

DV8

PHYSICAL THEATRE

JOHN

A work conceived and directed by Lloyd Newson

Education pack for students and teachers

The tasks and exercises in this workpack are intended for the ages of 16-18. However they can be adapted for higher education students.

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Further production details
www.dv8.co.uk

JOHN is co-produced by the National Theatre of Great Britain, Biennale de la Danse de Lyon, La Villette, Paris, Théâtre de la Ville and Festival d'Automne Paris, Dansens Hus Stockholm, Dansens Hus Oslo and DV8 Physical Theatre, with an additional contribution from Le Grand T, théâtre de Loire-Atlantique and le lieu unique, scène nationale de Nantes.

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JOHN - A work conceived and directed by **Lloyd Newson**

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Lee Boggess

Ian Garside

Ermira Goro

David Grewcock (second tour)

Garth Johnson

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Andi Xhuma

Assistant to the Director/ Company Manager

David Grewcock

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Lloyd Newson with the performers

Set and Costume Design

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Lighting Design

Richard Godin

Sound Design

Gareth Fry

Production Manager

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Technical Stage Manager

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Production Carpenter

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We are grateful to the generosity of the individuals and organisations who have allowed us to use their experiences and contributions in the making of this work. With deep gratitude to John.

JOHN

Foreword by Lloyd Newson

This text originally appeared in the programme for UK performances of JOHN.

What you should have seen tonight was a work about assisted suicide. I wanted to talk about dying with dignity. For some years I had followed the public debate around voluntary euthanasia and participated in an Exit International workshop on the subject. As I was about to embark on this project a close male friend died unexpectedly. My bereavement and despondency were more than I could have anticipated. As the months of mourning continued, I met up with two friends who, independently, talked about love, its power, confusions and complications. It made me reflect on my lost friend's complex relationship with love, and other men's intimate lives. I realised then that I needed to do a work about love and life, not death.

When talking about love, the topic of sex emerges. Is sexual monogamy the key to a happy love life? Can you be in love and not be monogamous? What is your relationship between sex and love? How do you go about finding intimate love? Is sex a manifestation of things unrelated to love: an escape from life's responsibilities, an animal desire, excitement or a way to combat boredom?

What are the risks you'd be prepared to take in pursuing love or sex... the questionnaire went on, and we found 50 men who agreed to participate. DV8's last verbatim work *Can We Talk About This?* examined Islam and free speech and sought to provide an overall perspective by portraying 33 people who had direct first-hand experience and contrasting views. I expected to focus on fewer stories in this work and had no intention of presenting a social survey on men, love and sex.

Then John walked into our office. After his interview it became clear the work would predominantly follow one man's story; his story. It is a personal perspective, not a collage of opinions.

When John agreed to be interviewed he was still under sentence. On excursions from his probation hostel he discovered a group of men, inhabiting a world unknown to most, where like him, they gather, all searching for something: be it love, escape, validation, sex or company.



Andi Xhuma, Hannes Langolf, Ian Garside. Photo: Ben Hopper

Journey of the Production

Research and Development phase 1

(April - September 2013)

- Director Lloyd Newson (LN) does background reading and research on the subjects of loneliness, ageing, male sexuality
- LN and his research team interview 40 men
- Interviews are audio-recorded and transcription begins

Research and Development phase 2

(October - December 2013)

- Final interviews are conducted
- Interviews are transcribed
- LN decides which interviews will be used in JOHN
- LN and his research team edit the original interviews into shorter scripts to use in the work

Set Design

(September - October 2013)

- Designer Anna Fleischle and LN agree on a concept for the set and costumes
- The designs are implemented by DV8's Production Manager and a team of set builders and costume designers

Sound, video and lighting

(April, May 2014)

- The designs and plans for the lighting, sound and video elements of the show are created

Touring and Editing

(August 2013 - December 2015)

- Premiere at ImPulsTanz Vienna on 5 August 2014, then touring
- Throughout the tour, LN, the cast and crew continue to work on, and develop scenes
- Some changes are also made to the production

NT Live Broadcast

(9 December 2014)

- During JOHN's extended run at the National Theatre (30 October 2014 - 13 January 2015), the production was filmed and broadcast live to cinemas throughout the UK and the world.

