

**'Reflecting on the collaborative practice and socially engaged principles  
underpinning the making of Vincent Dance Theatre's *Art of Attachment*.'**

**by**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This work is a critical examination of Vincent's influences, principles, processes and methods that underpin her 30 years of artistic and socially engaged practice. It examines, as a critical commentary, in the context of theory and literature, reflections on how Vincent brings together professional performers and often marginalised, non-professional participants to create and craft collaborative performance work. These methods of making are investigated through analysis of Vincent's extensive creative and research work with vulnerable community groups, from which she identifies individuals whose voices she captures and records in order to thread through production work, translated into dance theatre and text-based 'material' or used within soundtracks for her work on stage, on film and online. Set against and within the physical, abstract and poetic elements of her work, these 'messy narratives' are given a much wider public platform.

Vincent has built an original, inclusive, skilled and 'risk tolerant' practice that reaps results for both professional and non-professional collaborators, participants and audiences alike. Published works as original dance theatre constitute a contribution to knowledge at the forefront of dance theatre. The development of artist and artistry as process and performance are particularly analysed through a Case Study of Vincent's work *Art of Attachment*. The work aims to offer an examination of how Attachment Theory and Childhood Developmental Trauma impact on everyday lives, push dance theatre work into new realms, critique some of the challenges encountered in socially engaged creative practice and articulate a practice based on equality of opportunity and diversity of voices. The work engages audiences and performers alike as therapy/not therapy. This work has potential for distribution, use and application in arts and non-arts contexts, such as social care, youth services, sociology, social work, psychotherapy and integrative therapeutic arts.

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**Charlotte Vincent, January 6 2023**

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## LINKS TO CONTENT & CONTEXTUALISING MATERIALS

**ART OF ATTACHMENT FILM INSTALLATION** (2021, 39 mins):

<https://youtu.be/L69qF3SyCGg>

**CONTEXTUALISING FILMS** : the following resource material was shown on 5 x small screens

within the *Art of Attachment* film installation, New England House, Brighton, October 2021:

- ***Interview with Vikki: Reflections on Art of Attachment***  
(2021): <https://youtu.be/Ep6EtEkft9o>
- ***Interview with Leah: Reflections on Art of Attachment***  
(2021): <https://youtu.be/OD4sGHN9X2w>
- ***Interview with Annette: Reflections on Art of Attachment***  
(2021): [https://youtu.be/Yv4J6h\\_eJxs](https://youtu.be/Yv4J6h_eJxs)
- ***Art of Attachment Explained*** (2018): <https://youtu.be/H49m-kNSaYM>

- ***In Loco Parentis Explained*** (2020): <https://youtu.be/bSRU8ITCUro>

The following contextualising material is referred to within this thesis:

- ***In Loco Parentis Compilation of Key Scenes (2020, 38 mins)***: <https://youtu.be/bNTwEJdHVhw>
- ***Art of Attachment (live capture, 2018)*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSb98ckfJBs>
- **Lemn Sissay OBE & Charlotte Vincent *Art of Attachment Explained* (2018)**  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y\\_9HOzKQRAI&t=6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_9HOzKQRAI&t=6s)
- **VDT Practices: *Wendy Houston Using Text***: <https://youtu.be/Z0bLTYXuDBo>

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE ARTIST**

This section offers insight into my early career influences, an introduction to the key methodologies that inform my work with Vincent Dance Theatre, my approach to socially engaged practice, the reasons for focusing this thesis on *Art of Attachment* and my reasons for why undertaking a PhD by Publication.

### **EARLY CAREER INFLUENCES**

I was born in 1968 - a time of protest, riots and turbulence. I grew up in West Sussex and took part in my village amateur dramatics age 8-11. I went to a girl's comprehensive school in Horsham, where I was captain of several sports teams, then studied English Literature, French and Social Biology at Sixth Form College, where I was an active member of the Drama Group and studied for Oxbridge exams in English Literature. I went on to study English Literature and Theatre Studies at Sheffield University from 1986-1989, spending the second year of my studies at University of Maryland, USA.

At University, I studied Black American female writers Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Harriet Jacobs, Maya Angelou and Zora Neale Hurston alongside the more conventional British and Irish writers, playwrights and poets (Samuel Beckett, Sylvia Plath, Jim Cartwright, R.D Laing, Edward Bond, Alan Bennett, Dennis Potter, Caryl Churchill, Harold Pinter), which offered me great insight into gender and racial inequality. I was gripped by the feminist politics of Simone De Beauvoir, Betty Freidan, Germaine Greer, Andrea Dworkin, Audre Lorde, Doris Lessing and Gloria Steinem, whose writings, alongside more contemporary thinking from Naomi Wolfe and Laura Bates, still influence my thinking and work today. The visual Artists I frequently return to are Marina Abramovic, Cindy Sherman, William Kentridge, Richard Serra, Jenny Saville, Nancy Spero, Louise Bourgeois and Tracy Emin.

Studying in Sheffield was a world away from growing up in West Sussex. It's a down to earth, friendly city, with a visible working-class demographic, a proud but broken industrial history and the stunning Peak District national park on the doorstep. Living and working in the North of England for 26 years as a young adult strongly influenced my politics around social justice. When I moved to Sheffield in 1986, the palpable malaise of unemployment fuelled a left-wing desire to take Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher down. I sought out experimental, edgy performance work that spoke of the times and found it at The Leadmill in Sheffield, the Studio Theatre in Leeds (now Leeds Beckett) University, Bradford Theatre in the Mill and The Green Room in Manchester. I witnessed powerful work by Forced Entertainment, DV8, Mayhew and Edmunds, Volcano Theatre, Liz Aggiss, Nigel Charnock, Wendy Houston, Alain Platel and Wim Wanderkeybus – work that still offers inspiration for thought, 30 years on, alongside the inimitable Pina Bausch, whose work has been a constant reference point throughout my choreographic career.



After graduating with a first-class Honours Degree in English Literature and Drama from Sheffield University, I co-founded a theatre co-operative called Cut Back Theatre with five other English graduates, facilitating theatre workshops with community groups across Yorkshire, including those experiencing long term unemployment, people living with HIV and AIDS and young people in local schools and colleges. In those very early days the ‘socially engaged’ workshops we facilitated went on to inform the choreographic and thematic content of our devised physical theatre work, which we performed back in the community settings – unemployment centres, community centres, schools and colleges - where our ‘research’ process had started. Thirty years on, having worked as a professional artist for all this time, my practice has come full circle, via extensive and successful small and middle scale touring in the UK and abroad, back to this original way of working, ‘hiking the horizontal’, as American Choreographer Liz Lerman might say, between making high quality, professional performance work and nurturing creativity with targeted groups in the community, with that work shared in a wide variety of formal and informal education and community settings, as well as in more conventional theatre and dance venues across the UK and beyond.

Whilst all the early members of Cut Back Theatre left the company within a couple of years to pursue other interests and careers, my early work led me to a job as a Community Theatre Worker at Theatre Station Blyth in Northumberland, working full time with adults with learning disabilities and unemployed ex-miners. Whilst working in Blyth, and living in Newcastle Upon Tyne, I met kinetic sculptor and aerialist Mish Weaver (who went on to become Head of Aerial at the National Centre for Circus Arts, London), and together we continued Cut Back Theatre, working in prisons to research and devise *Taking Liberties*, a production that explored physical and mental confinement, performed by myself and Harry Theaker. *Taking Liberties* toured to prison and young offender institutions across the UK for two years, which in turn led me to being commissioned, in 1994, by Yorkshire Arts Council, (the then regional office of Arts Council England), to write a *Directory of Arts*

*in Prisons*, supported by Leeds Metropolitan University. I continued to lead creative workshops in prisons for a further 8 years, making the case for creativity as a pathway to recovery and rehabilitation.

I founded Vincent Dance Theatre (VDT) in Sheffield in 1994, initially creating duets, trios and group works, commissioned by Sheffield and Rotherham Dance Project, Leeds Studio Theatre, Yorkshire Dance, in Leeds and Danceworks in Sheffield. My early work drew attention from funders and venues and, with increasing financial support, grew in scale and impact, consistently touring across the UK and Europe, Canada and the States until 2014.

As Artistic Director of VDT, I have always maintained a 'community' dance' practice, facilitating and creating work with groups including prisoners, ex-miners, people with disabilities and special educational needs, long term unemployed, women survivors of sexual and domestic violence and young people. Since 2014, I have blended my choreographic and facilitative work to create and distribute intergenerational, interdisciplinary productions that explore the complex tensions between professional and non-professional practice. I identify with 'movement' in both senses of the word: kinaesthetically (through the act of moving, making movement and facilitating movement in others) and politically, as a group of people working together as one to affect change. I don't feel bound to the usual rules and conventions of contemporary dance because I didn't study dance as an Undergraduate. I think of creating new work as 'staging ideas', the main aim of which is to transform themes, political issues and individual lived experience into thought-provoking, universally affecting, interdisciplinary dance theatre.

*(See Appendix 9 for Full Biography and Appendix 10 For Vincent Dance Theatre's Production History).*

## MY METHODOLOGY: MAKING WORK WITH VINCENT DANCE THEATRE

Creativity offers a way of being heard. Historically within the arts sector we have referred to ‘the community’ as ‘other’ than us - as though we, as artists, are not part of it. I define VDT’s VDT’s production and participation activity as inclusive – it interrogates who we are and how we live, aiming to empower everyone involved. The work has always placed gender politics at its core and over the past decade has campaigned for political and cultural change through providing a public platform to those whose ‘value’ is often societally and culturally overlooked - specifically women and children.

In 2012, I worked with VDT’s then Dramaturg Ruth Ben Tovim’s daughter, 12-year-old Leah Yeger, who devised and performed *Motherland* alongside 8 professional dancers and musicians and 65-year-old Benita Oakley. Making *Motherland* prompted an interest in working again with younger and non-professional performers. When I returned to work after 9 months parental leave in 2014, the vision and artistic direction of VDT’s work shifted. Becoming a mother made me want to take my work ‘off’ my own body and instead explore the creative potential of individuals from specific targeted communities, as I had done much earlier in my career, integrating non-professional people within professional productions, embedding marginalized voices and translating personal testimonies into high-quality performance work on stage, on film and online. I also wanted to address the changing way in which people now consume art (remotely on personal devices, as well as in person in public spaces) and continue to contest the cultural norms and narratives within what I felt, in 2014, had become a stale, male-dominated dance touring circuit in the UK. I was also interested in exploring what ‘use’ and ‘application’ my choreographic work might have outside the arts sector.



Elysia, Maia, Nathan and Millie: Child Performers in VDT's **Virgin Territory**, 2015 (Photos: Hugo Glendinning)

Making *Virgin Territory* in 2016 marked a real shift in my creative methodology that has since formed the bedrock of my practice with Vincent Dance Theatre. *Virgin Territory* was a bold and uncompromising look at our hyper-sexualised culture and the impact that grooming, harassment and pornography has on girls and young women. Devised and performed by four children, aged 12-14, and four adult professional dance artists, the production asked vital questions about responsibility and the potential damage to children playing in an adult online world.

*'The most striking element of the production is perhaps the reality of it all; these aren't stories inspired by Charlotte's imagination, they are genuine anecdotes gathered from teenagers and young adults.'* *The Badger Online*

To make this work I spent many months workshopping ideas across Sussex with groups of young women, exploring issues of consent, pornography and sexual violence and gathering real life testimonies from groups and individuals. *Virgin Territory* premiered on stage, in the round, at The Place in London, in 2016. The production was twice nominated for a Dance UK National Dance Award. The work was then filmed on location across Brighton with Film Maker Bosie Vincent and edited to create the company's first multi-screen film installation, premiering at ONCA Gallery Brighton as part of Kate (now Kai) Tempest's Brighton Festival 2017. Allying with feminist Laura Bates' *Everyday Sexism Campaign*, VDT also developed #VDTEverydayAction – an

online campaign using Brown Labels which asks participants to offer one positive action to counter the onslaught of misogyny and visual perfection we consume online every day.

See VDT's Brown Label campaign here: <https://www.vincentdt.com/project/vdteverydayaction/> and here <https://www.flickr.com/photos/132150614@N07/albums/72157671573007835/>



Valerie Ebuwa & Antonia Grove in *Virgin Territory* (Photo: Hugo Glendinning) and the male cast of VDT's *Shut Down* (Photo: Bosie Vincent)

*Virgin Territory* (2016) was an experiment in working differently that went on to provide the creative methodology I have followed to make new work with VDT's since, developing a fresh, 'socially engaged' approach to researching, making and distributing new work on stage, on film and online. This process was repeated in 2017/18 with an all-male production, *Shut Down*, made in collaboration with young male MC's and spoken word artists from Brighton's grass roots talent development music organisation Audio Active (<https://audioactive.org.uk/>). *Art of Attachment* was made in collaboration with substance misusing women from Oasis Project in Brighton in 2018, *In Loco Parentis* with care-experienced young people from across Sussex, in 2020.

## **SOCIALLY ENGAGED PRACTICE**

Each new VDT production begins where the last production left off. I start with a broad concept for any new work that has to be explained or written about at least a year in advance to secure

the funding or commission or form part of VDT's Activity and Business Plan as a regularly funded organisation. I think about 'staging ideas' rather than 'making a show' and start by asking 'What is the enquiry?' 'What am I trying to say?' 'Where are we?' 'Who are we' and 'What are we doing here?'

Early research begins by offering targeted community groups free, interdisciplinary creative workshops to explore the intended themes of a new work. These research workshops provide a dual creative function: they offer opportunities for often marginalised groups to engage in issue-based creative practice and also allow me and my collaborators to mull upon and explore the issues and themes that will drive the creation of the new work without the pressure of immediately creating material or a product. These workshops also sometimes identify participants whose voices are later, with due permission, anonymously recorded in conversation with me and later still embedded in the soundtrack of the work set starkly within or against composer Jules Maxwell's more poetic soundtrack or edited down into chunks of text recordings that VDT collaborators use to translate into new choreographic or text based 'material' within the devising process. Early research processes also alert all collaborators to the protocols needed to safeguard any vulnerable adults, young people and children involved in the work going forward. Strict Safeguarding Policies are in place within the company to support and protect *all* participants, with ongoing therapy and support for vulnerable individuals encouraged throughout any creative process. Supervision is funded by VDT and offered to professional collaborators (alongside support with childcare and physiotherapy).

The early research phase, conducted in partnership with a range of local and regional arts and non-arts-based partner organisations and alongside VDTs ongoing professional development workshops and audition processes, also unearths potential young / non-professional collaborators

to make and perform in productions with VDT's trusted and experienced professional collaborators. Research workshops offer these participants an opportunity to explore their own thoughts, feelings about the enquiry involved, which also contributes to the development of the new production work. This approach shakes up the conventions of dance theatre practice: professionals involved have to adapt to non-professionals and vice versa, resulting in the development of everyone's artistic practice, skillset learning and creative agency.

Alongside this collective process I conduct my own research around any given theme through reading, watching, thinking, sketching designs. The design of the work is the vessel that all choreographic material sits within: the space holding the concept. From 1998 to 2004, VDT's work was designed in collaboration with Forced Entertainment's Richard Lowdon. His designs offered a metaphorical version of somewhere 'real', indicating, say, backstage at a circus, a billboard or an imaginary forest. Since 2004, I have since designed all VDT's productions. In my designs, the stage space usually physically transforms over 75-90 minutes, often starting clean and ending up messy or reconfigured (*Broken Chords (2004)*, *Motherland (2012)*, *Virgin Territory (2015)*, *In Loco Parentis (2020)*), with marks left on and in the space, alongside bodies changing visually and physically over the duration of each work - from clean to sweaty, stripped off, dirty, bloody, covered in soil or flour, exhausted. I use objects from the real world within the space to locate or indicate somewhere 'real' or familiar. These objects often transform as part of the 'act': a script becomes a paper aeroplane, a doll moves like a toddler, a ladle becomes a baby, baby powder becomes cocaine, wine becomes blood.

