuine pain' (p.14)
- 'As soon as Cate hears the word she bites his penis as hard as she can' (p.31)

- ‘There is a blinding light, then a huge explosion...the hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb’ (p.39)
- Baby dies (57)

### **Filthy Language**

- ‘Cunt’ (25)

### **Talk about Unmentionable Subjects**

- ‘Ian: A serial killer slaughtered British tourist Samantha Scrace in a sick murder ritual comma, police revealed yesterday point new par. The bubbly nineteen-year-old from Leeds was among seven victims found buried in identical triangular tombs in an isolated New Zealand forest point new par. Each had been stabbed more than twenty times and placed face down comma, hands bound behind their back point new par. Caps up, ashes at the site showed the maniac had stayed to cook a meal, caps down point new par. Samantha comma, a beautiful redhead with dreams of being a model comma, was on the trip of a lifetime after finishing her A levels year... (12)
- ‘Ian: Hitler was wrong about the Jews who have they hurt the queers he should have gone for scum them and the wogs and fucking football fans send a bomber over Elland Road finish them off’ (p.19)
- ‘Soldier: Went to a house just outside town. All gone. Apart from a small boy hiding in the corner. One of the others took him outside. Lay him on the ground and shot him through the legs. Heard crying in the basement. Went down. Three men and four women. Called the others. They held the men whilst I fucked the women. Youngest was twelve. Didn’t cry, just lay there. Turned her over and- Then she cried. Made her lick me clean. Closed my eyes and thought of- Shot her father in the mouth. Brothers shouted. Hung them from the ceiling by their testicles’ (p.43)
- Soldier: ‘Col, they bugged her. Cut her throat. Hacked her ears and nose off, nailed them to the front door.’ (p.47)
- ‘Ian: There’s no food.  
Cate: Can get some off a soldier.  
Ian: how? Cate: (doesn’t answer)  
Ian: don’t do that’  
‘Cate enters... There is blood seeping from between her legs’ (58-60)

### **Nudity**

- ‘looks down at his clothes. Then gets up, takes them all off and stands in front of her, naked’ (p.7)

### **Characters Humiliate Each Other**

- ‘Cate: stares [at Ian’s naked body]. Then bursts out laughing.’ (p.8)

### **Experience Unpleasant Emotions**

- Cate has episodes which causes her to faint when she becomes overwhelmed (p.9)
- ‘The soldier lies close to Ian, the revolver in his hand. He has blown his own brain out’ (p.50)
- Ian: ‘Be dead soon anyway, Cate. And it hurts. Help me to- Finish it.’ (p.53) Followed by Ian’s failed attempted suicide (p.56)

### **Become Suddenly Violent**

- ‘then [Cates] goes for him, slapping him around the head hard and fast. He wrestles her onto the bed, her still kicking punching biting. She takes the gun from his holster and points it at his groin’ (p.26)

### **Rape**

- ‘The soldier turns Ian over it one hand. He holds the revolver to Ian’s head with the other. He pulls own Ian’s trousers, undoes his own and rapes him- eyes closed and smelling Ian’s hair... When the soldier has finished, he pulls up his trousers and pushes the revolver up Ian’s anus’ (p.49)

### **Vomit**

- ‘Cate begins to cough and wretch. She puts her fingers down her throat and produces hair.’ (p.33)

### **Child Abuse**

- Not catering for a new born baby’s needs (57)

### **Cannibalism**

- ‘Ian tears the cross out of the ground, rips up the floor and lifts the baby’s body out. He eats the baby.’ (60)

### **Torture**

- ‘The soldier grips Ian’s head in his hands. He puts his mouth over one of Ian’s eyes, sucks it out, bites it off and eats it. He does the same with the other eye’ (50)

## **Mojo, Jez Butterworth: Referenced Examples.**

### **Use of Shock Tactics**

- '(Skinny is tied with his hands around the back of a jukebox, his pants round his ankles. Baby, naked from the waist up, wild, is wielding an old navy cutlass and screaming at Skinny that he is going to die)' (27)
- 'Mickey: what's up? Ezra's dead. (33) He is fucking cut in half. He is in two bins.' (36)
- '(Hanging upside down in the middle of the room, gagged, is a young man, wearing silver trousers and a pink shirt)' (92)
- (Baby walks across the room with the Derringer, puts its into Skinny's head and fires once)' (106)