Multiple Castings

(June 2013 - March 2014)

- Several auditions held to find performers
- Performers are selected on their dance technique, text delivery and physical improvisation

Workshops

(August - October 2013)

- Performers are invited from the early auditions to attend workshops (1-2 weeks)
- Initial movement ideas are sketched out
- The thematic focus of the work is finalised

Rehearsals with Final Cast

(January - May 2014)

- Movement is found for each section of text, using improvisation and task-based exercises. LN, working with the performers, sets the choreography

Technical rehearsals

(April - May 2014)

- The finished set arrives at Unicorn Theatre, London
- This is the final 2-week period when the lighting, sound, set, and costume design elements are decided and finalised

Preview Performances

(May - June 2014)

- Previews at Dansens Hus, Stockholm and Dansens Hus, Oslo. The company perform JOHN for the first time

DV8 Physical Theatre: Creating JOHN

By David Grewcock, Assistant to the Director and DV8 Company Manager. This text originally appeared as a post on the National Theatre's blog (2014).

Based on frank interviews conducted by DV8's Artistic Director, Lloyd Newson, JOHN combines spoken word with movement to create a touching and poignant theatrical experience that follows the extraordinary life story of one man.

After successful performances in cities across Europe, it is great to see JOHN arrive at the National Theatre. I joined the company in January this year but the research and interviewing for this new verbatim piece had started much earlier in 2013. Our rehearsal process for JOHN was meticulously detailed and required a level of mental and physical stamina that few performers can handle. We put the 'finished' edits of the interview audio recordings onto iPods and the dancers then repeat the words they hear back in real time as they improvise or complete physical tasks in order to generate material.

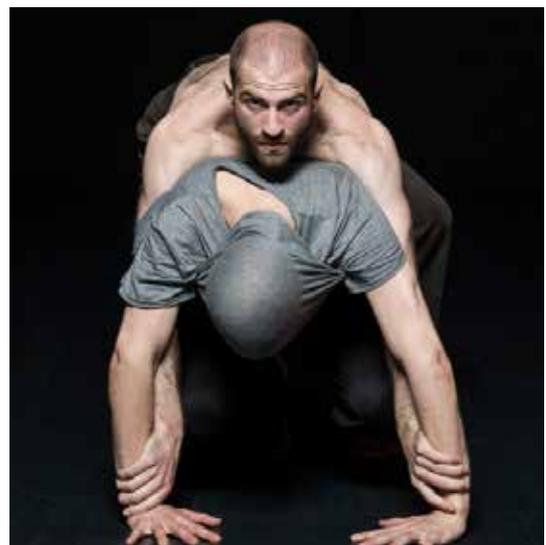
The process allows detail to be found in the tiniest of movements and to ensure nothing is missed, everything is filmed; from the sparks of ideas in workshops right through to performances 10 months later. For this project to date we have over 500 video clips which we continue to refer to. Lloyd very rarely takes more than a few seconds of an idea from the video footage but it might be a gesture, a particular line delivery or an interaction between 2 performers that ignites the concept for a scene.

For the dancers, the text becomes their score; scenes take on the mood and rhythm of each particular interview. And it is hard. Really. Think of patting your head and rubbing your stomach...on a balance board with one eye closed, as the floor revolves. Hence the need for a long and detailed rehearsal process. And you could say the process doesn't really end. 10 months on and movements will still be tweaked, new discoveries are made and there is a constant desire to progress and fine tune the work. Which is perhaps a major draw for performers so keen to work with the company – the show is constantly evolving and Lloyd pushes dancers to break their habits and develop as artists.