I rarely use coloured light in my work, with Nigel Edwards' subtle lighting designs often jolting performers in and out of a stark open white 'working light' wash, to deliberately remind an

audience that what we are in a theatre and constructing a performance – that however affecting, this is not ‘real’ but rather a rehearsed, creative ‘translation’ of reality.

My work with VDT is now produced and distributed on stage, on film and online, in full-length and short form, to enable the widest possible distribution of the work and allowing the company to ‘return the work’ back to the ‘communities’ who helped make and shape it. Each new production is designed to create multiple live and filmic outcomes, distributed year-round, from the same creative enquiry / choreographic material. This approach extends the life and legacy of each new production well beyond the initial live production and allows the work to be presented both within more conventional art spaces, theatres and galleries and within a myriad of community, academic, festival and non-arts-based contexts. The work therefore reaches a much wider range of audiences and participants outside the conventional dance/theatre sector, in health and wellbeing, social care, family intervention, attachment context, for example, as well as conventional participants and audiences within it. My devising process involves working alongside non-professionals at every stage of the process.

## **CONTEXT FOR THIS STUDY**

There are a diverse range of UK and internationally based practitioners and companies working and publishing within the field of ‘socially engaged practice’. There are also those artists whose work and practice, like mine, explores gender based violence and gender politics, collective authorship, trauma narratives and the creative and personal agency of participants involved. In addition there is work which examines the problematic nature of the instrumentalism of art and the specific issues arising when working collaboratively with historically marginalized groups and non-professional participants.



In this section of my thesis, I will critically reflect on, and contextualise, the work of Vincent Dance Theatre through sharing definitions of socially-engaged practice and examining the processes and works of some contemporary artists, companies and organisations working in the field of socially engaged practice, whose values, mission and practice attune with my own approach.

‘Socially engaged practice’ is sometimes referred to as ‘social practice’ or ‘socially engaged art’, and, as the Tate Modern website defines, might include:

*‘any artform that involves people and communities in debate, creative collaboration or social interaction... Socially engaged practice can be associated with activism because it often deals with political issues...Artists who work within this field will often spend much time integrating into the specific community which they wish to help, educate or simply share with. The artists’ aim could be to help this community work towards a common goal, raise awareness and encourage conversation around issues, or perhaps to improve their physical or psychological conditions.’* (<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/s/socially-engaged-practice>).

Socially engaged artists, companies and organisations often cite diversity and integration as key drivers for their work: often meaning the inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing, Disabled and neuro-divergent people. Companies such as, for example, Candoco, Green Candle, Anjali Dance Company, Access all Areas Theatre, Frontline Dance, Stop Gap Dance Company have paved the way for ‘integrated’ and inclusive practice for many years, with campaigning by Disability Arts International, for example, and ‘*promoting increased access to the arts for disabled*

*artists and audiences around the globe*'. (<https://www.disabilityartsinternational.org/>). See **Bibliography** for all company websites).

Vincent Dance Theatre's definition of 'socially engaged practice' is based on offering access to and opportunity within the arts to individuals and groups for whom challenging personal, economic or social conditions have presented barriers to accessing and taking part in arts activity and whose lived experience has oftentimes resulted in trauma. My work often specifically targets women and care-experienced young people, creating a platform for people whose voices might not otherwise be heard. My work is related, in its politic, to Clean Break's work with women who have experienced the criminal justice system, promoting often unspeakable female narratives, whose company vision is to enable women to '*realise their full potential...and challenge their oppression by society in general and by the criminal justice system in particular.*' (<https://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/about/>). However the interdisciplinary nature of VDT's work distinguishes my work from Clean Break's more text driven, play based productions.

Similarly, my approach could be aligned with Cardboard Citizens who '*create work with and for people who experience homelessness, inequity, or poverty. We provide theatre/art/training that explores, interrogates, and challenges the injustices that are most alive in our world.*' 'However my distinct choreographic practice and aesthetic approach to making performance work that blends abstract movement, real voices and a sense of place, sends VDT's work in a different aesthetic, textual and physical direction. (<https://cardboardcitizens.org.uk/>)

Companies such as Third Angel, Stan's Café, Fevered Sleep and Reckless Sleepers are contemporary performance companies whose work also embraces participatory practice – also with distinct but comparable aesthetics influenced by 'experimental theatre' practice from the

2000's and 2010's. Liz Lerman's work with Dance Exchange (Maryland, USA) collaborated '*across generations, disciplines, and communities to channel the power of dancemaking as a means for dialogue, a source of critical reflection, and a creative engine for thought and action...artmaking at the intersection of social relevance and community participation.*'

(<https://www.danceexchange.org/>).

With her own company and practice, Lerman continues to expand notions of '*who gets to dance, where dance happens, what dance is about, and why dance matters*' with a choreographic approach that opens up her creative process '*to everyone... resulting in both research and experiences that are participatory, relevant, urgent, and usable by others*'. (<https://lizlerman.com/>).

Fallen Angel Dance Theatre's mission is also to 'provide high-quality dance theatre experiences for people in recovery from addiction where they are accepted, valued, and realise their potential – a mission closely aligned with the retrospective learning outcomes from making *Art of Attachment* which I articulate in this thesis. <https://fallenangelsdt.org/>).

Engaging with VDT's practice stimulates individual creative expression, encourages critical thinking, builds trust and enhances social networks for specifically targeted groups, so participants become active and enriched members of creative communities. Participants' ultimately contribute to the development of new production work in response to ideas, themes and feminist approaches embodied in my distinctive choreographic practice. The work itself is and sets out to explore contemporary themes and socio-political issues, to provoke thought and to stimulate dialogue, with participants who collaborated in it often returning as audience members in a distinct creative cycle. What distinguishes my practice from others that exist in the

field of socially engaged practice, is the long duration of projects, supported by core funding from Arts Council England, which enables rapport to develop between myself as the artist and the participants, alongside the enhanced embedding of safeguarding practice and trauma informed practice within the creative process which results in authentically building trust and allows for professionals and non-professionals to work authentically as co-collaborators. My work is not a short-term engagement or 'intervention' but suggests a deeper engagement through process to performance and beyond, with the creative process delivered over many months and shaped by my own politics and lived experience as a woman, maker and mother. With a final phase of the creative process that translates live work onto film beyond a straight 'live to digital' capture, my work on film allows the work to be 'applied' in non-arts sectors many years after the live experience has taken place (e.g. a duet made for film depicting violence towards women can be used in social work training to explore the emotional labour of working in that field). I am not aware of many UK choreographers who apply work in this way over a lengthy process and producing work equally on stage and on film.

A close contemporary in form would be Luca Silvestrini's dance theatre work with his company Protein. He uses '*a blend of original choreography, text, music and social commentary*', with professional performers, inviting audiences and participants 'in' to '*break down the boundaries between watching and participating*'. (<https://proteindance.co.uk/about/>). Protein's *En Route to Common Ground* promenade performance, part of Greenwich and Docklands International Festival (2021), describes placing '*local community performers alongside Protein's cast and guests*', which perhaps assumes a hierarchy of experience and skill within the work. Protein's work approach differs to VDT's, however, as Silvestrini distinguishes his 'On Stage' productions from his 'Off Stage' and 'Community' works, perhaps suggesting that the two practices are

not *blended within* the creative process in the way I describe my making process, later in this thesis.

There are very few female choreographers in the UK working in the dance theatre field in the extended, inclusive, socially engaged way that I describe. Harlow based Rhiannon Faith Company is one socially conscious artist whose work, like my own, aims to promote discourse, raise awareness and lobby for change (<https://www.rhiannonfaith.com>). As performance artist Bryony Kimmings writes of Rhiannon Faith in a foreword to *Smack That (a conversation)* publication 2018: '*I saw in her a little Charlotte Vincent, a little Wes Anderson and a little Brit Pop.*' (Faith, R. (2018), pg. 6).

Faith's 2017/18 project *SMACK THAT (a conversation)*, a collaboration with domestic violence charity Safer Places, (involving former VDT collaborator Valerie Ebuwa), engaged in a series of intensive participatory workshops and interviews with female survivors of domestic abuse, leading to '*participants finding ways to perform their stories, consult on the creation and speak to the world about what needs to change.*' Although Faith's language is different – she uses the terms 'non-performers and dance artists' - her creative methodology seems similar. Faith's *Care House Project* was a performance involving '*autobiographical stories of care, suffering and belonging*', made with *members of the Harlow community to 'improve mental health and wellbeing, celebrate care and community*'. Her 2023 project, *Lay Down Your Burdens*, '*grows out of conversations with communities and is developed from real-life experiences of the company.*' (<https://www.rhiannonfaith.com>).

However, whilst the enquiry based nature of Faith's cross-disciplinary production work seems similarly driven by a shared cross-disciplinary, feminist vision, her creative methodology has yet

to fully embrace working equally on stage on film to enhance the longevity of the work beyond a live experience and capture. In lockdown, Faith created a digital version of a popular work *DROWNTOWN*, but it was significantly shorter than the live work of the same name, and created in response to lockdown for distribution purposes rather than as an integral aspect of her creative methodology. Since the artist has maintained a focus on producing live work, perhaps not yet allowing for the extensive distribution, use and application of Faith's work outside of the arts sector that VDT is currently focussing on.

Socially engaged practice as an area of scholarship is a developing field and strongly aligns with and relates to publications discussing 'applied theatre'. For example, many of the principles, practices, aesthetic dilemmas and ethical questions that underpinned the making of *Art of Attachment* - described within this thesis - are articulated in the *Participatory (Syn)thetics* chapter of Nicola Shaughnessy's *Applying Performance: Live Art, Socially Engaged Theatre and Affective Practice*, where she discusses the dialectic between ethical and aesthetic considerations at play whilst working with non-professional or 'community' participants. Shaughnessy addresses critical questions about the relationship between life and art, the nature of non-professional collaboration and the potential egotism of the professional artist in relation to those participants. She discusses the tension between ethical and aesthetic choices when making work, the tension between empathy and 'social amelioration' of any given practice or project and the personal and political considerations of any socially engaged process: in other words, the tension between 'the art and the social.' (Shaughnessy, N., (2012), pg. 201). See also **Risks and Ethical Considerations** section of this thesis.

As Helen Poyner suggests in Frizel and Rova's (2023) *Creative Bodies in Therapy Performance and Community* (pg.101) 'engaging with other human beings is necessarily a creative endeavour, a

*process of improvisation.*' Poyner goes on to discuss the kind of 'finely tuned' presence and process of *'unfolding'* and uncovering I describe in the Case Study of *Art of Attachment* in this thesis – how, when working inclusively, conscious choice is underpinned by experience, knowledge and a 'wholistic' (sic) kinaesthetic practice that can identify 'material' in the room to work with, advocating that the body may be able to sense, feel and express sooner than words can. In this thesis I discuss edging our way from talking and words towards physicality and back again in the creative process in the *Art of Attachment* Case Study sections on **Trauma Narratives, Developing Physicality** and **Wendy Houston's writing**.

In her discourse *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics – describes work as a marked violation of our expectations*, Shannon Jackson suggests that:

*'art events that are inter-relational, embodied, and durational, the notion of social practice might well be a synonym for the goals and methods that many hope to find in the discipline of experimental theatre and performance studies.'* (2012) pg. 12)

Jackson discusses socially engaged work as 'contemporary relational art', relating it to post dramatic (experimental) theatre and live art, describing it as 'affective' practice: having some effect on participants and practitioners, affecting change and inciting transformation. This is a similar approach to that I articulate here, reflecting on the personal and political, the work as an act of translation. Jackson discusses the relationship between process and performance (production) and unpacks the nature of meaningful personal and political encounters within the process of creative exchange. Jackson also considers empathy within the creative process: how any process is home to loss as well as gain. I also discuss this in my unpacking of the creative process in the **PACE Parenting and Therapy /Not Therapy** sections of this thesis. Jackson's

definition of applied practice based on the Latin '*applicare*' - '*to bring things into contact with one another*' - is apt. VDT's work brings together my established practice, experienced practitioners and those who have little artistic experience but who are experts in their 'lived experience'. Together we brought together elements from our different lives and worlds, found a 'new language to represent ideas', created change and together created something new.

I conclude this section of the thesis with the work of Nicholson (2015):

*'participation in theatre is a gift... it can be experienced negatively and well as positively. In its many guises, applied theatre is undertaken by those who want to touch the lives of others, who hope participants and audiences will extend their perception of how life is, and imagine how it might be different... to move beyond what they already know.'* (pg. 173).

VDT's mission is '*to move people and make them think differently*'. This thesis articulates how that happened for everyone taking part in *Art of Attachment*. The next section reflects on why I used the live production and consequent film installation of *Art of Attachment* as a case study for this PhD to articulate and define my distinct approach to 'socially-engaged practice'.

## **WHY FOCUS ON ART OF ATTACHMENT?**





*'It is clear from the outset that an alternative version of these stories is going to be told – one that is agonisingly visceral, and often beyond words...But this is also a piece about love as an enduring source of hope.'* Isobel Todd, *The Psychologist, Art of Attachment, 2018*

When I started writing this thesis, I aimed to reflect on several VDT productions within it. However, when thinking and writing about *Art of Attachment*, it became clear how this particular project, conducted over many months, both exemplified my socially engaged principles and practice and the depth and complexity of the process warranted an opportunity to reflect, unpack, write about, analyze and learn from. In depth evaluation from the making process and sharing of the work also presented an opportunity to reflect on the impact of the work on audiences, practitioners and the participants themselves to demonstrate the multiple layers of my creative approach and to reflect on why and how I make work in the way that I do.

*Art of Attachment* live production was artistically strong and emotionally powerful and the impact of the project on the women's lives significant. Due to the global Covid pandemic, the creation of a film installation from content captured and filmed in 2018 had been shelved, so in 2021 the making of *Art of Attachment* Film Installation became an obvious choice as a new work for the

'Publication' aspect of this PhD. *Press & Articles and Feedback regarding ART OF ATTACHMENT live production (2018) and Film Installation(2021) can be found in Appendices 4, 5 & 6 at the end of this thesis.*

## **WHY UNDERTAKE THIS PHD?**

I have worked for nearly three decades as Artistic Director / Chief Executive of Vincent Dance Theatre, leading the organisation and directing choreographing all the company's productions to date. I have worked regularly as a visiting artist /and lecturer in universities, facilitator, mentor and key note speaker around gender equality, discussing and exploiting my compositional and choreographic methodology, approach and values in all these contexts. As I mature, I write and talk more and physically move less. This PhD offers a framework to delve deeper into why and how I make the work I do, how my creative and political thinking, autobiographical experiences and interdisciplinary, intergenerational techniques have developed over 30 years of research, participation and performance practice. It offers a space to analyse what is actually 'going on' in my creative process, from initial concept to premiere and allows me to interrogate why '*shouting from the spaces that matter*, as Guardian Dance Critic Judith Mackrell once described my work, matters to me.

This PhD focuses on the development of the past 8 years of socially engaged practice, interrogating how my interdisciplinary approach combined with the translation of lived experience into performance, has developed the company's work. Writing this PhD has allowed me to re-examine, re-evaluate, re-frame and articulate the methodologies involved in making work with professional and non-professional collaborators that is now widely seen on stage, on film and online and applied in a wide range of community, education and public settings. Reflecting on my

movement based practice has restored my faith in why dance should and can carry weight and be of use outside the dance sector and indeed have currency within the academic field.

