**Explain how one or more performers used impressive or surprising movement and/or physical skills in one live production that you have seen and assess their contribution to the effectiveness of the piece at particular moments.**

On the 13th January 2015, I saw Lloyd Newson’s verbatim style production of “John” at the National Theatre, London. Lloyd Newson, the founder of DV8 used non-naturalistic movement to retell the dark story of John. Newson became committed to looking at one man’s story and his search for something “be it love, escape, validation or company”. I was particularly impressed by the movements of Hannes Langolf, playing John, as they created a tense and engaging atmosphere throughout the piece.

The first moment of surprise for the audience comes when John begins talking about his relationship with his mother and how she eventually died of a drug overdose. The intricate and repetitive movements used here were very effective as the production team aimed to communicate to the audience the process of arguments and forgiveness that John constantly went through with his mother. Langolf worked with Andy Xhuuma playing his brother, and Vivienne Wood playing his mother in this scene. The scene began with John linking arms with both of them and all of them moving fluidly to a dramatic underscore. John repeats the same sentence over and over, “She throws me out, she has no money, I buy her brandy, ok you can move back in”, using an increasingly fast pace and bored tone to reflect how his relationship with his mother was falling apart. This speech was accompanied by an impressive range of movements to create a visual representation of the process for the audience. The aim of the performers and Lloyd Newson who choreographed the scene was to emphasis the sheer amount of energy this took from John and to shock the audience by using graphic representations of the experience. The two brothers would hold up the mother on either side using strong grips whilst she made her joints weak and put her weight on them displaying her weakening health. The men pushed Wood forwards keeping a grasp on her shoulders and they proceeded to spin round each other. Langolf then supported Woods’ back as she fell backwards and he pushed her up forcefully and Xhuuma then carefully caught her. The movements of the brothers were performed at an increasingly high and urgent pace whilst Wood’s became increasingly slow and careless showing her increasing dependence on drugs. All the movements were accompanied by dialogue and I felt this was very notable and successfully built up anticipation to her death. After repeating this sequence four times, the two men gently laid the finally lifeless body of their mother flat onto the bare floor. Whilst standing stiffly looming over her, Langolf described in an callous tone with a loud volume the way they had found their mother nine days after her death, as Xhuuma hurriedly placed sheets of newspaper over her body. This contrasted well with the movements from before to make her death even more shocking and to emphasise John’s new solitude. The creativeness and ingenuity of the choreography joined with the superb way Langolf vocalised were very impressive for me and effectively conveyed the emotional importance of this experience on John to audience.

The next key moment comes when John informs the audience of the deterioration of his girlfriend’s health as she struggles with the disease, AIDS. The production aim in this scene is clearly to communicate to the audience the internal struggle that John is facing and his dependency on alcohol. In this scene, the director used Langolf’s interaction with beer bottles and his physical movement to show this. The sequence begins with Langolf lying on his side on a mattress, with a line of empty bottles in front of him. He picks up a bottle with his right hand, skilfully and remarkably twirling it frantically before placing it between his crossed legs. Langolf continues to talk, keeping his face turned to the audience using an energised voice as he reaches for another bottle with his left hand. Langolf then sat up with a poor curved posture passing the bottle behind his back to his other hand then curling his body over, putting the bottle roughly into the crook of his neck as he reached searchingly across his body for another bottle. This was particularly impressive as Langolf used the props very effectively with the physical movement of his body to convey to the audience his growing hunger for beer. Langolf used a fast pace to deliver the lines, with a low pitch and his voice repeatedly cracking whilst his movements remained precise and familiar with the process ,and I felt this combination was very profound as it showed his desperate franticness to the audience. Langolf then exhaustedly and slowly began to reverse the process placing the bottles gently and caringly back onto the floor in a line. The lines also became slower and slurred as the bottles were moved around each other, with Langolf occasionally lifting one up only to slam it back down again. This was a very inspiring, physical way of showing the audience John searching for a full bottle. The exciting and thrilling sequence of movements successfully achieved the production aims of the production team as it created a clear sense of John being very familiar with the process and showed the audience the downwards spiral that John experienced.

The next key moment for the audience in the story of John, is when he is in court for having committed arson. In this scene there is a doctor, a lawyer and a judge at upstage left, centre stage and centre stage right. The movements used here were very precise and conveyed the seriousness of the situation to the audience. Langolf began facing the judge, with his face turned to audience telling them about the unfair decisions made. He then moved over to the doctor, Langolf did this by squeezing his feet together then turning his heels out and moving them back in together at a very high pace whilst keeping his arms pinned to his side. This movement was awkward but defined and helped to convey the production’s aim to the audience, to show that John was incredibly uncomfortable with the situation and unsure where to go. When he talked to the Doctor played by Ermira Goro, she began slowly leaning forwards with one hand held up to her chin and the arm holding onto her elbow in a position of thought. This movement was impressive because Goro held it in a strong stance for a considerable period. As Goro leaned forwards, Langolf leaned backwards keeping his lower body rigid and straight, the interaction between the two characters movement helped to convey the tense and untrusting relationship to the audience. The scene was effective as the physical movement was controlled, and was exciting for the audience to watch making the serious court scene hold even more importance for them.

Finally, after having been sent to prison, the audience is shown John’s time in prison. This begins with John popping up and down from behind a wall in a square room giving the impression of him being in a prison cell. As John appears for a few seconds at a time from above the wall, he informs us of his new high; exercise. This scene is hilarious and upbeat, conveying to the audience the sense of John getting his life back on track. This scene is impressive as Langolf is bobbing up and down yet manages to keep the audience engaged, at one point clinging to the top of the wall and turning to face the audience with a grin. The next time Langolf popped up, both his hands were above his head, his fingers spread wide. This sequence finished with Langolf gripping the edge of the wall and then very slowly with his arms straining put his elbows on the wall and his head in his hands to then turn to talk at a fast, excited pace with a high pitch to the audience showing his triumph and having lost “10 pounds” whilst in prison. This series of fleeting physical movements were important as they were imaginative, comical and each one showed John’s pride effectively to the audience. This scene later transformed into John sitting at a desk with a simple clock sound in the background portraying time passing and creating anticipation for the audience. The aim here was to show to the audience the intense boredom John endured in prison. Langolf sat facing the audience on a chair, his elbows on the table and his chin resting heavily on firsts. Suddenly, Langolf began to whip his head in different directions, progressing to his whole upper body moving in a stiff, inhuman way. Meanwhile Langolf also spoke of the job that he had in a cold, detached, low pitch voice. I found these movements very rousing as they were very controlled and fitted precisely with the tick of the clock clearly conveying to the audience the strict conformity to time and focus in the prison. The scene ended with John sitting stationary with only his hand moving frantically across a page with the pen crushed between his fingers. This was very impressive as only Langolf’s wrist moved; the rest of his arm stayed tense and only shook to convey his intense focus. The production team very effectively worked together to create engaging and extraordinary movements that were within the actors ability here but which also showed John’s bi-polar battle between boredom and excited energy.

In conclusion, Langolf and other actors used impressive and skilled physical movement to help tell the terrible story of John to the audience. Langolf also used the movement in a way that very clearly expressed the emotions of John to the audience particularly in the beer bottle scene. The creativity and passion with which the actions were created and performed made for an entrancing and effective piece of theatre that engaged the audience throughout. The aims of the production team were met as the piece told the story of John and the complex range of emotions he encountered in a unique and ingenious way.