When we initially announced auditions for this production, we were overwhelmed by the response and yet still we struggled to find performers who can make a truthful connection between meaning and movement. We have seen some exceptional dancers, really beautiful movers, but as soon as we ask some of them to speak, they crumble. Likewise, we've explored working with 'straight' actors but invariably they lack the technical ability the work requires.

To anyone keen to work with Lloyd and DV8, I'd say get out and watch as much dance and theatre as you can. Go and see work that excites you, that moves you and affects you. Hunt out those all too rare performers that surprise you, that scare you and leave you wanting more. Go and discover if pretty lines and clever 'steps' are always enough for you. Ask yourself if you believe the story you're being told. And if you don't, why not?

We're not dance fascists, I promise, and personally speaking I am a huge lover and supporter of all things musical/commercial. It's wonderful that JOHN can play alongside Here Lies Love at the National whilst The Royal Ballet grace the stage in Covent Garden and the West End continues to provide breath taking choreography night after night. You just have to know where your passion for movement lies and embrace it.



Andi Xhuma, Ian Garside. Photo by Kris Rozental

Tasks for teachers and students

To be used in conjunction with

JOHN: scene-by-scene synopsis (pages 9-12)

Prompts to accompany this workpack are available for teachers. If you are a teacher please email dv8@artsadmin.co.uk to request a copy of the prompts.

Clarifying what the work is about and identifying underlying themes

1. Write two paragraphs describing what JOHN is about.
2. As a group, list and discuss at least 5 themes from JOHN.
3. Identify 3 character traits for John. How are these traits expressed or communicated on stage? Give examples, referring to either text or movement.
4. Considering the movement has been created in direct response to the text, how do the movement and physicality of the performer add meaning to the spoken words?
5. Various movement styles are used throughout JOHN. Choose two physically contrasting scenes and discuss the difference in movement language and how it relates to what is being communicated/expressed.
6. The scenic design, and in particular the revolving stage, plays a key part in the work.
 - i. *What metaphorical significance does this have to the story?*
 - ii. *What practical purpose does it serve?*
7. All the words spoken on stage come from real life interviews. Is it important that the audience know this? Why? Think about the responsibility of the author/artist in verbatim work.

Exploring scenes

1. The character John speaks openly about the many crimes he's committed and the prison sentence he served. Despite his criminality, are there moments where you empathise with his character during the performance? If so, when and why is this important?
2. In the scene CRIME, Hannes Langolf (who plays John), is seen to lean beyond his own physical boundaries giving him a sense of being invincible. Think of another way of physically staging this scene that will enhance the meaning of the text. See page 13 for the full text from this scene.
3. The scene ACHIEVEMENTS is set to strict counts of a metronome, which sounds like a clock tick. As a performer, what difficulties might this pose to the text delivery? What are the challenges of maintaining the natural and spontaneous delivery of text alongside the precise choreography?

Physical Task

i. Combine a short paragraph of text with a rebound movement phrase, ii. Now deliver the text whilst rebounding to each tick of the metronome, iii. How does this type of physicality and rhythm constraint affect: a. the way the audience understand the text b. the performer?

4. In BUSY the performers repeatedly dress and undress, passing between each other picking up items of clothing and towels. Why do you think it is important that this scene was so tightly choreographed?
5. The subject of safer sex is discussed by both the sauna owners and the character who works as a secondary school teacher.
 - i. *Where do these characters stand on the issue? Is there a difference in the perspective of the sauna owners compared to the school teacher?*
 - ii. *How do these characters on stage regard the notion of responsibility within this context?*

Continued...

Tasks for teachers and students

6. Discuss three ways in which John seeks to change his life.

7. Towards the very end of the performance the audience hears the real John's voice for the first time. He speaks openly to Lloyd Newson about his search for love. How does the experience of hearing John's voice impact upon this scene and your impression of John?