## **CASE STUDY: ART OF ATTACHMENT**

This Case Study reflects on the research process and making processes involved in producing Vincent Dance Theatre's *Art of Attachment* (live production, premiered November 2018) and subsequent film installation, the key element of Vincent Dance Theatre's *Home Truths Listening Project* (premiered October 2021, as the 'publication' for this PhD). The Case Study considers the political principles, psychotherapeutic theories and creative methodology underpinning my socially engaged approach to making work and also reflects on the therapeutic benefits for non-professional participants who took part in the project.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2017, I was commissioned by Oasis Project as one of two Lead Artists alongside Poet/Broadcaster Lemn Sissay, to produce work for *Art of Attachment*, a project exploring 'the complex emotional bonds that exist between women in recovery from substance misuse and their children, partners, family and friends.' Oasis (<https://www.oasisproject.org.uk/>) remains one of the only providers of female only drug and alcohol services in the UK, providing vital services across Brighton & Hove and East Sussex for women, children and families affected by drug and alcohol misuse and recently awarded a prestigious CSJ Award from the Centre for Social Justice.

Encouraged by Jamie Watton, then Artistic Director of South East Dance in Brighton, Jo-Anne Welsh (Director of Oasis) approached me to work on an application to the Wellcome Trust to

fund *Art of Attachment*, a project aimed to offer participants an opportunity to work with experienced artists to produce collaborative outcomes, to invite the general public to reflect on the psycho-biological issues involved in attachment, to find new ways to creatively represent how attachment related trauma impacts on a woman's ability to function adequately as a parent and to create visible, public platforms to raise awareness of the complexities of attachment theory and its practical implications on women's lives. Oasis' Wellcome Trust application stated:

*'Attachment is of increasing importance in the fields of substance misuse, mental health and children's services. It is increasingly acknowledged that women with drug/alcohol problems have much higher rates of trauma and abuse than women in the general population. This can and does compromise their ability to safely parent their children, or to provide them with what Bowlby et al (1988) would consider, a secure base. Brighton Oasis Project witnesses on a daily basis the impact this trauma can have on children. This sometimes leads to decisions where children are removed and placed into care.'*

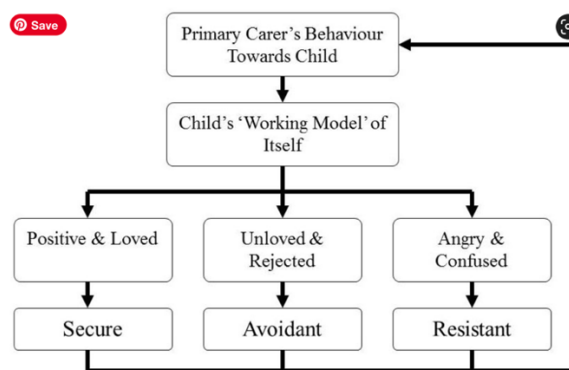
Making *Art of Attachment* has significantly impacted on my creative practice over the past 5 years, bringing together my lived experience as an adoptive parent, my creative interests as a dance theatre maker and my political interest in platforming female experience in order to raise issues around gender equality and violence towards women. Working on the project has resulted in a more 'trauma informed' and 'attachment aware' approach within my own creative practice and influenced every aspect of VDT's participation production and campaigning activity since 2018.

Fellow Lead Artist Lemn Sissay and I explain Oasis' 'ART OF ATTACHMENT' project (2018) here:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y\\_9HOzKQRAI&t=6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y_9HOzKQRAI&t=6s)

## ATTACHMENT THEORY

In *Attachment and Loss* (1969), British psychologist and psychoanalyst John Bowlby developed an evolutionary theory of attachment, suggesting children are biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others and that an innate fear of strangers is a vital part of a child's survival mechanism. Attachment Theory describes the particular emotional relationship a child forms when seeking comfort and security with a caregiver. Attachment supports a child's biological and psychological survival and informs their brain development. Bowlby used the term '*maternal deprivation*' to refer to the separation from, loss of, or failure to attach to the mother figure arguing that a continual disruption of the attachment between infant and primary caregiver, (usually the mother), may result in irreversible, long term cognitive, social and emotional difficulties for the infant. Adverse childhood experiences set an early template for psychology later in life.



<https://www.simplypsychology.org/bowlby.html>

My research around the four 'attachment styles' that exist informed my practice with the women and children I worked with from Oasis project. These are: secure attachment, ambivalent-secure attachment, avoidant-insecure attachment and disorganized insecure

attachment, summaries of which I displayed in the *Art of Attachment* film installation space in October 2021. See *Appendix 1: Attachment Theory Information Displayed in Art of Attachment Film Installation (2021)*.

A child with a secure attachment will explore a room while the parent is present, show signs of missing the parent during separation and when reunited with the parent will initiate physical contact, settle and resume play. A child with **avoidant, insecure attachment** fails to express emotion, cry or appear angry when separated from the parent, avoids or ignores the parent when reunited and shows little or no proximity or contact-seeking, tending to focus more on toys and the environment than on a caregiver in new situations. A child with **ambivalent, insecure attachment** shows little exploration of their environment, may seem wary prior to separation and preoccupied with the location of the parent, then when reunited, fails to find comfort in the parent and also fails to return to play. **Disorganized insecure attachment** is associated with a parent who frightens the child, where they become 'scare-giver' not 'care giver'. The child displays disoriented, confused behaviours in the parent's presence, for example: may freeze with a trance-like expression or cling, crying, leaning away with an averted gaze.

Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1969) informed my approach to co-creating all the performative material for *Art of Attachment*: through the exploration of proximity, emotional flatness, tone and choreographic content of three key duets within the work; through informed discussions with the participants whilst creating the work around this subject and via the writing process for two of solos in the work:

*'Attachment is a relationship dance: the child signals and the parent responds. Helping a child to learn to feel secure means you responding to what he hides, as well as what he signals.'* **Golding and Hughes** (2012: pg. 30)

Bowlby suggests that attachment is:

*'a psychological connectedness that occurs between humans and describes the way in which a parent or carer can respond sensitively to their child's needs at times of distress and fear in infancy', so that 'Ideally, a child can rely on his parent or caregiver for comfort at times whenever he feels threatened, frightened or in danger, to provide what is known as a secure base or safe haven for the child: a reliable foundation from which a child's learning and development can grow.'* Golding and Hughes (2012: pg. 30)

The most important aspect of attachment is not based on the practicality of who feeds and changes an infant, but who plays, responds, attunes and communicates with them - matching and reflecting through voice, facial expression or gesture that their needs are being understood and met. I tried to mirror aspects of this in my approach to working in my initial research workshops with women and the children from Oasis:

*'Charlotte's empathy is the main thing. She can pick up immediately if one of us isn't feeling ok. She has her radar out.'* Adult Participant, Art of Attachment Workshop

As an adoptive parent, my experience of family therapy has been of both sensory integration and Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP), an approach pioneered by American

psychotherapist Dan Hughes. I have completed training in Hughes' PACE Parenting model to further understand the treatment of attachment disorders and the impact of trauma and disruption on childhood development. PACE parenting suggests a Playful, Accepting, Curious and Empathic environment is needed for children to feel safe in relationship with their parents. The approach encourages intersubjectivity, which is when communication takes place in a reciprocal relationship between two people and where each person has an impact on, and influences, the experience of the other person. PACE encourages ways of communicating and interacting with children to develop new learning about everyone's strengths and vulnerabilities, integrating the technique and the person with kindness and compassion to build confidence and the ability to heal, resolve issues and move forward in life.

*'The human brain is designed to function within relationships... ones where we have a reciprocal impact on each other.... Mutual influence rests on our ability to understand the inner life of each other.'* Golding and Hughes (2012: pg. 87)

## **THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL**

Since the beginning of my choreographic career (1990), I have created new work based on personal, lived experience: my own, those I collaborate with and via testimonies gathered through research facilitated with specific groups in our community. I believe passionately that if lived experience is at the centre of the work, other people (audiences) will emotionally or intellectually connect to it. If creative translation of our human experience forms the foundation of the work, it can provoke alternative ways of thinking about a subject, shed light on the reality of the female experience and thereby challenge socio-political norms whilst also subverting - through the form it takes - pre-conceived ideas about what 'dance' should be or



look like. With *Art of Attachment* I wanted to support the often stigmatised, marginalised women involved, encourage them to feel some worth and to feel confident about being seen - for their experiences to become visible and for their voices to be heard.

As Hanisch (1969; pp. 1-2) stated in her *Memo, Some Thoughts in Response to Dottie's Thoughts on a Women's Liberation Movement*, it seemed essential that *Art of Attachment* articulated the misogynistic and abusive framework that the women I was working with were articulating so clearly to me, '*recognizing the need to fight male supremacy as a movement instead of blaming the individual woman for her oppression*'. My aim was that our work together would offer insight and real understanding as to *why* vulnerable women may be driven to misuse substances and *how* poor parenting is often a direct consequence of the parent's own childhood abuse or neglect - making the case, as Hanisch (1969; pg.2) did, that '*women are messed over, not messed up! We need to change the objective conditions, not adjust to them.*'

## **APPROACH TO MAKING ART OF ATTACHMENT**

*Art of Attachment* was supported by a Project Advisory Group of distinguished professionals working in the fields of children and youth work, law, ethics, community dance, neonatal medicine, child psychotherapy, attachment and substance misuse. (*See Appendix 8: Production / Project Credits*).

My creative process began in January 2018, with a period of personal research around Attachment Theory and interviewing members of the PAG about their professional relationship to attachment. From January to April 2018, I concurrently facilitated introductory workshops

with a range of women from Oasis' Phase Two Recovery Programme, once a week at Oasis Project, Morley Street, Brighton, in groups varying in size from 2-16 people, all of whom were at different stages of recovery from substance misuse. From May to June 2018, I started working more intensively with a group of 4/5 women in a research and development phase of the work, playing with ideas and devising strategies for performance, joined by professional performers Antonia Grove and Robert Clark and Understudy Anna Clasper. By July 2018 we were beginning to devise small sections of material and over the summer months I worked with Writer Wendy Houstoun to develop text for the production. In September 2018, we reconvened as an ensemble of 6 performers (4 non-professional, 2 of VDT's regular professional collaborators) and worked intensively towards the one-off live performance on 18 October 2018. From January to October 2018, I facilitated 44 interdisciplinary creative workshops with women and children from Oasis. These workshops were initially designed to stimulate discussion around attachment, to begin to reflect on individuals lived experiences and stories, to draw, write, talk and build the foundations of trust and rapport with participants with a view to several who would later self-select to be part of the performance. Working within a grass roots charity dealing with the day to day, front line challenges of women in recovery was challenging. The aims and expectations of the project had not been articulated to those who had been encouraged to attend the sessions, the space used didn't allow for movement, and the groups remained fluid and unstable for the first 3 months of work.

## **SUSTAINING A REGULAR PRACTICE**

I designed my delivery of *Art of Attachment* to offer vulnerable women an opportunity to engage in a meaningful, long-term artistic process, which aligned with my growing interest in leading projects with local communities developed over many months, rather than parachuting

in for shorter periods or running one off workshops. Working with the same group of people over many weeks enables a creative process to build safely and organically, rather than being led by an immediate need to create a public facing 'product'. Allowing time for trust and rapport to build, for personal growth, for taking time for emotional barriers to break down, for the slow building of skills encouraged the women to bring themselves and their lived experience to the creative process. One participant noted *'You cannot make someone open up all the wounds too fast. I would have collapsed'*.

I offered a consistent care for the women, meeting regularly twice a week, every week over several months and in so doing offered the women a regular creative 'safe haven' and a secure and trusted attachment figure they could begin to rely on. This approach required a considerable time commitment from me and once the needs of the process became clear, a considerable commitment from the participants. VDT invested heavily into the project with my salaried time, free studio space, considerable finance and management support to enable a meaningful process to take place.

*'If it had been shorter I wouldn't have made it to going on stage or believing I could or getting used to being touched or even to look people in the eye.'* Participant, *Art of Attachment*

Our work together seemed ground the participants week to week, offering something meaningful to lift them out of their personal chaos, if only for the 5 hours they spent in the studio with me. The project began to act as a countering force to the 'provisional existence' that Dr. Ironside had discussed with me. Inviting the women's thoughts, input and ideas throughout a creative process unlocked a sense of adult agency in the participants, by women

who had felt infantilised by partners, medical and social work interventions over many years. The space felt rich, complex and emotionally loaded to hold, but slowly I began to witness significant changes in the four women who had committed to the project. As Independent Evaluator Annabel Jackson reported in her Evaluation Report on the project:

*'The impacts on the participants are remarkable... Participants reported breakthroughs in their recovery because of: reframing experiences by viewing them symbolically, metaphorically, externally and ultimately compassionately; changing their relationship with their body, where traumas were often manifested; having their experiences heard and validated by a full and appreciative audience; gaining a sense of joy from being playful; and reducing isolation from strong personal connections with the other participants.'*

## **BUILDING TRUST**

*'Charlotte has a way of explaining it, that this isn't just about a performance for her. She will transform our stories into something of value to an audience.'*

***Vikki (Participant / Performer)***

The longevity of the project was important to participants and to the creative process, particularly to build trust between me and the women who gave their time to the project. Given the psychological, emotional, medical and domestic challenges the participants were dealing with on a day to day basis, a sensitive approach and regular schedule was imperative. I aimed to find ways to release and relax participants both physically and with humour. I encouraged the women to craft their experiences and feelings into a shape that would be bearable to repeat, that could be more objectively witnessed. We checked in regularly about

how and what each woman might be comfortable bringing into the process, about ‘what would make a good performance and what we wanted an audience to take away from the work we made together.

## **HOLDING SAFE SPACE, RESPECT AND SUPPORT**



Vikki and Leah, *Art of Attachment* live production, November 2018 (Photo: Bosie Vincent)

My creative, discursive workshops were facilitated with therapeutic support, conducted in a circle where each participant has equal status and everyone is able to make eye contact with each other. We implemented VDT’s Safeguarding Policy at all times, and used Oasis Project’s ‘Check in and Check Out’ process to start and end sessions. As a group we agreed **Safeguarding Ground Rules** for our sessions together to ensure we gave each other space, respected difference, were aware of retraumatizing others, took time out of the room when needed with Integrative Arts Therapist Jo Parker, arrived on time, took regular breaks and emotionally checked in and out at the start and end of all sessions. We were clear about routes of support for the women after the often emotionally gruelling work to ensure their safety after our sessions in my space. We agreed that any disclosures around substance misuse or endangering children would have to be reported back to the Safeguarding Lead or the Key Worker of the participant involved at Oasis. We stringently followed Vincent Dance Theatre’s Safeguarding

Policy throughout the project, a policy which has since been updated from learning gained through delivering *Art of Attachment*.

*(See Appendix 3: Groupwork Principles and Appendix 8: Vincent Dance Theatre's Safeguarding Policy).*

*'As a trainer I need to be attuned because if I don't notice the small signs that the people listening need a break, I lose their interest. It's more important to me to watch their responses and check they are tracking with me than to just stick with my teaching plan.'* **De Thierry, B.** (2019: pg. 31)

A debriefing process after each session between myself as facilitator / artist, Parker and Oasis' *Art of Attachment* Project Manager Alison Cotton became a useful space to reflect on what issues and behaviours had risen up for the participants in the group work and allowed a space for us to discuss what, if any, follow-up support was needed for individuals.