### **Use of Filthy Language**

- 'Mickey: Fuck all this. You stupid cunt. We're finished' (33)

### **Talk about Unmentionable Subjects**

- 'Potts: My piss is black. Sweets: It's the white ones. Don't eat no more of the white ones.' (11)
- 'Sweets: You know Beryl? She goes to me tonight, she goes, 'when Silver Johnny sings the song my pussyhair stands up... Potts: These girls. They shit when he sings.' (13)
- 'Mickey: what's up? Ezra's dead. (33)
- 'Potts: Had a look. You'll only have a bad dream now. I remember when I was four I saw this dog get ripped up by these pikeys. They had it tied up on a swing and they had these pinking shears and a rake. Carried that little doggie round in my head for weeks' (77)
- Sweets: They've woken him up driven up the Hyde, staked the fucker out and... and drove a lawnmower over him. Over his face. Drove a lawnmower over his face.' (79)

### **Experience Unpleasant Emotions**

- '(Mickey falls to his knees next to Skinny's body.) Mickey: No. No. No! No!' (108)

### **Become Suddenly Violent**

- '(Baby walks across the room with the Derringer, puts its into Skinny's head and fires once)' (106)
- '(Potts stands above them. He kicks Mickey in the stomach.)' (109)

## **Shopping and Fucking, Mark Ravenhill: Referenced Example.**

### **Use of Shock Tactics**

- '(Lulu produces three hundred E in a clear plastic bag.) Robbie: You're gonna sell them? Lulu: We're going to sell them.' (16)
- 'Mark starts to lick Gary's arse... Mark pulls away. There's blood around his mouth' (26)

### **Use of Filthy Language**

- 'Robbie: Cunt cunt cunt... I hate the cunt' (21)

### **Talk about Unmentionable Subjects**

- 'Mark: No. I'm off the scag. Ten days without the scag. (4)
- 'Student girl behind the counter. Wino is raising his voice to student. There's a couple of us in there... And Wino's shouting: You've given me twenty. I asked for a packet of ten and you've given me twenty. And I didn't see anything. Like the blade or anything. But I suppose he must of hit an artery. Because there was blood everywhere... And he's just stabbing away.' (29)
- 'Gary: because- look- this bit. It doesn't end like this. He's always got something. He gets me in the room, blindfolds me. But he doesn't fuck me. Well not him, not his dick. It's the knife. He fucks me- yeah- but with a knife... Listen, right. When someone's paying, someone wants something and they're paying, then you do it. Nothing right. Nothing wrong. It's a deal. So then you do it.' (84-85)

### **Nudity**

- 'Gary pulls down his trousers and underpants' (26)

### **Experience Unpleasant Emotions**

- 'Gary's tears are close to hysteria' (69)

### **Become Suddenly Violent**

- 'Lulu: fucking fucker asshole. Fuck. Pillowbiter. (hit). Shitstabber (hit)' (39)
- - 'Brian punches Robbie. He slumps to the floor.' (46)
- Robbie leaps on Gary and starts to strangle him... Mark attacks Robbie, who is attacking Gary' (64)

### **Rape**

- 'Robbie unzips his fly. Works spit onto his penis. He penetrates Gary. He starts to fuck him... Robbie pulls away. Mark goes through the same routine- spitting and penetrating Gary. He fucks him viciously' (83)

### **Vomit**

- 'Mark vomits' (3)

### **Child Abuse**

- 'Gary: I'm fourteen.'

## **Cleansed, Sarah Kane. Referenced Examples.**

### **Use of Shock Tactics**

- 'Tinker is heating smack on a silver spoon' (p.107)
- 'Carl sticks out his tongue. Tinker produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl's tongue. Carl waves his arms, his mouth open, full of blood. No sound emerging' (p.118)
- '[Tinker] takes Carl by the arms and cuts off his hands...the rat begins to eat Carls right hand' (129-130)
- 'Then a long stream of automatic gunfire...The gunfire goes on and on. The wall is pitted with bullet marks and as the gunfire continues huge chunks of plaster and brick is blown from the wall' (133)
- 'an electric current is switched on. Grace's body is thrown into rigid shock as bits of her brain are burnt out' (135).
- '[Tinker] forces Carl to the ground and cuts off his feet' (136)
- 'Grace lies unconscious on a bed. She is naked apart from a tight straggling around her groin and her chest. And blood where her breasts used to be. Carl is unconscious next to her. He is naked apart from a bloodied bandage strapped around his groin.' (145)
- 'He sucks her right breast. She undoes his trousers and touches his penis. They take off the rest of their clothes, watching each other... They begin to make love, slowly at first, then hard, fast urgent, finding each other's rhythm is the same as their own. They come together.' (120)
- Suicide of Robin (p.144)
- Onstage consensual sex (148)
- Incest (120)