8. How does JOHN vary structurally to DV8's previous works *Can We Talk About This?* and *To Be Straight With You*.

Extended written tasks

1. Write a review of JOHN. Assess the production in terms of choreography, performances, staging, and its ability to address contemporary issues.

2. Write a press release for JOHN:

i. Find a way to describe the genre (what is it: dance documentary, dancing testimony, dance theatre, physical theatre?)

ii. Convey that the work is factually based (verbatim)

iii. Highlight the strengths of the work

iv. Would you hold any information back about the production? If so, why?

v. Would you include any warnings? If so, why?



Andi Xhuma, Ian Garside. Photo by Blandine Soulage-Rocca

3. Write a five-paragraph essay that summarises the production. The first paragraph should introduce the work and include a thesis sentence that outlines what the rest of the essay will discuss. Each of the next three paragraphs should raise one theme explored by JOHN and use examples from the production. The final paragraph should be a conclusion that includes your personal reflections/opinion.

4. Choose one event in John's life and recall as much specific information about what the character said and the physicality that was used in the scene. Write as detailed a description of that scene as possible.

Physical tasks Option 1

1. Conduct a short interview with a peer, friend or family member about a personal story or event(s) in their life, then transcribe the interview.

2. Choose the most important sections of the interview, and edit them together so that the remaining script is not more than 3 minutes long.

3. If the technology is available, record the interview, then edit it to match your script using a computer programme like GarageBand. Put the interview on an mp3 player. If you can record but not edit, record your interviewee reading your edited/written transcript. Download that to an mp3 player. If none of this technology is available, continue to use the written text.

4. Choose a partner and ask them to speak the text aloud as they hear it on the mp3 player or read it aloud from the script.

5. Then ask your partner to improvise physically in response to the text. Avoid movement that is too reflective, literal, or habitual. Try to find movement that complements, but doesn't fall into the trap of "doubling" the text. Choose the sections of the improvisations that fit best with the rhythm and meaning of the text and set the movement material.

Continued...

Tasks for teachers and students

6. Memorise the text and perform it with the set movement material.

Tips:

If a performer is locked into a way of moving, try and get someone who moves very differently to improvise in front of them. The performer then has to imitate how this person moves. This can produce surprises and choreographic ideas. It may help to film the improvisation so you can better remember it and scrutinise it in more detail later.

Physical tasks Option 2

1. Conduct an interview with a peer, friend or family member about a personal story or event(s) in their life. Then transcribe the interview. (If there is not enough time to conduct an interview, use the text of a newspaper editorial.)

2. Select the words/phrases that are most critical to the interview. Keep repeating this process until you're left with a couple of phrases from the text.

3. From this reduced selection, find the one word or phrase that encapsulates the feeling, or thematic intent of the entire interview.

4. Find a gesture or physical motif that best illustrates this word or phrase.

5. Create a dance exploring and developing this physical motif.

Tip:

This whole process takes time and can be repeated many times in different ways.

Physical tasks Option 3

1. Construct a 30-second movement phrase. Concentrate on linking movements together and ensure there are changes in dynamic/rhythm and spatial orientation.

2. Conduct an interview with a peer, friend or family member about a personal story or event(s) in their life. Then transcribe the interview. (If there is not enough time to conduct an interview, use the text of a newspaper editorial.)

3. Choose 30 seconds of text from this interview or article.

4. Combine the words you have chosen with the movement phrase you created. This random combination might create unexpected and interesting results, even if there is only a flash of an idea that could be developed in detail later on.

Tips:

Often Newson will see a momentary gesture or movement (from hours of improvisation) that he feels has resonance for a scene, which he later refines and develops into a full scene.

Ask students to confirm that the movement supports the text, instead of distracting the viewer from what is being said. This task is also a good way of mixing physical rhythms against the rhythm of a text (i.e. you don't always have to have fast movements just because someone might be speaking quickly and vice versa). Encourage students to vary text delivery or movements to see how slight adjustments can change meaning. This exercise is intended as a simple way to explore random combinations of movement and text, and helps circumvent our inclination to "double." Ask students to explore the possibility that the movement can create a subtext for the words, that the words can deliver one message when the movement provides another, sometimes contradictory message; thus providing texture and complexity.