## **ROLE MODELLING**

As the work developed I understood that my presence as a female leader was having a positive effect on the women, role-modelling taking responsibility, listening, empathy, empowerment and being 'on their side'. I offered clear structure, consistency and care for participants to feel safe, brought a visible facilitative skill into the room, demonstrated a sense of direction and progress so they could witness the potential impact of my craft. Participants reported to Annabel Jackson:

*'Charlotte is strong as a leader and a person. I recognized she was someone who knew what she was doing. I sensed she was someone I could follow... Charlotte is*

*a force to be reckoned with. She is so raw and powerful. She is more powerful than any man I have ever known.'*

*'Charlotte inspired me to be braver because she is a strong woman.'*

## **TRAUMA NARRATIVES**

The first 6 months of this project were spent listening, gathering ideas and stories from the women, encouraging the participants to express themselves in whatever way seemed safe or appropriate for each individual. Sometimes we brain-stormed ideas around attachment, drawing in charcoal on large rolls of paper sprawled over the floor. Sometimes the women wrote privately in journals and shared whatever they wanted to share with the group. With their permission, I documented their thoughts in my own notebooks and captured our conversations on a Zoom recorder. I trusted my process, leading and following the women in equal measure in the early sessions, improvising my way through, responding to what was present and presented in the room. I began to edit the captured conversations into short excerpts for the women and professional performers to work with later in the making process. The material was dark and challenging, their voices clearly expressing many years of pain, grief, abuse and loss. There was much laughter too, though this was harder to capture or reflect in the final work.

The women at Oasis had devastating histories of physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect as children, mostly repeated in adulthood in relationships with abusive male partners. To avoid stigmatizing the women further, I adopted an approach that never asked '*what's wrong with you?*' but preferred to focus on '*what happened to you?*' to gain a better understanding of how the women found themselves in recovery and from what. Was the project an opportunity to

creatively 'reinterpret' the women's lives?

We discussed the challenges of parenting whilst involved in substance misuse; the negative impact on women's mental health when their children are removed into care; post-traumatic stress; loneliness; prostitution; the medicalisation of women (when dealing with anxiety, disordered eating and perceived personality disorder); issues of self-esteem, confidence and body image kept coming up in discussion; homelessness and rough sleeping; unwelcome interventions of family, medical staff and mental health practitioners on women's lives.

Repeated themes emerged from weeks of talking: self-destruction, self-loathing, self-sabotage; damaged trust, post-traumatic stress, suicidal thoughts, disconnection, disassociation, flashbacks, childhood sexual violence, neglect, assault, grief, loss, domestic violence, questions around identity, co-dependency on partners and fellow users, infantilization within the medical and social care systems, being sectioned, medicalized, unsafe, risk-taking around sex, drugs and childcare, sex work, pregnancy, abortion, miscarriage, birth, child protection and adoption. The women expressed a strong desire and need to reinstate boundaries in their lives, to find ways to stop the cycles of denial and abuse they could see recurring, to regain some power and gain control of their lives. The women's fragile mental health and physical disabilities dominated the process at times and they were all struggling not to relapse into drug and alcohol misuse throughout the first 6 months we worked together.

Unexpressed hurt and anger from childhood and intergenerational trauma dominated our discussions, manifesting in painful accounts of self-harm, low self-esteem, health disorders and chaotic, unsafe attachment patterns experienced in childhood and repeated in adulthood, the women *'unable to tell a coherent story about their past - each in their unique pattern of incoherence.'* Siegal and Payne Bryson (2020: pg. 66-67).



I encouraged the women to think in metaphor. One talked of her experience of attachment feeling like a house perched on really tall tower, built of sand, with no one to catch her when it collapses. Another talked of building a wall around her to protect herself from intimacy for years as the risk of touch was too dangerous for her to contemplate after suffering years of domestic violence. Another talked about wearing layer upon layer of underwear as an adult to protect herself from any further sexual abuse that she experienced as a child, making it impossible for men to gain access to her body. We discussed how the women had inherited damaging scripts influenced by early childhood trauma and how these fixed narratives had led them to believe they 'deserved' the bad things that kept happening to them. Understanding the weight and influence of these negative, inherited narratives, carried so heavily through life, made me wonder whether our process could 'rewrite' or 're-author' their individual scripts or at the very least articulate their experiences so precisely that our production might offer an alternative script, one that processed and integrated the past, and publicly replaced the shame ridden, worn out narratives, formed from low self-esteem and through abuse and misogyny, that they had largely been living by until this point.

*'When the lengthy process of integration and reinterpretation of past memories is complete, the experience is integrated with other life events and stops having a life of its own...in PTSD this process fails and the memory remains stuck – undigested and raw.'* Kolk (2015: pg. 256)

I asked the women what they didn't 'deserve' in life, they wrote:

*I don't deserve to be looked down on*

*I don't deserve to be abused*

*I don't deserve to be alone*

*I don't deserve to be judged*

*I don't deserve to be lied to*

*I don't deserve to hold my breath*

*I don't deserve to be bullied for being different*

*I don't deserve your violence, your anger, your apologies*

*I don't deserve to be trodden down*

*I don't deserve to be controlled*

*I don't deserve to be neglected*

*I don't deserve to be hit and beaten*

I asked the women to write what they did deserve. The women wrote:

*I deserve love*

*I deserve to be respected*

*I deserve honesty*

*I deserve equality*

*I deserve a safe home*

*I deserve to be free from addiction*

*I deserve to feel safe*

*I deserve to make my own decisions*

*I deserve the right to stay if I want and leave if I want*

*I deserve the right to say no*

*I deserve to be free of you.*

## **PREGNANCY, PARENTING AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE**

A powerful, damning narrative exists about women who fail to achieve an idealised image of motherhood and public, media response to substance misusing women is rarely empathic, tending instead to be punitive and demonizing. Trauma in childhood or adulthood impacts on a mother's ability to care for a child, which can often lead to child protection concerns and ultimately to children being removed into care. Oasis' Therapist Jo Parker named this as:

*'an area that's steeped in stigma, secrecy and shame... so it takes absolute courage... [to speak out about it]... it's the material that's creating the work.'*

If we could understand and articulate some of the women's experiences that disabled their ability to parent, might our work be able to play a role in destigmatizing the women's lives and instead cultivate a more compassionate, empathetic response to them? Who were the real casualties here? What role did men and the women's parents play in their lives? It became clear from our discussion that this project could raise public awareness around the root causes that drive women into such personal and relational jeopardy, to shed light on the impact that cycles of abuse have on women. Could committing to our creative process alongside their involvement in Oasis recovery programme and therapies play a part in suspending the women's day to day self-harming compulsions and replace them with the rehearsal of alternative narratives, taking confident steps in a different direction?

Project Advisory Group member Dr. Neil Aiton, Consultant Neonatologist at Brighton and Sussex University NHS Trust, explained his pioneering method of supporting substance-misusing women to me

– one that prioritised the development of a secure attachment between mother and baby during pregnancy and in the first months of care, (through stabilizing drug or drug replacement intake), rather than enforcing a withdrawal from substance misuse and / or removing the child at birth. This approach contradicted my understanding and experience in the field of adoption, where children are routinely removed into care as a protective measure, with the child’s emotional and physical safety being the absolute priority. How we look after our women and children in society is a key political driver for why I, as a feminist artist, place the female experience centre stage in my work. Dr. Aiton suggested that pregnancy is often the ‘strongest motivator for change that women will ever have’. This medical proposition (along with the need to form alternative narratives, discussed above), shaped my approach to making *Art of Attachment*. To connect another layer into the work – that of some of the younger members of families involved – I facilitated 12 creative workshops with vulnerable children from Young Oasis, which affected me deeply, and subconsciously, implicitly fed into the making process.

To make *Art of Attachment* I suspended my complex feelings about children and the care system, imagining I might revisit this in a future production, which I consequently did with *In Loco Parentis*, in 2020. For *Art of Attachment*, my feminist drive clarified that the main aim of this project was to focus on articulating the personally powerful, politically loaded women’s testimonies as they had been shared with me first hand. PAG member Dr Leslie Ironside, Child and Adolescent Psychotherapist, (interviewed 30 April 2018) charged me to find ‘*something authentic to these people’s stories*’, something that would indicate ‘*this is my story – this is it, this is me... love me, or don’t, but this is my story.*’ How could the project act as a ‘force for change’ for the women and consequently for those who witnessed it? What did I need to put in place to facilitate a process that could nurture the participants whilst also demanding real creative focus, commitment and responsibility from them? How could this process create a circumstance where the women would take the chance to trust me and attach themselves to the work enough for that work to have real value and meaning for them?

During the research phase, I asked the women to write down what they thought 'positive attachment' looks like, between adult and child. They wrote: *'Loving. Respectful. Caring. Guiding. Listening. Kindness. Trusting. Present. Creating and maintaining an environment of safety. Reliable. Protective. Nurturing. Boundaries. Eye Contact. Laughter. Cuddles. Delight in each other.'*

I then asked the women to write what a positive adult to adult relationship looks like. They wrote: *'Equal. Listening. Talking. Peaceful. Shared Motivation. Common Goals. Trust. Love. Understanding. Acceptance. Liking the person who is reflected back at you. Not having to play any games. Agreement. Empathy. Laughter. Totally being yourself.'*

As the women's stories continued to land in the room, I wondered if this project might enable the women to 'take a different view of themselves', translating worn out narratives into a more considered, poetically and politically framed provocation, crafting into existence a different set of perspectives for both the participants and those who saw the work to digest. If I could facilitate the learning of new skills, could the women build resilience, renew confidence in themselves and rewrite the scripts about how 'worthless' they had been told they were?

Participant / performer Vikki noted:

*'You get your view of who you are by how people respond to you and if people are talking down to you, or treating you like you can't be trusted, or you are a risk, then you're not going to think "I am responsible". It's only when people say 'I trust you' or 'I believe in you' or act like they do, that you can see yourself differently...'*

After several weeks working with the women I felt the project should consider the family relations and surrounding environmental culture that had impacted on the women's lives, and. Instead of adding to any narratives that shamed the women for the so called 'choices' they had made, should rather celebrate their survival skills and resilience.

## **SHAME**

Shame is a pressing issue for women in recovery from substance misuse and domestic violence, especially for those whose children are at risk of, or have been removed into care. In one group discussions one of the women, who later left the project, shared her experiences, then retracted and expressed a desire to withdraw her contribution. As Dr. Leslie Ironside suggested: *'all of us will yoyo in our stories: putting something out there, then shame floods in and you back track.'* Hungarian-Canadian physician and author Gabor Mate discusses this in *When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress (2019)*:

*'Shame is the deepest of negative emotions, a feeling we will do almost anything to avoid. Unfortunately, our abiding fear of shame impairs our ability to see reality.'*

I wanted our production to reclaim a positive visible presence for the women, provide a platform for their authentic voices to be heard in a public space and to frame the catalogue of abuse they had suffered at the hands of parents and male partners as a political provocation as well as agonizing, courageous personal statements, to use this process, as American Feminist Carol Hanisch (1969; pg. 2) writes, to *'overcome self-blame, discuss their situations amongst each other, and organize collectively against male domination of society.'* I aimed to

present an assertive, powerful vision of the women to demonstrate their incredible emotional strength, as well as their vulnerability.

## **DYADIC DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOTHERAPY (DDP) and PACE PARENTING**

*'Neglect reduces the capacity for play'. Golding and Hughes (2012: pg. 54)*

Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP) is a technique designed to develop connection, nurture confidence and build a sense of security in traumatized children, developed by psychotherapists Dan Hughes and Kim Golding. DDP suggests healing can be developed through connection, a sense of belonging, social interaction and authentic exchange, focusing on the intersubjectivity that is at the heart of all meaningful relationships:

*'In loving a child, a parent is opening herself up to this mutual influence, and in the process both can grow stronger... This is intersubjectivity... which allows each partner to discover what is unique and special about the other and share this understanding together. How we see ourselves - our very sense of self - is an outcome of these intersubjective relationships...'* Golding and Hughes (2012: pg. 31)

Violence is attachment gone wrong, and often results in the violated child becoming the violent, neglectful adult, with repeated catastrophic results. I felt genuine empathy towards the women at the heart of this research process for *Art of Attachment* and an innate, at times heart-breaking, acceptance of the stories they shared in the room and the waves of emotional responses that came with it. Trust between myself and the participants grew alongside mutual

peer relationships and understanding between the women themselves. The process I led allowed leader and participant to become *'aware of... the others thoughts, feelings, wishes, beliefs – that is her inner life – without trying to change it. You simply experience what her experience is and understand it as it is, not as you might want it to be... you are open to her inner life.'* Golding and Hughes (2012: pg. 87).

In DDP the child suggests a theme and the therapist follows. It can seem like a passive approach, but rather than 'doing to' the child, this approach respects and works with what they bring into the space. I followed the women's lead deep into a discursive exchange within this creative process, mirroring the 'follow-lead-follow' at the heart of DDP that aims to offer agency to the client and requires the therapist to improvise with whatever comes up. The early stages of my process were almost the opposite of 'directing' work. I bade my time, trusted that a considerable period of listening, gathering and musing on themes would ultimately offer up the direction the work might need to take and that all the talking would produce enough material to form the foundations of a meaningful production.

As an adoptive mother I attempt to implement PACE parenting at home. PACE parenting is an approach associated with DDP, that supports traumatized children to revise their view of themselves, reinforcing the child's notion that they are loveable and that safety with a parent can exist, where before there has been a limited sense of safety to hold on to. PACE Parenting is based on playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy. The foundation of PACE parenting is based on the notion that if verbal and non-verbal interactions are playful, accepting, curious and empathic, a person can heal from past trauma to become more emotionally healthy, find relationships easier, regulate emotions, manage stress and understand emotional and physical experiences better. PACE parenting helps parents to see the strengths and positive features of



their child that lie underneath often negative and challenging behaviours, whilst helping children to learn to trust their parents. It also helps the parent to demonstrate that they are doing their best to understand their child. I propose that my socially engaged practice, when delivered at its best, is based on similar principles to PACE parenting: where the space I facilitate, and the manner in which I lead, aims to provide a playful and supportive context in which participants can safely find their voice and freely express their emotions. Play is the opposite of depression, it shapes the brain and opens up the imagination.

Meeting the women at face value, accepting their lived experience and current situation felt natural within a creative process where a principal requirement is that participants somehow offer parts of themselves to the work. Facilitating the early research workshops with Oasis, I followed the women's lead in my attempt to make sense of their traumatic experiences, allowing their stories to land in the space over an extended period of time. As an artist and facilitator, straying into what felt like therapeutic territory at times, I asked Dr. Ironside how I might approach the women when they were expressing hopelessness about being caught in cycles of abuse and substance misuse. His answer aligned with the foundations of DDP and PACE parenting approaches I am familiar with:

*'The first thing is to accept the feeling: 'of course you are feeling hopeless... after what you have been through...it seems so appropriate'. To be absolutely accepting of it... genuinely accepting of it... so in that moment you're not becoming a rejecting attachment figure, you're becoming someone... authentic. There is contact... ok you've got the feeling and we've got choices here.'* Dr Ironside (2018)

My creative process is as playful, collaborative and democratic as it can be before a directorial distillation and editing process shapes the final work for public presentation. I encourage serious investigation, remain playful, accepting and curious, invite humour into the room and always express delight in participants' achievements until the stage in the process where generation of material needs constructing and distilling into a shape with a more critical, directorial eye. Playfulness provides *'graded doses of positive emotion'*, bringing the child (read 'participant')

*'into connection with another so she can cope with this connection... through a playful relationship, the child develops increased capacity for emotional regulation.'* Golding and Hughes (2012: pg. 87).

*'This is emotionally tiring, but done in a fun way.... You can sit and talk until you don't want to talk about it anymore. Play is more expressive. Going beyond words'*, one of the women stated during the process.

Choreographic material is co-created with performers, never 'on' them, with their personal movement style, physical anomalies, ability, age and lived experience forming a critical aspect of how they bring their authentic self to the process. My work is interested in vulnerability as well as emotional and physical strength. Structurally my work is episodic but often left deliberately fragmented, disrupted or 'unfinished', with the structure itself offering a metaphor for the disjointed, often isolating culture we live in. A fragmented narrative structure is often set against a clear emotional arc for each performer, which, layered alongside other performer's journeys, builds a coherent collage of ideas and expression.