### **Use of Filthy Language**

- 'Tinker: you fuck her? Fuck her till her nose bleed? I may be a cunt but im not a twat' (139)

### Talk about Unmentionable Subjects

- ‘Voices: Dead, slag  
She was having it off with her brother  
Weren’t he a bender?  
Fucking user  
All cracked up  
Shit no  
Shit yes  
Crack crack crack’ (131)

### Nudity

- ‘Grace: (to Robin) Take off your clothes... (Takes off clothes down to his underpants) Grace: All of them... (Robin removes his underpants and stands shivering with his hands over his genitals. Grace undresses completely)’ (113)
- ‘Grace lies unconscious on a bed. She is naked apart from a tight straggling around her groin and her chest. And blood where her breasts used to be. Carl is unconscious next to her. He is naked apart from a bloodied bandage strapped around his groin.’ (145)

### Characters Humiliate Each Other

- ‘Robin eats the chocolate, choking on his tears. When he has eaten it, Tinker tosses him another. Robin eats it, Tinker throws him another x24’ (139-140)
- Tinker: Fuck is that? Robin: Flower. Tinker: (sets light to the paper and burns the whole thing)’ (128-129)

### Experience Unpleasant Emotions

- Graham: I want out.’ (107)
- ‘Robin watches- at first innocently eager, then bemused, then distressed. She dances for sixty seconds. The flap closes. Robin sits and cries his heart out.’ (134)
- ‘Robin takes off his tights and makes a noose... He attaches the noose to the ceiling and puts his head through... [Graham] then wraps his arm around Robin’s legs and pulls. Robin dies.’ (144)
- Carl is being heavily beaten by an unseen group of men. We hear the sound of the blows and Carls body reacts as if he has received the blow’ (116)
- ‘[Tinker] pulls Rod away from Carl. Tinker: You or him Rod, what’s it to be? Rod: Me, not Carl, me. Tinker: (cuts Rod’s throat) Carl: (Struggles to get to Rod. He is held) Rod: It can’t be this (he dies) Tinker: Burn him.’ (142)

**Become Suddenly Violent**

- ‘She lashes out- he handcuffs both arms to the bed rails’ (113)

**Rape**

- ‘Carl's trousers are pulled down and a pole pushed a few inches up his anus’ (117)

**Child Abuse**

- Robin in the original script is sixteen.

**Drug Injection**

- Tinker: injects into the corner of Graham’s eye- ‘in original Graham injects himself (108)

**Torture**

- ‘Carl sticks out his tongue. Tinker produces a large pair of scissors and cuts off Carl’s tongue. Carl waves his arms, his mouth open, full of blood. No sound emerging’ (118)
- Cutting off of Carl’s hands and feet (129-130)

**Mercury Fur, Philip Ridley: Referenced Examples.****Use of Shock Tactics**

- ‘Elliot: Can you see the dead dog? Darren:... Yeah. Elliot: Step over the dead dog. Turn left.’ (9)
- Elliot: Show me, you nigger, paki, wog, spic, chinkie, muslim, Christian cunt!’ (13)
- ‘Spinx: Listen! She shit herself last time I left her alone for too long! You hear that? There was crap coming down her legs. I had to bath her. Dig shit from her crack. You wanna do that?’ (79)
- ‘Party guest: I’m going to stick that meat hook in him and I’m going to twist it and- You won’t film my face will you... Cos’ I don’t want to wear a mask or anything. Told you that. Nothing getting in the way of me seeing and smelling and feeling.’ (102)
- ‘(Bang! Darren has shot the party guest) Party guest: This... this ain’t suppose to fucking... (collapses, dead)’ (122)

**Use of Filthy Language**

- ‘Darren: Shit! Fuck!’ (10)