Scene-by-Scene Synopsis

Scene 1: Family

(Revolving set, John's family home)

John is born to a violent father who physically assaults his mother, sexually abuses his sister and is convicted for raping the family's babysitter. John's mother would "shop lift to order... and use us (her children) as cover". When John is ten years old social services put him and one of his brothers into a care home.

Scene 2: Mother

(Empty room)

Despite a difficult relationship with their mother, John and Nicholas live with her, on and off, for several years. She becomes a reclusive alcoholic. After not seeing his mother for 9 days, John returns home and discovers her dead from an overdose. It is then that his own drug use increases, "I started using quite a lot. Quite a lot."

Scene 3: Girlfriends

(Hanging clothing descends from the ceiling, representing significant women and children in John's life)

John has a series of relationships with women (some long term). He has a son with one of them. As a young adult John becomes addicted to heroin. He steals money and jewelry from his then girlfriend to support his habit.

Scene 4: Nicholas

(Empty room - John and his 2 brothers, Ronald and Nicholas are under the influence of drugs)

Nicholas and his girlfriend neglect and physically abuse their new baby. John informs the police and Nicholas is consequently imprisoned for 8 years. Soon after he's released he dies of a heroin overdose. John is evicted from his home. Around the same time his other brother, Ronald, is killed in a car crash.

Scene 5: Sleeping Rough

(Chairs on stage)

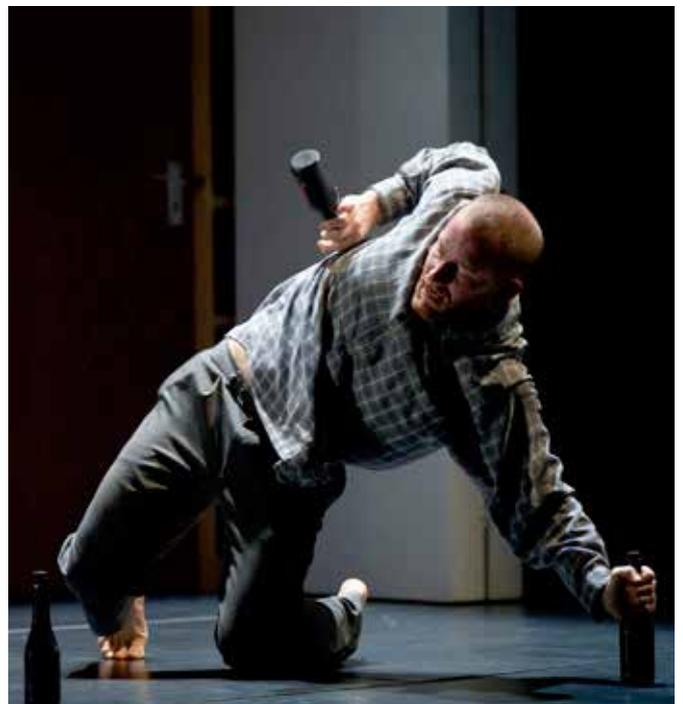
John sleeps rough for 6 years before being housed in a recovery/rehabilitation hostel for homeless

people. Whilst there he stops using drugs and sets up a support group for other users. He is diagnosed with depression and becomes addicted to food instead of drugs.

Scene 6: Bianca

(Hostel room, mattress on the floor: surrounded by cider bottles)

While living at the hostel John befriends a woman named Bianca. She is HIV positive and an alcoholic. Because she refuses her HIV medication she dies and John is left devastated.



Hannes Langolf. Photo by Laurent Philippe

Scene 7: Shoplifting

(Supermarket: till check-out noises)

John talks about his shoplifting habit. His accomplice provides an insight into the tactics employed by seasoned shoplifters.