Working with non-professional performers raises questions about what dance theatre 'should' look like, whose lives it represents and who high quality performance work is made for. 'Socially-engaged practice' is currently driving Arts Council England's 10 year 'Let's Create' strategy from 2023 onwards, with a main stated outcome being that '*everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life*' (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-strategy-2020-2030>).

VDT has been ahead of the curve with this approach over the *past* 10 years, measuring success via the *depth* in which people engage in my work, rather than the *reach* of the work (though this has increased significantly via the company's on film and online strategies).

My model of working examines the limitations and social barriers of participants as core principles of the work. The women in *Art of Attachment* had not worked collaboratively or creatively in this way before, so I narrated out loud on the creative process as I facilitated it, explaining why I was doing what I was doing, what I hoped to achieve by doing it and how they might engage fully with the tasks I proposed. This approach also supported the women to externalise rather than internalise their thoughts, separating the individual from the problem. When things didn't 'work' creatively for me, I offered honest insight into why I thought that was the case and checked in to see if they could 'feel' the work functioning or not. A transparent, unpretentious approach seemed to help the women to understand the creative and collaborative transactions at play and encouraged them to share responsibility for what we were making together, rather than allowing themselves to be passively 'done to' again – this time by a dance theatre Director.

Over several months I built rapport with a core group of women, gaining their trust, not least by showing up consistently every week, listening and empathising, slowly drip-feeding imaginative

ideas and ways of working into our process. Four women, Louise, Leah, Annette and Vikki, self-selected to take their involvement forward into the co-creation of a new, full-length live production. From May 2018, we met two times a week and moved the sessions into VDT's studio space at New England House in Brighton, and reviewed and refreshed the safeguarding protocols attached to the project.

*(See Appendix 2: Group Session Safeguarding Guidelines And Appendix 7: Vincent Dance Theatre's Safeguarding Policy).*

With the cast of non-professional participants confirmed, I stepped up the intensity with which we approached the performative task ahead and all sessions were supported by Volunteer Sherryn Watkin (who went on to study Dance Therapy and now works with Young Oasis), Programme Manager Alison Cotton, VDT Understudy Anna Clasper and Oasis Clinical Lead/Integrative Arts Therapist Jo Parker. Moving into VDT's workspace had an immediate and positive impact on the women's sense of professionalism, engagement and responsibility. It was the first time they had worked in a dance studio. The creative environment, as well as an increasing sense of direction towards a making something for public consumption, began to stimulate 'movement' in several senses of the word. In late July 2018, I invited regular VDT collaborators Robert Clark and Antonia Grove into the process to form an ensemble with the women that would go on to devise, perform and film the new production together.



*The four participants in Art of Attachment: Vikki, Leah, Louise, Annette (Photo: Bosie Vincent / Charlotte Vincent)*

## **DEVELOPING PHYSICALITY**

Talking and sharing thoughts and personal experiences in a circle over many sessions seemed the only way to begin this process, as it felt reasonably safe, recognisable and familiar for the women and we conducted this with support with a therapist in the room. But we know and feel more than we can tell and sometimes that tacit knowledge cannot be put into words. This is where movement has a part to play in expression.

Initiating movement with these four women proved to be a much harder task than all the talking. Some of the women entered the process not wanting to be touched at all, deeply fearful that their former, physical ‘body shocks’ from the abuse they had suffered in the past, would be retriggered by another person’s touch.

Initially I explored gentle touch and very simple partnering in pairs and as a group, with acute awareness of the potential for touch to feel unsafe for the women. Contact with another body had for these particular women, been actively avoided for years, so I worked slowly and sensitively, focussing on building trust and always gathering their consent to be touched with each new, gentle physical task I facilitated.

I led ‘safe touch’ warm ups and movement-based activity that encouraged regulation and release, using the breath to reduce anxiety and mitigate against the immediate signs and visible states of panic, freeze or flight that surfaced regularly in the women’s bodies during the physical sessions. Warming up in a circle allowed me to do a physical ‘check-in’ with the women – pay attention to different body parts, acknowledge any discomfort and locate ourselves in the present in order to feel safe.

With trauma memory so locked in the women's bodies, I led the women through basic movement tasks to regulate the body and breath:

- simple yoga sequences
- stretching
- release-based work on the floor, feeling the support of the ground, twisting, reaching
- regulating breath work
- playful games with throwing, passing and catching balls across a circle
- keeping balloons in the air
- gently massaging backs, shoulders, hands, feet alone and in partners
- leading and following using fingertips (eyes closed and open)
- discussing what it was like to lead and follow (the women found leading challenging, following more relaxing)
- maintaining eye contact
- slowly grounding self through taking weight

The physical sessions were designed to 'resource' the women – to renew their relationship with touch, to build physical skills, to bond as a team and to test what they could physically tolerate in order to gain a better understanding of what might be possible choreographically within the work we were to produce together. It took a several sessions for the women to accept that touch could be gentle, nurturing, fun, playful and empowering. Strengthening connections with their bodies gave Leah *'more space in your body. Before something little would happen and it would feel like the end of the world, and now I can shrug it off.'*

As Mitchell states:

*'resourcing is closely connected to the principle of 'dosing' in psychotherapeutic processes, where cognitive, emotional, bodily and relational methodologies can be dosed differently...The right dose can also be to not do the exercise or to do it in a tiny way.'* (2022: pg.229)

## **SKINNER RELEASE TECHNIQUE**

In the early 1990's, I studied directly with American Choreographer, teacher and improvisation pioneer Joan Skinner in San Francisco, training in Skinner Releasing Technique, a practice *that focuses on releasing tension and habitual holding patterns to 'enable greater freedom, power and articulation. At times inward and detailed, oftentimes highly dynamic, this challenging and disciplined approach uses anatomical and poetic imagery, as well as hands-on partner studies. It facilitates the creative exploration of technical principles such as multi-directional alignment, suspension, suppleness, readiness and economy.'* <https://movementresearch.org/people/joan-skinner>

SRT involves the facilitator offering images to participants which work as metaphors for the kinaesthetic experience and offer ways towards understanding technical principles. The poetic imagery fires the imagination and integrates technique with creative process:

*'letting go of stress, letting go of unnecessary holding in our body, letting go of preconceptions about what is supposed to happen, letting go of fear of awkwardness, letting go of the belief that we don't have the right body for*

*dancing. We let go of habitual holding patterns and habitual ways of thinking in order to let something new happen. Eventually, we find energy and power. We rediscover our natural alignment, improve strength and flexibility, and awaken creativity and spontaneity.* <http://www.skinnerreleasing.com/aboutsrt.html>

Whilst facilitating movement with the women, I used what Skinner refers to as ‘guided imagery’, tapping into the imagination, encouraging visualisation of an internal landscape and settling the mind so that the body will start to move instinctively and *‘without the necessity for more verbalisation.’*

As Mitchell (2022: pg. 227) suggests, *‘Relaxing a body part that has learnt to ‘hold’, or bringing energy through breath into body parts that are normally held in ‘static tension’ for the purpose of avoidance and protection... can lead to a release of emotions and an acute moment of vulnerability or overwhelm.’* Despite many moments of fear and deregulation, regular physical and imaginative play allowed the women to start to pay attention and listen to their bodies differently. Phobias began to fade, eye contact between us all increased, weight loss began to occur and, in moving their bodies, a different kind of mental strength began to emerge. Leading movement in this way, the women were women became *‘more active, less one dimensional, not just thinking in their head’*, as Louise put it.

As confidence grew over weeks working together, the women began to enjoy exploring their physicality, giving and taking weight and allowing themselves to physically lead and follow, be held and support other people. The group talked about feeling comfortable with touch being a significant breakthrough after many years of touch being an abusive sensation stimulated by fear.



## **PARTNERING**

The dance theatre work I create rarely relies on verbal dialogue because that results in the work becoming too much like a play. Instead, performers use direct address and 'dialogue' takes place in a physical form, via partnering. Partnering relies on the physical principles of touch, gravity, momentum, inertia and the sharing points of contact and weight between two people. Partnering is a playful, democratic leveller with people of differing body shapes and sizes, ages and abilities. As well as Skinner Release Technique, I trained for many years in Contact Improvisation, a system of movement initiated developed by American Choreographer Steve Paxton. Contact Improvisation involves rolling, falling, tipping upside down, giving and taking a partner's weight through all surfaces of the body and following a shared physical point of contact through space together. To enable this (in my interpretation of Contact) it is essential that you 'find your centre' which grounds the body and enables it to use yourself, another, the floor to move. Grounding your physical centre also centres the mind, make participants feel powerfully in their own 'flow', and, in my experience, results in participants feeling strong, trusting, capable, physically free and 'in touch with' the other human being they are moving with. With this in mind, I taught the women:

- to give and take each other's body weight
- to catch the weight of each other's heads and other body parts
- to fall and lean into each other, gaining trust that they would not be dropped
- to apply these techniques to inanimate objects (tables / chairs / found objects) and the floor
- to manipulate objects as 'partners' in the space

- to emulate martial arts-based self-defence movement (empowering blocking / striking movements)
- to build sequences with a partner

Skinner Release Technique aims to create *‘a class atmosphere that includes all parts of us... we leave with more energy than we had when we came. And with ideas flowing.’* From our practice together, supported by Clark and Grove’s skill and experience, movement sequences began to emerge with the women, at their pace, as they began to discover more fluid ways of following their inner creative impulses. (<http://www.skinnerreleasing.com/aboutsrt.html>)

Natural partnerships began to emerge between Annette and professional collaborator Antonia Grove, and between Louise and Robert Clark. We started to repeat and remember phrases, which as a helpful neurological by-product, supported the development of the women’s short-term memory. We laughed a great deal at the happy accidents and unexpected outcomes that always take place with this kind of physical, improvisational creative practice. Our bodies ‘attuned’ to each other, building secure attachment patterns and building trust between us all:

*‘This non-verbal attuned dance among those who are communicating is where the affective component of the dialogue lies. It generates safety... it invites new events into the storytelling process in a way that makes them much less likely to be avoided or defensively engaged.’* Hughes, D. (2011: pg. 46)

We had discussed the relentless weight of what women have to ‘carry’ in a patriarchal society: babies, injury, illness, weight, work, childcare, infertility, miscarriage, the fight for equality. So

much responsibility held in our bodies, hearts and minds, so much potential fragility.

Recognising this, the women began to use the group as a support system, gaining individual and collective strength from sharing stories and feelings, feeling less alone through doing so.

One participant said '*we are carrying scars you cannot see*'. When working, I constantly scan the room for what might be used performatively within the work we are creating together. Material is not always generated by the central creative task I have set. Sometimes the *way* a task is approached (confidently, timidly, a bit confused), or the way the resulting material is presented (apologetically, shyly, with gaps and awkward silences), may offer more interesting insight into the subject matter than a neat response. The tone of voice, or a snatched conversation about how to approach the task, often carries more creative currency than the main response to a creative task that someone may be working on. It is my job to pick up on the nuances, the slips of the tongue, the lost or forgotten words and other 'mistakes' which made when performers are not able to process an emotional truth that the task may be trying to uncover. How to make the women's scars, and those accountable for them, visible in this work? How to re-frame and re-author the women's life stories so they could authentically speak their own words, their own truth?

How to set creative tasks so the women could start to imagine creatively 'staging' their experiences, thoughts and feelings into a visual image, a set of gestures, a duet, a monologue, a list: something *outside* of themselves that could be performed for an audience to 'bear witness' to, understand them better, judge them less?

The work I create is usually episodic, non-linear and usually held together by an emotional and political arc that layers and swells across the whole piece. Each scene within a work is usually

able to stand alone as an individual 'enquiry' or episode. As I structure and layer these scenes into what I consider to be a coherent choreographic, verbal, textual, visual, sonic 'whole', the form and content often draws from and mirrors the creative process the group has been through to make it.

## **LIFE STORY WORK**

Life Story work helps care-experienced children to understand their history, build a sense of identity and offers a realistic account of known events to dispel unrealistic fantasies about birth parents and what 'might have been', had they not been removed into care. It links the past to the present, helping a child to understand how early negative experiences continue to affect them. Life Story work also enables adoptive parents to develop empathy for the child and removes the child's sense of self-blame for what has happened to them, which in turn promotes better self-esteem and self-worth. As Golding notes (2014: pg 27) *'story telling brings the affective (emotional experience of the story) and the reflective (content of the story) together, with the verbal components of the story enriched by the non-verbal.'*

Life story work is a 'sense making' tool - one which underpinned the creative process for *Art of Attachment* through the reshaping of memories and experiences into a more coherent narrative for each woman, into a narrative that could be 'read' by an audience via the layering of text delivered through direct address and the edited verbal testimonies from the women, via physical and visual images we created, underscored by Jules Maxwell's sound composition.

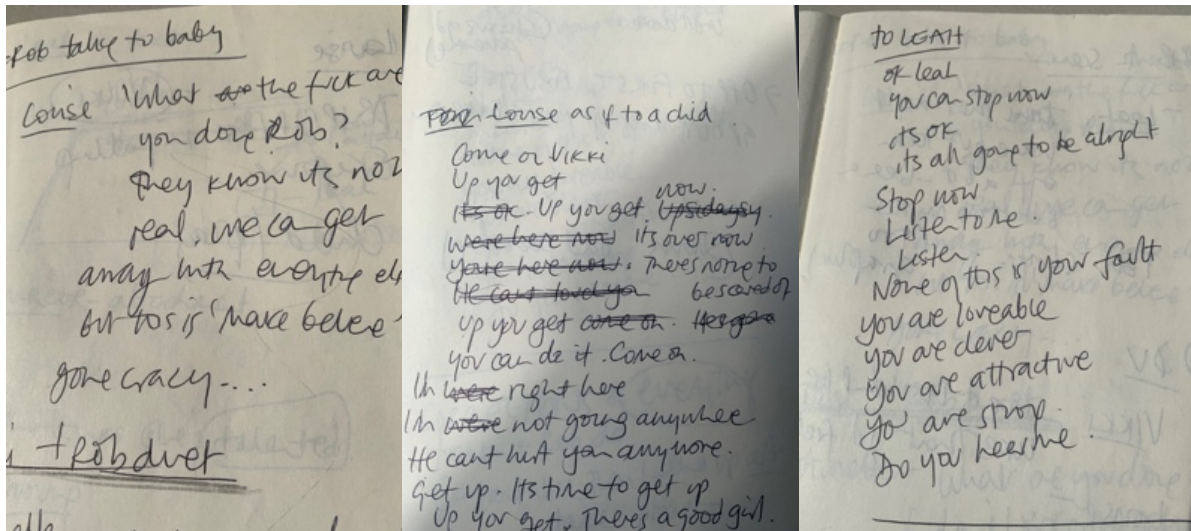
Vikki commented on this:

*‘Charlotte is taking our stories and turning them into something beautiful... in counselling the talking just creates heart ache’ and ‘care workers are cautious and avoid asking difficult questions. I need to be challenged. That is what brings the healing. Telling your story to someone who is learning about the subject, rather than someone who has heard it all before.’*

Metaphor is one way in which we process our inner experiences. For children who have experienced trauma, neglect or abuse, *stories* play an important part in helping make sense of their thoughts and feelings to find a way to grow and change. Stories help us to learn about how our physical, social and interior worlds work.