**Talk about Unmentionable Subjects**



- ‘Naz: That’s where I saw monkeys being shot. Live monkeys... These blokes. Didn’t know ‘em... They were all shooting into this cage and- yeah! The monkeys were in a cage. The monkeys were all screaming and jumping about and stuff. They hid up in the trees.’ (31)
- ‘Naz: Yeah! My mum grabs me by the hair. Mum pulls Stace by the hand. We try to get through the back of the supermarket. But some of the gang are already there... The next thing I know the gang is all round us. They’re laughing... Lots of blades go swish. Sort of helicopter feeling. Stuff gets in my eyes. Blood. Look up and see one of the gang holding mums head... Can hear Stace crying but can’t see her. The crying is real close. It seems to be coming from this bag of smashed fruit. It’s all red inside and very juicy. It’s got an eye. It’s Stace! The gang has stomped on her head. One of her arms is gone. The gang drag her away and pull off her knickers. She’s pissing herself... One of them gets his cock out and says he’ll plug the leak. He sticks his cock in her. One of the others fucks what’s left of her mouth... I think Stace must be dead now. She ain’t moving. I get right to the back of the shelf. I stay there for ages.’ (38-39)
- Elliot: The windows light up! A car’s on fire! The streets full of people. They’re all holding weapons. Sticks metal bars, guns knives... The crowd is in the hospital... Doors smashing open and glass breaking on the floor below. People screaming. Rush to the fire escape. I remember looking at this old dear in bed. She’s had a stroke. Paralysed. Nothing on her could move and yet- fuck me, her eyes... Im heading for Brick Lane. What’s that? A horse. No. It’s a zebra. How’s that get here. Kids are chasing it. Corner it. Stab it with knives. Broken bottles. Someone throws petrol. Someone strikes a match. The zebra bursts into flames.’ (58)
- ‘Elliot: There’s a black butterfly... Lola: What does it do? Elliot: Suicide. You take it and... every suicidal thought you’ve ever had... It finds them. Latches on to one and... it happens. Lola: You... kill yourself? Elliot: Oh, you don’t have to do a thing. The butterfly does it for you. Very convenient, eh? You just lay back and- veins open without blades. Necks break without rope. Brains splatter without a single bullet being fired and people are taking them, Lol... Another girl was found with her neck broken. And a boy- he was only ten- Lol, his guts were split open and like he’d- Lola: Alright, alright enough. Elliot: It gets worse. They’re getting together to do it now. Suicide parties. Twenty were found in a club a few days ago. The place was like an abattoir, so they say.’ (69)

### **Nudity**

- ‘(Naz removes his trainers, Jacket and Jeans.)’ (118)

### **Characters Humiliate Each Other**

- ‘Elliot: You’ve got to have fucking brains to understand an insult like that! Darren: Don’t insult me, El. Elliot: Know what? I should be a one-man band. Everyone thinks so. Oh, they

don't say anything 'cos you're my brother. But I know what they're thinking. Elliot could be big. Elliot could be a star. A right supernova if he didn't have that butterfly-addled brother hanging round his fucking ankles like a million miles of machine-gunned afterbirth.' (16)

#### Experience Unpleasant Emotions

- '(Lola turns away, tearful.) Elliot: Lola... I'm sorry. Lola: No! Don't touch me! You think you can just slip a couple of fingers in and everything will be alright!' (57)
- '(Duchess screams) Our boys! He wants to kill our boys!... My husband is hitting them with the hammer. He is hitting the eldest on the leg. It's all smashed. And the little one- the little ones been hit on the head! No! No! So much blood!... Burning! I can smell burning! Screaming! He's... he's set fire to himself. My husband is burning.' (92)

#### Become Suddenly Violent

- '(Spinx whacks Darren round the head)' -three times- (81-82)
- '(Spinx grabs Lola by the hair)' (99)

#### Vomit

- '(Party Piece vomits)' (104)

#### Child Abuse

- '(Elliot enters. He is carrying an unconscious ten-year-old boy. He is wearing a tshirt and jeans. He is the party piece.)' (47) 'Lola: He's so pale. Elliot: He's been in the cupboard, aint he. Lola: He's lost weight. Elliot: He is supposed to be lean. Lola: He looks starved.' (55)
- '(Party Guest grabs Party Piece's hand. Party Guest breaks Party Piece's thumb- crack!)' (109)

#### Drug Injection

- '(Elliot gives party piece injection)' (61)
- '(Spinx prepares injection... Naz rolls up Duchess's sleeve and holds her arm... Injects her)' (92)