Scene 8: Crime

(Outside area, performer is standing by door, leaning)

John talks about his extensive criminal record: 28 convictions for 65 offences including credit card

Continued...

Scene-by-Scene Synopsis

fraud, theft, drugs, assault, possessing offensive weapons and multiple driving offences.

Scene 9: Arson

(A house on fire. It's dark. A man walks through the house, carrying a torch, searching various rooms. A fire engine siren, alarm and distant yelling are heard)

Scene 10: Sentencing

(Areas of the stage are highlighted in sharp spotlights, suggesting an interrogation and/or court room)

John is charged with 2 counts of arson and section 20, 'Unlawful Wounding'. He is initially sentenced to 13 and a half years' imprisonment but the charge and sentence are later reduced after the Psychiatrist's Report explains the medication John was taking is capable of inducing psychosis and amnesia.

Scene 11: Weight

(John behind the top of a wall, exercising as if on a trampoline)

Whilst in prison John stops using drugs and alcohol and instead becomes addicted to exercise. He loses 10 stone.

Scene 12: Son 1

(Stage revolves suggesting various rooms that John and his son might inhabit. At no time in this scene do John and his son physically see one another)

John locates his son via the Salvation Army Family Finders Service. He hasn't seen or spoken to him in 12 years. They are having a telephone conversation. John explains (from prison), "I've done something pretty bad. My actions have caused a lot of stress for a lot of people but it turned my life around." His son is understanding and stresses that, despite this information, he still wants to see his father again.

Scene 13: Achievements

(John sitting at a desk)

In prison John becomes a peer mentor to other inmates. He also enrolls in an Open University course, eventually passing with a Distinction.

Scene 14: Son 2

(Revolving stage as in Son 1)

Before John's son is due to meet him, he discovers details of his father's arson attack and requests that the prison stop his father from contacting him.

Scene 15: Busy

(Sauna changing room)

Two new characters are introduced. They are a male couple who run a gay sauna. They describe how the sauna wasn't making a profit until they implemented a strategy to ensure it was constantly busy: this included free entry for younger customers and opening 24 hours a day.

Scene 16: Sauna 1

(Hot, dry sauna room)

John is revealed, unexpectedly, using the gay sauna. Unlike most of the clientele he breaks the code of silence by talking and joking with other customers. He is critical of the anonymity and lack of intimacy he witnesses in gay saunas.

Scene 17: Straight

(Hot, dry sauna room)

A new character is introduced, who largely identifies as straight (heterosexual). In contrast to John, he prefers the silence of gay saunas, as "there's not a lot of chat at all. Absolutely...perfect." He frequents gay saunas to escape "work, clients, busy-ness, people I live with, my girlfriend, my family."

Scene 18: Chit Chat / Lasagna

(Sauna front desk and lounge)

John is eating lasagna in the lounge. He complains rudely and aggressively to the sauna receptionist about the quality of the food.

Continued...

Scene-by-Scene Synopsis

Scene 19: Sauna Layout

(Tour of sauna, revolving set)

A new customer is shown around the sauna and the receptionist talks about the private cabins, giant bed, showers, lounges and theme nights.

Scene 20: Hunting

(Sauna corridors)

The sauna owners explain that the art of cruising involves subtle eye contact and body language. In their opinion the limited use of words in gay saunas mean you're "just judged by the cover, which can be an advantage."

Scene 21: Biker

(Sauna corridors)

John says that he doesn't tell his close friends he's gay, however he did tell his probation office and key workers that he visited saunas. He recounts an amusing story about his "biker and dispatching days."

Scene 22: Breathing

(Dark stage, four men in towels]

The men gather in close proximity, watching each other's chests as they inhale and exhale; the stage revolves.

Scene 23: Cleaning

(Empty sauna room)

The sauna owners describe the sometimes unpleasant practicalities of running a sauna.