For *Art of Attachment*, my approach to representing the women’s lived experience remained practical and unsentimental. Keeping the physical, visual and textual metaphor imaginative and grounded, I hoped to lay bare the external factors that had influenced the women’s lives but leave it to the audience to feel and process their own responses to that as a provocation. We discussed how an understated presentation of the women’s complex stories would be more effective and powerful than too much ‘drama’, how nuance requires an audience to move *towards* a work and too much didactic exaggeration and moralising hyperbole can push an audience away. With this in mind, I introduced the women to the brilliant simplicity of a sound loop called ‘*No No No No – New Museum*’ from a CD of Bruce Nauman’s sound installation *Raw Materials* I had seen at Tate Modern, where single words are repeated over and over, with a different emphasis each time. In this extraordinary work disembodied voices speak into the space via a series of directional speakers, describing psychological states that are at odds with the calm delivery of the voice itself. We discussed how Nauman’s provokes and disorients his audience, refusing to offer to offer solace or affirmation around the material presented. The

immediacy and impact of this work, which I used to set a creative task that resulted in some empowering, rhythmical table-banging material, and developed a desire in me to follow Nauman's creative commitment to make work that is like getting hit in the back of the neck. You don't see it coming; it just knocks you down.



After several months of research, improvisation and play, the devising process for the live production of *Art of Attachment* started over two weeks from 2-18 July 2018, then over 5 weeks, September-mid October 2018, with the professional performers, non-professional participants, understudy Anna Clasper, therapist Jo Parker, volunteer Sherryn Watkin and Oasis Project Manager Alison Cotton. The devising process focussed on developing ensemble and individual scenes, working 5 days a week with professional performers Clark and Grove joined for two mornings a week by the women, which, as the women began to acknowledge they were part of something bigger than themselves, and as we all began to understand the enormity of the personal and creative challenges ahead, soon became 2-3 full days a week.

## STAGING IDEAS

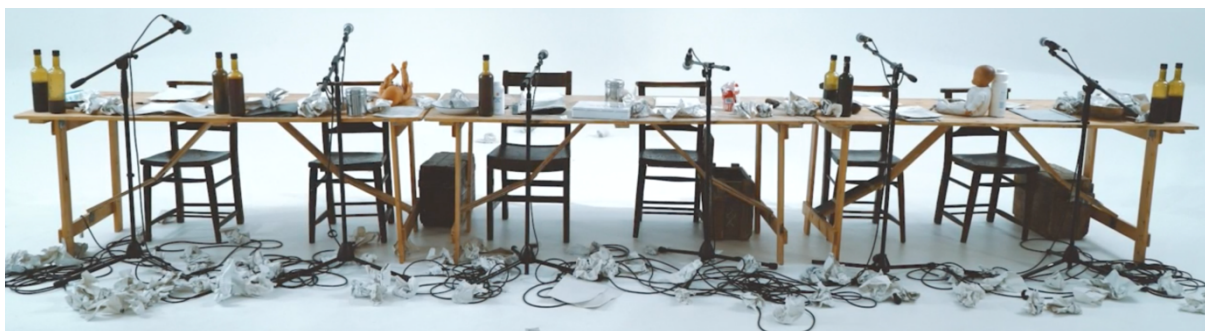
Aesthetically reminiscent of past VDT productions *Test Run* (2006), *Motherland* (2012) and *Shut Down* (2017), the stage and costume design for *Art of Attachment* live production is deliberately monochrome and un-fussy, with black floor and tabs and understated black and white costumes. The film work was designed to be the polar opposite, mostly shot in a film studio in Brighton with a white floor and white infinity wall behind. Objects from the real world carry literal meaning into a fictional space and ground action in a recognisable reality. Wooden trestle tables, a plastic doll, dark green wine bottles, red fake blood, talcum powder, wet wipes, reams of script papers, a gun, a white and blue hospital gown and vintage wooden ammunition boxes, repurposed from *Motherland* (VDT, 2012) and *Virgin Territory* (VDT, 2016) breaking the monochrome design. Real world objects, transformed by their use on stage, can take on a metaphorical meaning so that, as Tufnell and Crickmay (2004: pg. 74) note, *'through their particular character they provide something to respond to'*, and as scholar/writer Josephine Leask discusses in *50 Contemporary Choreographers* (2021: pp. 574-580)

*'Vincent's approach to set design is deliberately low-tech, ethical and un-ornate, favouring old fashioned looking objects from the real world such as desks, chairs, blackboards, and recycled sets and props. She prefers muted and earthy colours which suit the tone of much of her work.'*

A line of four, 2 metre trestle tables in *Art of Attachment* are designed to provide a protective, physical barrier between the women and the audience which I felt would enable them to feel safe whilst performing. Unlike in other work I've made, where an initial stage set up transforms visually and physically over the duration of the performance, these tables do not move, remaining in place to anchor the action whilst also providing a safe place for vulnerable women

to sit behind, steady themselves against or take shelter underneath. The line of tables suggests a formal panel, an interview, a court room and by placing the performers upstage of and behind them, facing out, women could speak with some authority as the audience assumes the women's usual position as passive and voiceless and 'in the dark'- evoking the lack of agency felt so often by these women in the many formal interview and panel settings they had encountered, having to explain themselves and their choices to social workers, police, medical practitioners and therapists to gain access to support. At times, the women took charge of the downstage space, stepping forward into the downstage arena to perform their own stories, duets and narratives.

The repeated paper shuffling choreography alludes to the formality of the many 'systems' these women encounter, a metaphor and demonstration of how these women's lives have often literally been in the hands of others. I wondered how would performing from a perceived position of authority affect the women's physicality. I asked the women to imagine being the judge, doctor or social worker, shuffling case papers, sitting differently, powerfully, upright, the cast worked as a chorus. Feeling a shift in power, Annette commented: *'I haven't felt this good for years.'*



When Robert Clark smashes the stage right table to the floor, as part of a duet with Antonia Grove portraying domestic violence, it feels brutal in both fictional and 'real' terms. His action



exposes the women, removes their protection, makes them vulnerable to his aggression. The sound of the table crashing to the floor is shocking within the delicate context of this delicate production. Led by Grove, the women regain control by resetting the tables, tidying up the mess caused by the only male figure present, as they have done many times in their own lives whilst Clark, ashamed, curls up on the floor. In this moment Clark represents both misogyny and 'the system' the women have experienced, the resulting scattering of papers that shape the women's lives - representing the court orders, birth certificates, adoption papers, child protection plans, restraining orders, refuge applications, mental health assessments and medical forms passed on and processed over and over again, papers that literally take their lives out of their own hands and place them into the hands of others. The collapse of the table also represents the bureaucratic fragility of the social work system: a detail missed by a social worker and a child's safety is compromised, a woman hospitalised.

I made an early decision that the cast of 6 would remain on stage for the whole performance, supporting individual scenes as a chorus, taking part in segues and transitional scenes, building an ensemble language in order that the non-professional cast could experience what professional performance feels like from inside a production.



Images from **Art of Attachment** film installation, 2021. (Photo: Bosie Vincent)

Clark and Grove 'stood in' for aspects of production that needed more sophisticated choreography or that would be too triggering for the women themselves to perform live.

*'When we gather the courage to examine our past and develop the ability to reflect on and then tell our own stories in a clear and coherent way – where we are neither running from the past nor becoming preoccupied with it - we can begin to heal from past wounds... we rewire our brains... you have the power to liberate yourself now from a past you did not create... Then out of that liberation you can begin taking responsibility for your behaviour going forward... what clinicians call 'agency.'* Siegal and Payne Bryson (2020: pg. 67)

As a maker of dance theatre, I balance abstract and literal languages: movement and gesture with text and spoken word. Whilst both dance and words can be poetic, carry emotional weight and are both open to interpretation, text offers something more concrete, readable and specific to communicate specific ideas, thoughts, politics and themes, when movement alone is not specific enough. I thought it was vital that each of the four women should develop one key scene that encapsulated part of their story and if possible, perform it themselves. Vikki had begun to bring her own written material into the studio, which I imagined I would be able to find ways to stage with her to form her solo scenes. I asked writer/performer Wendy Houstoun to work over the summer with me to write and shape texts for the other three women to come back to in September 2018, after a 5 week break from the process. As Houstoun comments in Vincent Dance Theatre's online series *VDT Practices: Wendy Houstoun: Using Text (2022)*:

*'This layering of dance with everyday actions extends the form into one that can be understood by a wider range of people, rather than a specialist dance audience. The process for finding such material begins with extended periods*

*of improvisation based on tasks set around the central idea behind each particular work in which the performers will explore partnering, text, costumes and real-world objects...'* (<https://youtu.be/Z0bLTYXuDBo>)

## WENDY HOUSTOUN'S WRITING

The writing process with Houston for *Art of Attachment* took place remotely, exchanging documents and m-pegs via emails and discussing potential content via video calls and on the phone.



Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021. (Photo: Bosie Vincent)

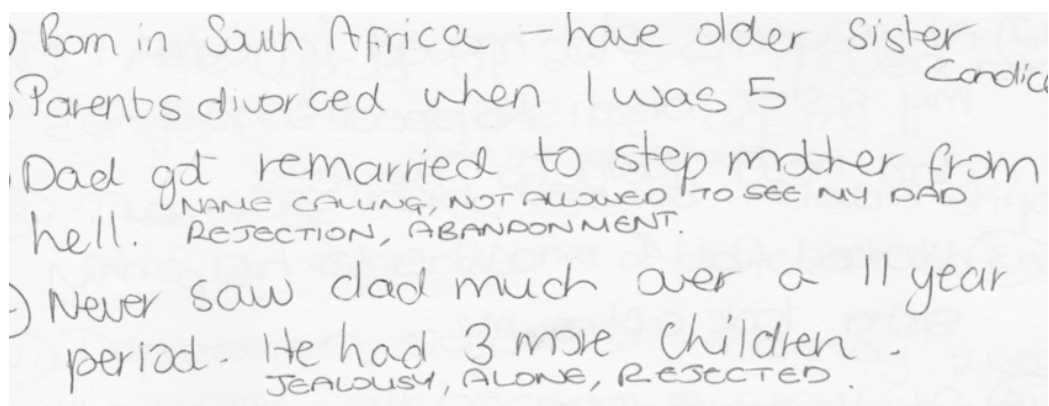
The work I produce is designed to appear straightforward, practical almost, but in its construction and content is nuanced and multi-layered. The function of Houston's language in this process was to textually capture complex lives, writing abstracted language and editing captured conversations from our process to partner, underscore, rub up against and sometimes stand in for or accompany physical activity happening on stage. There's a relationship and interplay between the visual, sound and text elements that weave through and form the work, as Houston (2022) notes:

*'The texts I offer, I would call them vignettes really, vignettes or episodes, they leap around in time, in scale, in size, in volume, in intimacy, in tone... Something may be happening and the words are*

*battering it... the dialogue might work almost slightly obliquely to it, almost like you've taken the soundtrack off something and put it up against an image of something else - letting things collide.'*

VDT's work is not verbatim theatre. Houstoun describes it as '*framing*' rather than '*fictionalising*' the lived experience. The text moves the words away from the original source or person, for someone else to share or narrate, with performers standing in for, or accompanying, each other, with words often offering a rhythmical score to move to.

I talked remotely to Houstoun about the material and tasks we had been working on in the studio and, with the participants' due consent and permission, sent her edited extracts of captured conversations, fragments of writing by the women, ideas from notebooks, formal medical records and psychological assessments that had been shared with me by the group, chronologies of memories, lists of ideas, images from the women's journals that I had asked them to keep for the duration of the creative process.



1) Born in South Africa - have older sister  
Parents divorced when I was 5 Cordia  
Dad got remarried to step mother from  
hell. NAME CALLING, NOT ALLOWED TO SEE MY DAD  
REJECTION, ABANDONMENT.  
2) Never saw dad much over a 11 year  
period. He had 3 more children.  
JEALOUSY, ALONE, REJECTED.

Leah's Journal entry, devising process for **Art of Attachment**, 2018

Houstoun listened, notated and logged the recorded conversations. She absorbed the ways the women were thinking and talking and was keen that the text would mirror back and elevate the women's words, '*maintaining the heart of an emotional story, but cooling down the language,*

*presenting it more plainly*, which aligned well with the emotionally sensitive, but non-sentimental, approach directing the physical creative process.

I suggested to Houstoun that we would need one 'anchor text' for each woman and that these texts would be read from the script by one voice into a microphone at the table, accompanied by physical material performed downstage by the woman whose 'story' it was. Houstoun's text, alongside the visual and physical work we were generating in the studio, together with Vikki's solo text and performative contributions, went on to form the backbone of the live production. Houstoun wrote an introductory text for all four women (*So Here I Am, Sitting Here*), solo texts for Leah and Annette and also edited a looping excerpt from a group conversation I had captured earlier in the process. This edit was later used by Clark and Grove as a score for their *Faulty Woman: Love and Pain have been Confused* duet, which Composer Jules Maxwell embedded into the emerging soundtrack.

*'I can appear to trust people. My ability to detach from someone who I'm having a physical relationship or something...My skills at that are good, my skills at that are good. Love and pain have been confused. They've been so mixed up...'*

Houstoun's *Hope Text* framed the ending of the work, capturing the resilience of the women to keep going, put one foot in front of the other against the odds, daring to dream of a different path, to make a different set of choices.

***Leah - Stop.***

*Reach out*

*to friends,*

*to right directions*

**Annette** - *To our kids with new affections*

*Taking on the search for what we lost-*

**Vikki** - *The cost we paid in full.*

*Not that its laughter- or that happy ever after stuff –*

*Just bits of hope, to cope*

*to bend, not break,*

*to reach, not ache,*

*To weave and breathe-*

**Louise** - *A chance to step- with one foot- then another.*

**Vikki** - *Hold onto stuff that matters...*

**Annette** - *We breathe.*

**Leah** - *We breathe.*

**Louise** - *We listen.*

**Vikki** - *We breathe.*

**Annette** - *We feel.*

**Leah** - *We listen.*

*(See Appendix 3 for Full Script of Art Of Attachment Film Installation, 2021).*



## SOUNDTRACK

Embedding language in the form of testimonies jolts us out of the abstract and into something specific literal, personal and provocative. The soundtrack and any songs performed live within VDT's work are composed in the studio by Composer Jules Maxwell. Maxwell and I have collaborated to create VDT's production work onstage and on film since 2016. His role is three fold: to create musical or ambient sound tracks to accompany the dance aspects of my productions; to embed testimonies edited by myself of Houstoun in to his composition, to source sound effects, should they be needed, and to develop a suite of soundtracks – often various versions or etudes of the same track - that come together in a particular order to accompany the work and that 'make sense' for the performers to work with.

*'I think the sound score helps create a distinct world in which the work can exist. So even before I see anything, it is important for me to talk to Charlotte to get the measure of this world which she is hoping to create. Music in the creation process can energise the performers and enable ideas to emerge which may not otherwise have occurred.'* Jules Maxwell

Following initial conceptual discussions, Maxwell usually visits the studio over 5 or 6 times during a devising process and we also collaborate remotely, Maxwell sending material to me via email which I listen to and try out in the studio, feeding back, discussing and resending the work back and forth until the final final production week where Maxwell is present in the studio and then the theatre with me, completing, tweaking and layering the soundtrack until the premiere,

incorporating my directorial changes as the work goes through its final refining processes. The soundtrack is programmed into Q-Lab and operated by Maxwell for dress runs and the premiere, and then handed over as a final soundtrack to VDT's Production Manager Mat Ort to take forward on tour or into the film making process.

## **INDIVIDUAL WOMEN'S STORIES**

*'The strength of the piece did come from the fact that these were experiences of the people you were looking at on stage – direct experience – you were very aware that the people in the room had experienced what they were talking about.'* Audience Feedback, *Art of Attachment* live production, 2018

### **VIKKI**

Vikki was the most independently creative of the four women, bringing texts and diary entries into the studio as suggested material to work with, preferring to work alone and closely with me, emailing me out of hours with new ideas and working with dedicated concentration to overcome many life-long anxieties and phobias. Vikki developed two solo scenes for the work, and narrated scenes for other performers, speaking Wendy's words.

In the live work, Vikki performed a simple circular dance that we choreographed together, based on a conversation I had recorded and edited where she had explained her reasons for not wanting to become a mother. In the scene she transformed her cardigan into a baby, performing a younger version of herself with her own recorded voice accompanying simple movement that switched between childlike skipping and the suggestion of maternal care:



*'I was scared that if I had my baby, because I was... even if I didn't use while I was pregnant, which I would have had to have had a withdrawal... Even if I didn't, that I thought because I still have an addiction problem I won't bond properly with... like 'coz attachment is a two-way thing and I felt like I won't be available enough to give my baby what it needs.'*

Vikki and I also worked together with a piece of her own writing that details her experience of childhood sexual violence. With her permission, I edited the text to remove the perpetrator's identity and some graphic and self-blaming elements and set a polyvagal, displacement task to experiment with how she might deliver these difficult words. Manipulating pastry dough gently with her fingers emulated the use air drying clay in therapy – it calms and regulates the nervous system. Using her hands metaphorically draws attention to the words she is saying about 'his hands'. Thumping the dough with a rolling pin acts as a physical metaphor for her, the violent acts that were done to her and the consequent pain she suffered at the hands of her step-father. The scene became a slow and steady articulation of terrifying abuse, every brave and accusatory word heard and punctuated through her kneading action with the flour, water and dough. I placed a bowl of water for her to rinse her hands in a religious gesture that also allowed her to physicalize her desire and inability to wash her hands and body clean of the effects of the abuse and the impossibility of this. Vikki performed this scene with acute sensitivity, bravery and understanding of the impact of the metaphors involved. The effect was powerful and arresting. She said: *'turning things in to art helps you process them, helps you neutralise the pain.'*



Images from **Art of Attachment** film installation, 2021. (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

Night- time for Vikki was a source of terror, not comfort. The subject matter in her pastry scene reinforced the work’s ongoing enquiry about parents being caregivers, not ‘scare-givers’.

Thinking more about bed times, I asked the group to reflect on songs from their childhoods and lullabies to them as children. Vikki taught the group a Jewish song she had learnt as a child, *Ma Nishtana*, where the child asks the parent questions to help them understand about heritage, tradition, food and family. The song consists of 4 four questions, one of which is ‘*Why is tonight different from all other nights?*’ a refrain both haunting and mournful when set against Vikki’s precise and poetic account of child sexual violence. Vikki sung these words and the rest of the cast hummed the melody of *Ma Nishtana* as a kind of chorus to accompany scenes within the work. Composer Jules Maxwell also adapted the melody as a recurring refrain used throughout the soundtrack.

## LEAH



Images from **Art of Attachment** film installation, 2021. (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

Leah had some experience of performance at school, but, troubled by her physical size and conscious of being 'over-weight', she preferred to deliver text within this work, despite engaging well in the movement sessions I facilitated, particularly when working with Clark.

*'The way you were parented significantly influences the way you view the world and how you parent your children. But what's even more crucial is how you've made sense of your own childhood experiences – how your mind shapes your memories to make sense of how you are in the present. Whilst you can't change the past, you can change how you come to make sense of it... What does it mean, specifically, to make sense of our life story... to develop a 'coherent narrative'. Siegal and Payne Bryson (2020: pg. 64-65)*

As part of the devising process, I had asked the women to write a chronology of key events in their lives, to start to make sense of individual life stories, to offer some objectivity about whether we were trying to represent certain parts of their experience within the work, (as Vikki was doing in scenes specifically concerning abuse and abortion), or trying to represent the shape of a whole life to demonstrate the catalogue of difficulties that stack up and drive some women towards misusing illegal substances as some kind of release. Leah was open and vocal about her very challenging upbringing. She brought an Emotional Assessment Record about her early life that had recently been unearthed to the studio, offering it as material to work with. Having not yet processed the content of the Assessment in a psychotherapeutic context, Therapist Jo Parker expressed concerns about Leah using this as source material. Leah was, however, adamant that she wanted to work with it, so, with her permission, I sent it, along with

Leah's Life Story chronology to Houston to draw on, reframe and piece together as a performance text for us to use:

*History. Subjective*

*Age: Under 30.*

*Parental Information: Parents divorced.*

*Maternal: Dead (cause: suicide).*

*Paternal: Remarried.*

*Aunt and Uncle (In Loco Parentis) 5 years.*

*Grandmother (In Loco Parentis) 2 years.*

*Nationality: unknown*

*Schooling: Boarding School from 9 years of age.*

*Substance Abuse: Recorded as Cannabis, Alcohol, Cocaine.*

*History of self-harm.*

*Other: reports multiple relocations across countries and continents.*

*Witnessed domestic abuse of mother at young age...*

Continuing our exploration of songs and nursery rhymes, Leah shared a lullaby from her childhood and taught us the melody. I asked her to sing to a doll I had brought into the space, as she would to a real baby.

*I've a dear little dolly*

*She has eyes of bright blue*

*She can open them and shut them*

*And she smiles at me two*

*In the morning I'll wake her*

*And we'll go out to play*

*But I like best to rock her*

*At the end of each day.*

I wondered if this image could look forward in time to encapsulate Leah's real desire to be a mother, whilst also looking back to the lack of appropriate care she had experienced as a young child. Leah invested emotionally in this scene, overcoming her fear of singing in public to deliver it, as a litany of abuse and harm was narrated by Louise from the long table, (in the film installation by understudy Anna Clasper), papers piled up around her to represent how Leah's life had been captured and determined by the contents of reports and court orders as she negotiated a confusing pathway into and out of various states of family and state care. To prevent the scene becoming too divorced from Leah's body, the real site of all her listed traumas, we decided to embed the physical representation of a panic attack alongside the text, suggesting the catastrophic impact on Leah's body of the multiple traumas she had encountered over the years. Vocalized by Grove, Leah staged the sudden feeling of disorientation, nausea and breathlessness that a panic attack psychologically and physiologically induces, with her physically doubled up, crushed by the weight of too much responsibility at too young an age, her body sent into breathless freefall. We then showed Leah emerging from the panic to present the list of positive affirmations that, against all the odds, are now driving Leah's life story in a different direction.

## LOUISE



Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021. (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

Louise was naturally apt at movement and really enjoyed the physical aspect of our work together. Building on the partnering work I had initiated with the group, I worked with Rob and Louise to develop a duet informed by, and set to, a conversation I had captured earlier in the process and edited into a looping text, about the struggle to parent well when constantly seeking the next 'bad' (alcoholic) drink. Louise had talked about her kids wondering 'What mother am I going to get today?' and likened her relationship with alcohol to the slippery journey of Incy Wincy Spider in the familiar nursery rhyme:

*'Incy Wincy spider climbing up the spout, down come the rain, completely washed him out and then the sunshine comes out dries up all the rain and then what does the Incy Wincy Spider do? He climbs all the way up again. That's me...climbing up...Then I have a drinking binge. The hangover's gone. And then what does the Incy Wincy Spider do? He climbs all the way up again. Climbs all the way up again. He climbs all the way up again. Climbs all the way up again. I was happy climbing up that spout... yeah, it was hard work, but it was fine. I was managing. But then came the... (PHOOF sound). It takes control, doesn't it? That's why it's an addiction...It's bigger than you, it's bigger than your own being, it's bigger than your soul as such.'*

Using the same doll that Leah sings to in another scene, I suggested working on a simple duet task where Louise would twist and turn to reach for a bottle of (fake) wine, instead of reaching for her 'baby'. Rob's instruction was to encourage Louise to hold and mother her child instead of the bottle and to protect the 'baby' from harm. I added the sound of sirens and a snippet from a film to the end of the soundtrack, reflecting Louise's experience of drink driving. This hard-hitting duet ends with Rob removing the 'child' to an imagined safety, leaving Louise alone on the floor cradling her bottle instead of her child.

## ANNETTE

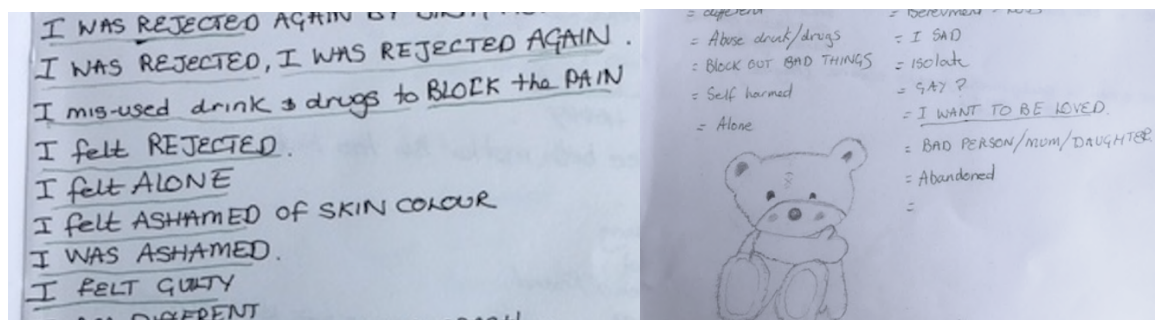


Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021. (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

*'Stories can help a child find a way again.'* **Lacher, Nichols and May** (2005: pg. 659)

Annette is registered as physically disabled and also has a learning disability (dyslexia) and often presented as the most physically and mentally vulnerable within the group. Annette had a recurring hip injury, originally caused by domestic violence, which meant that she couldn't stand for long, so I often adapted movement work to include a seat or support for Annette whenever we worked physically. She carried a strong sense of fear in her body, which sometimes manifested in panic attacks, anxiety and visible low self-esteem. Her sense of self and identity was complex, due to being adopted and mixed heritage. As an adult she had also

experienced abrupt changes, escaping a violent relationship into a women's refuge and losing her children into care. She carried a sense of shame and would mostly talk to me privately in the studio, rather than in the group setting. I found Annette to be very caring and intelligent and deeply thankful to be involved in the project as a way to process some of her pain.



Notes from Annette's Journal, devising process for **Art of Attachment**

I tasked Grove and Annette to develop a tender, partnering duet that could somehow allude to or demonstrate her maternal instinct and care - instincts that had been severely compromised over the years by her relationships with men. This scene is underscored by Vikki's narration of a text that (similarly to Leah's) that writer Houstoun had blended from Annette's life story chronology and directorial notes I had shared. Working on a chair to protect Annette's injuries and disability, Grove found ways for her to give and take weight whilst remaining seated, enabling her to physically and emotionally move through a caring, steady duet together. Annette stated that she had 'built a wall around herself' and due to Grove's safe touch, empathic approach and expert physical guidance, this was starting to break down. The resulting duet seems simple, but carries such weight of meaning. Although we worked safely, the physical strain is apparent in her body, the emotional strain visible in Annette's face, as is the empathy in Grove's. I feel nothing but warmth and connection watching Annette nurture a daughter-like figure in Grove, whilst simultaneously being supported by her. It is an apt metaphor for the push me pull you of attachment when it is insecure or under threat.

### *History. Subjective*



*Age: Unrecorded.*

*Parental Information Maternal: Still alive*

*Paternal: Unknown*

*Adopted: Foster Care (Sexual Abuse)*

*Race: Unknown*

*Sexuality: Unknown.*

*Substance Abuse: Multiple. Alcohol. Cocaine. Cannabis.*

*History of Self Harm.*

*Other: Patient has two children but is now sterilised. No partner.*

*Previous partners whereabouts unknown.*

*History. Objective.*

*Expresses belief of being bad (i.e. Bad mother. Bad person).*

*See APPENDIX 3 for Full Script of Art of Attachment film installation, 2021, from which the above excerpts are taken.*

## **PROFESSIONAL PERFORMERS' CONTRIBUTIONS**

Whilst working intensively with the women, I began a concurrent devising process with long term collaborators Antonia Grove and Robert Clark. Clark and I have worked together for over ten years and often share the writing for his roles in devising new work. Reflecting on the use of text in VDT's practice, Rob states that

*'text can act to contextualise the meaning of the work and can free up other aspects of the work to be abstract... Text acts as a springboard to allow us to go into other areas – the audience are forced to follow – you can't ignore words in the way you can movement.'* Interview Robert Clark, VDT Practices

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZG7iVrEdTg4>

Robert Clark and I co-wrote the text for two scenes for *Art of Attachment* where Clark imitates a social worker's concerned voice, asking an inanimate ('powerless') baby (Leah's doll) to comment on their recent placement away from the birth family. The text was informed by the *Children and Social Work Act (2017)*, which proposes '*acting in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and well-being, of those children and young people; encouraging those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings; to take account of those feelings and for those children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships and education.*' Clark delivers the text dryly, faltering, as he becomes more aware that the baby both literally and metaphorically has no voice in the matters he is discussing:

*'It's good to see you again. There's been a process. A rigorous and thorough process. Do you understand? If you don't understand, you can ask me and I'll explain that to you again and again and again until you do understand. OK? There's no need to be scared. I know change is scary, but with the right support, I think you'll grow to understand the reasons. We really value your thoughts and feelings. Well, then we can all feel good about this...About what we're...doing to you...with you...err...for you... '*

*Art of Attachment* needed poetic 'relief' from all the text, all these words. The two professional dancers main task was to physicalise the more complex choreographic ideas for the production, which we showed the women for scrutiny and approval. As part of the process to generate movement material, I shared my impressions of the women's unresolved grief around their childhoods and attachment patterns in devising discussions with Grove and Clark, sharing ideas around the impact of childhood trauma on their psychological and physical lives and sharing my

own understanding of the behavioural, psychological, cognitive and developmental issues that insecure attachment produces. We discussed the impact of trauma and attachment disorder on the nervous system: the arousal and relaxation cycle that someone with insecure attachment cannot safely regulate. Both artists are parents, so we also talked about the impact of absent fathers, the bench mark of 'good-enough' parenting and how we all feel the product of the parenting we experienced as children. We talked about the inter-generational cycles of abuse that were so emphatically present in the women's lives. We also discussed being bound by inherited, pre-prescribed family scripts and how the production might somehow represent this. We discussed the dual demands and skill needed when facilitating non-professionals within a professional creative process, whilst performing to a professionally high standard within the work as established creatives - how to make appropriate demands on the women, whilst maintaining artistic merit. I tasked Grove and Clark with holding the performative frame for the women from within the work, ready to catch or cover for them should they falter, fall or fail to function in the live performance context, which at times during the devising process felt like a very real possibility.

There is a reciprocal connection between movement and meaning. Both movement and metaphor can bridge an individual's inside world with the outside, and vice versa enabling invisible realities to be made visible. The professional performers task was to make physically concrete certain aspects of the women's experience. When working with text, experienced dance practitioners can physically capture a generalized meaning of the words and perform with the text present to keep the work located in literal understanding. Alternatively, they can create movement then remove the text in performance, trusting that the meaning of the text will be embodied by the connection the dancer has to the meaning of the text that initially enabled them to generate the movement from it. Sometimes dancers instinctively channel the

*feeling* or emotion of text or testimony through their own physical and emotional filters, into their own distinct movement or gestural language. Movement can then replace words and visual metaphors. Poetic text can 'describe' an embodied experience.

I edited the group conversations I had recorded with the women early in the research for this work into looped and distilled soundscapes on GarageBand music editing software for Clark and Grove to work with in the devising process, choosing, composing, sculpting words into a shape that carried meaning for me and that, through rearrangement, offered rhythmical patterns of repetition, looping and fragmentation as well as meaning for the dancers to process into a choreographic shape. Grove and Clark's performances 'stood in' for women's experiences of birth, domestic violence, panic attacks, death and bureaucracy. Together we also developed a hopeful physical duet for the end of the work, as I was keen for the work to contain some optimistic images, positive ways forward to represent how far the women had come by expressing themselves and from remaining with the process for so many months.