Scene 24: Perfect Body

(Dark sauna room)

The straight character, introduced in scene 17, describes his experience of visiting a gay sauna and how it helped him to come to terms with his own body image.

Scene 25: Intimacy

(Sauna room, blue light)

A new character is introduced who is a school teacher. He regularly visits gay saunas and talks about his willingness to engage in unprotected sex. The interviewer challenges him about his behaviour and attitude.

Scene 26: Never Enough

(Dark, sauna doorway)

The school teacher then reveals that he has become HIV positive and talks about a specific sexual encounter in the sauna. The interviewer provokes the character by asking him to justify his behavior that puts him and others at risk of catching and passing on potentially incurable STDs.

Scene 27: Drugs

(Open space within the sauna)

One of the sauna owners talks about his intolerance for drug use on the premises and his responsibility as an owner.

Scene 28: Sauna 2

(Sauna cubicle entrance)

John says he's only visited gay saunas three times in his life.

Scene 29: HIV/STDs

(Dark, revolving stage)

The sauna owners criticise unsafe sex practices. One of them concludes, "I am a liberal, but I genuinely believe that at a certain point we have to say 'man up'. Really. Take responsibility for yourself."

Scene 30: Sauna 3

(Cubicle entrance/Sauna room)

John is approached by an older man in a sauna cubicle and rejects his advances because of the man's age.

Continued...

Scene-by-Scene Synopsis

Scene 31: Love

(Sauna changing room)

The voice of the real John is heard talking about his desire and search for love: "I'm aching to find someone I can share my life with... I've so much love and affection that I've never been able to express for so long... that's why I come here (the sauna), because it's another door that's opened, you never know where this is gonna lead. You never know... I just gotta keep looking, innit. Just gotta keep looking."

Scene 32: Home

(Dark, revolving stage)

John has struggled with his sexuality for many years and tried to ignore his homosexual tendencies. However, deep down, he believes he is "proper gay." He concludes by saying he now wants "the normality of life. Just to have someone you can express stuff with."

The last image is of John lying on the floor, alone, inhaling and exhaling to the sound of amplified breath while the stage revolves into darkness.

Text for Scene 8: Crime

This text is included to accompany Task 2 in *Exploring scenes* on page 6.

JOHN

How's the Mrs?

JOHN (*as Man*)

Yeah, she's alright.

JOHN

And I used to go around there everyday. "You alright, you alright babe?"

JOHN (*As Woman*)

"Yeah, I'm fine."

JOHN

And I'd leave.

JOHN

One day I went around there and he wouldn't let me in, "If you don't open the fucking door, I'll blow it off!"

He was an abusive alcoholic ...so I'm thinking he's beat her up and don't want me to see what he's done to her, so I threatened to shoot the door open.

I'd picked up this replica machine gun from a skip...

Anyway, I got nicked for that.

The Judge said, "Methinks I'm reading a script from The Bill - because it wasn't drug or gang related but just some stupid domestic - 9 months! Otherwise you would have been looking at 5-10 years."

I've got 28 convictions for 65 offences. One offence against a person. That was when I pushed a policeman or something.

Two offences against a property, criminal damage that is.

30 thefts, 12 fraud offences, 8 offences relating to police court and presence (which is obviously failing to turn up to court), 2 drug offences, 1 firearms shotgun offensive weapons and 7 miscellaneous offences... What else... driving offences, I got a lot of driving offences.

Credit card Fraud. That was just using someone else's credit card.

I was busy that day 48 different places I used that credit card.



Andi Xhuma, Ian Garside. *Photo by Kris Rozental*

I stole it out of the post from some empty house. We were looking for a squat...there was loads of post piled up under the letterbox, so we went through it, opened it, there it was.

The person didn't exist, it was a piece of plastic really. It was mine. I owned it.

I'm a thief. If I see something I just go and steal it. Just for the hell of it. Not that I needed it or wanted it, just for the buzz or something, cause I could...It's just the way I was brought up I suppose.