Clark and Grove's roles in *Art of Attachment* are deliberately ambiguous and fluid, not representing one fixed character, but rather designed to serve what each individual scene in the work requires to make the women's stories land. Grove slips between personifying birth mother, protective commentator, victim of violence, social worker, public critic, friend., supported by signifying objects that indicates specific states of mind or contexts: a hospital gown, a blood-soaked rope (umbilical cord), endless sheets of paper work, semi-formal, feminine clothing to represent authority. Clark represents a range of male figures, providing a male presence to set the female experience against and alongside.



Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021. (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

Both live and installation productions begin with Grove simulating giving birth, with Clark protecting, then removing, the new-born 'baby' from the mother figure. Guttural birthing sounds, a simulated birth, followed by an immediate portrait of loss immediately plunged the work into the complex, fundamental realities of insecure attachment, leaving an audience in no doubt as to the subject matter of the work from the initial scene.



Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021 and live production, 2018 (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

In their solo contributions to this production, both Grove and Clark use gesture, arms folding and reaching within their own kinespheres, representing an interior world in turmoil or 'translating' text through specific, semi-literal gestures: working to shape the constant tension existing between inner and outer worlds, between what is seen and what is felt.

Gender based violence has been a recurring theme in my work since I founded Vincent Dance Theatre in 1994, to highlight the constant physical and sexual threat women live under, in a culture that remains largely patriarchal and misogynistic, both inside and outside of the home.

As he often does in much of VDT's work Clark represents a kind of 'everyman' in *Art of Attachment*: a violent perpetrator, a gentle male partner, a child's social worker, a suicidal man,

a male wrestling with self-hatred, hurting others because he has been hurt. Signifiers he uses in this work include a gun, wine bottles, scissors, a shirt and tie.

Clark and Grove's brutally poetic *Domestic Violence Duet* (interspersed with the *Trip Trap* scene in the Film Installation) is an uncompromising physical representation of violence against women, with Grove's vocal screeches and the thudding sounds, as she is repeatedly thrown to the floor, heightening the audience's visceral sense of threat.



Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021. (Photo: Bosie Vincent)

Clark and Grove's partnering is choreographically simple, at times within the duet articulating attachment and connectedness, at other times detachment and grim male to female aggression. The duet embodies the terrifying challenges the women had faced at the hands of men, that I had noted during their conversations with me:

*'I'm bruised with nothing to lose'*

*'I honestly can't imagine a nice man'*

*'He would check my phone telling me I'd cheated, tell me I'd deleted messages that I'd never received'*

*'I couldn't get out. I'd have to plan my exit'*

*'Your survival depends on reading other people's moods'*

*'I'm keeping you here for your own good'*

*'You can't run away now, can you?'*

After drafting this harsh duet together, Grove and Clark shared sketches of it with the women, so we could gather their feedback, wondering out loud with the group whether what we had choreographed 'had the feeling of' the lived experience of domestic violence they had articulated to us. Wary both of re-traumatizing the women by showing them the work, and equally of them being blinded by what they might see as clever physicality of the movement material rather than what it signified, I asked them what they would they change to make the duet as impactful as possible. Having watched a sketch, they suggested that Grove 'wouldn't do that' or 'maybe if she did this...' and we altered the material according to their direction.

From fragments of an early conversation I had recorded with the women about being in a violent relationship, Houstoun edited a looping track which Grove and Clark then used to create the *Faulty Woman* duet:

*'I can appear to trust people. My ability to detach from someone who I'm having a physical relationship or something...My skills at that are good...*

*Love and pain have been confused. They've been so mixed up.*

*Don't think I should have a kid, or bring up a kid. That makes me really sad.*

*Sometimes people say things to me and they just make me feel so hollow and sad. If I ever got there, it would be so far down the line.*

*Love and pain have been confused. They've been so mixed up.*

*So, there's this big hole.'*

Recurring images of twisting and falling and being picked back up again dominate Grove's movement language, as a metaphor for how the women talked of their relationships feeling like a game of snakes and ladders, or a spider climbing and falling up the spout - returning to an abusive relationship, alcohol or drugs again and again, not being able to say no, not feeling they deserved anything better and putting their children at risk. Clark, this time playing a patient and supportive role, urges Grove throughout the duet to stand on her own two feet, to take back control.



Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021 and live production, 2018 (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

Vikki said: *'how can I trust again and form healthy attachments after incidents that have taught me that people or the world are dangerous.'* Another reported that her violator had said: *'I'm coming in whether you like it or not'*. This sentence stayed with me, reminding me of nursery tales where three little pigs try to build a house strong enough to withstand the Big Bad Wolf's approach, or where Billy Goat Gruff tries to get over the bridge, past a big angry Troll. Alongside Leah's lullaby and Vikki's Jewish childhood song, I wanted *Art of Attachment* to allude to how well-worn stories are conventionally used to comfort a child with their happy endings, good conquering evil, but how, for traumatized women and the care-experienced children at Oasis I had also been working with, they induce real fear and make a child feel unsafe. I wrote *Trip Trap* as a response to the fear people feel when they aren't safe at home:



*Who's that trip trapping over my bridge?*

*She was 14*

*He was 45*

*She was 8*

*She was 10*

*She was 15*

*She was a child*

*She did not say yes*

*She did not consent*

*She did not know it was wrong*

*She covered up the bruises and the blood*

*She covered the scars and the cuts*

*It was a cover up*

*And she carried on*

*And she carried on*

*She carried on with the world on her shoulders*

*She carried everyone else's shit*

*She took the blows*

*I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down*

*Blow by blow*

*It was a blow by blow account*

*She didn't know it was going to end like this.*

Grove and Clark created a striking, gesture based, physical response to my text, delivered whilst speaking it and using the tabletop surface as a performance platform.



Images from *Art of Attachment* film installation, 2021. (Photos: Bosie Vincent)

According to Clinical Psychologist and Storyteller Steve Killick, in his forward to Kim Golding's *Using Stories to Build Bridges with Traumatized Children: Creative Ideas for Therapy, Life Story Work, Direct Work and Parenting* (2014: pp. 15-16):

*'We learn that houses can be made in different ways and some are stronger and more secure than others we learn that the world is full of dangers, of people or creatures that may be threatening to us. Most importantly we learn that these dangers can be overcome and safety and happiness can be found so we can learn, effortlessly and joyfully about how the world and minds work through stories.'*

## **LIVE PERFORMANCE, FILMING AND LOCKDOWN**

The four women, Grove and Clark performed *Art of Attachment* as a one-off 60-minute live performance after Poet and Broadcaster Lemn Sissay's poetry reading, on 18 October 2018 at Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA), University of Sussex, Brighton. Sharing a bill with Lemn Sissay, *Art of Attachment* sold out, gathering real interest from an audience of 300 that included other women in recovery, staff and families from Oasis, the Project Advisory Group, social care, youth and social work students, social workers, therapists, attachment specialists alongside ACCA, VDT and Sissay's core live performance and literature audiences.

The live work was captured live on three cameras by filmmakers Bosie Vincent, Alvy Vincent and Hugh Fox and edited for documentation purposes.

(See *Art of Attachment (live capture, 2018)*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rSb98ckfjBs>)

My Director's Note in the programme for the live production of *Art of Attachment* states:

*'The performances you see tonight are the result of many hours of talking, sharing, writing, recording, questioning, listening, moving, crying, retracting, redacting, translating, thinking, improvising, trying out, walking out and walking back in again in order to carry on. After a 9-month period of working together, Vikki, Leah, Louise and Annette are carrying themselves and their life stories differently. Well established defense mechanisms, well-worn scripts and high degrees of distrust have been usurped - for the time being at least - by a shared sense of purpose, empathy and self-worth, alongside a visible lengthening of bodies and strengthening of resolve. Art of Attachment is an extraordinarily honest piece of work - a litany of trauma that no child or adult should endure. Yet what shines through the vulnerability, the violence and the hurt is sheer female strength: the ability to stand up, become visible, carry it all and carry on.'* Charlotte Vincent, Director's Note, Programme, 18 November 2018

Three weeks after the live performance (November / December 2018), Film Maker Bosie Vincent and I captured key scenes from the work in a white infinity walled studio in Brighton, with the intention of creating 6 new short films. Three of the four women (Annette, Vikki and Leah) were joined by Understudy Anna Clasper, who had been part of the process from early in the research process, replacing Louise, who had been hospitalised due to a substance misusing relapse. As well as filming the creative material, Bosie and I interviewed the women, asking

them to reflect on their experience of the project, to potentially use as contextualising material in a film installation programmed as part of Lemn Sissay's 2019 Brighton Festival. We edited key scenes into 6 short films in spring 2019, but further work to develop the installation was cancelled due to the Covid 19 pandemic, as was the 2019 Brighton Festival, so the live capture and 6 short films were shelved as I made the decision to furlough VDT's staff as the company went into a period of lockdown.

In 2020, with both film shorts and live capture of *Art of Attachment* still shelved and Sissay's Festival delivered digitally in 2020, my focus was pulled back to live work to produce *In Loco Parentis*, a 'sister' production to *Art of Attachment* exploring attachment from the care-experienced child and adoptive parent's point of view., investigating the emotional and psychological impact of trauma on child development and how an insecure foundation can affect identity, attachment style, trust and a sense of belonging later in life. In March 2020, *In Loco Parentis* premiered live in Worthing Theatres to critical acclaim, but the tour was abruptly cut short due to a second wave of Covid and another period of lockdown.

I returned to *Art of Attachment* on film in 2021, supported by an Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Award of £8,321 (2020), raised by Dr Cath Lambert at the Department of Sociology at Warwick University and also supported by VDT's ongoing Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation funding. I originally intended to edit *Art of Attachment* together with *In Loco Parentis* to create *Home Truths Listening Project*, but on returning to the filmed and captured material from *Art of Attachment*, (and because *In Loco Parentis* had been screened publicly several times as an online / digital offer to universities and for arts venues 'dance on film' offers during the 2020 lockdown), I decided to take a different approach and focussed on a complex edit of *Art of Attachment*.

The unused creative content of both short films and live capture of *Art of Attachment* was powerful, but how the two might feed off each other needed a complete rethink to create a new installation offer. Having edited and produced two complex multiscreen film installations in the past (*Virgin Territory*, 2017 and *Shut Down*, 2018), to simply screen a capture of a live performance in a space and call it an installation was not creatively appealing. The 6 shorts, created three years before, didn't work as stand-alone films away from the context of the full production. So to create *Home Truths Listening Project* (as it was then renamed), working with the material we had, we needed a different approach.

Bosie and I approached the blending of the two sets of material by embedding close ups from the (black) live capture into the (white) short film material, re-editing content from the short films and bringing that material into dialogue with sections from the wider live capture across two screens, a detailed edit that took Bosie Vincent and I six weeks to complete.

See the work *Art Of Attachment, Film Installation* (2021; 39 mins) here:

<https://youtu.be/L69qF3SyCGg>

To give *Art of Attachment* a visible relationship to *In Loco Parentis* as originally intended, we also edited down the full-length live capture of *In Loco Parentis* to a 38 minute compilation of key scenes, to sit in the same space as the new work. *In Loco Parentis Compilation of Key Scenes* (2020, 38 mins) can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/bNTwEJdHVhw>

To contextualize both works within one engaging installation space, we also edited three of the four interviews with the women involved in *Art of Attachment*, filmed in 2018, screening these interviews on 3 smaller TV screens to form a wall of resource material. These were:

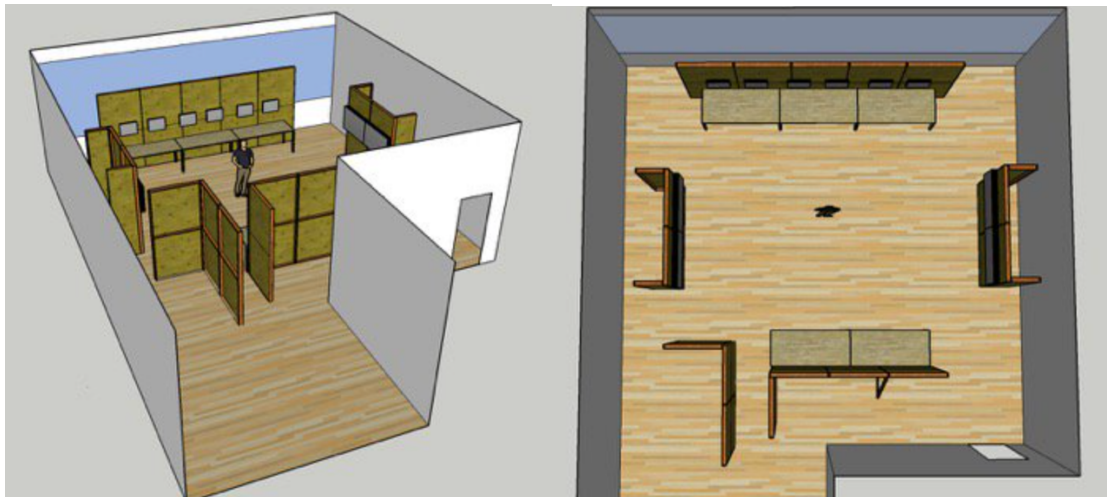
- **Interview with Vikki: Reflections on Art of Attachment (2021):** <https://youtu.be/Ep6EtEkft9o>
- **Interview with Leah: Reflections on Art of Attachment (2021):** <https://youtu.be/0D4sGHN9X2w>
- **Interview with Annette: Reflections on Art of Attachment (2021):** [https://youtu.be/Yv4J6h\\_eJxs](https://youtu.be/Yv4J6h_eJxs)

On two further small TV we added / screened two further contextualising videos:

- **Art of Attachment Explained (2018):** <https://youtu.be/H49m-kNSaYM>
- **In Loco Parentis Explained (2020):** <https://youtu.be/bSRU8ITCURo>

To design the space for *Home Truths Listening Project*, I revisited my approach to early participatory engagement spaces, modelling this new work on a space I designed for the Helen Martin Studio at Warwick Arts Centre in 2015 for *21 Years/21 Works* using an immersive ethnographic approach based on Dr Cath Lambert's research.

<https://www.vincentdt.com/project/archive-engagement-space>). I had replicated this engagement space approach in 2016 as a research process for making *Virgin Territory Film Installation* (<https://www.vincentdt.com/project/virgin-territory/>). To stage *Home Truths*, VDT's Production Manager Mat Ort created computer aided design drawings based on my sketches and our conversations and built the space VDT's studio at New England House, Brighton in October 2021.



VDT Production Manager Mat Ort's CAD mock ups from Charlotte Vincent's designs, VDT's HOME TRUTHS, Brighton, 2021

The installation space was designed to enclose the space, host the screening of the film content and offer a bank of screens to provide contextualising material for the work. I dressed the space with props and artefacts from *In Loco Parentis* and *Art of Attachment*, including the trestle tables, ammunition boxes, wine bottles and chairs. I painted a wall with black board chalk and redrew a child's timeline on it in chalk (from *In Loco Parentis*) and placed the trestle tables from both productions in the centre of the space so audiences could sit communally and could feel physically connected to the work sitting at tables that were a key component from the design. Viewing the work whilst sitting at the central table made the audience's relationship to the screens and each other more intimate and less formal. You could watch the work at either end of the space (there were 2 x two screens playing *Art of Attachment*) offering choice around the point of view from which you watched the work. The soundtrack was played through wireless headphones, given to audience members on entry, which made the experience deliberately more personal and intimate. It also offered a choice to turn off the sound if the work became too triggering (by removing the headphones and returning to the ambient soundtrack in the room. The central table also provided a spacial anchor to host post screening conversations about the work and offered a place for the engagement tasks to sit in the space

which could be facilitated formally or self-led, during the screening and after watching it, depending on personal choice, the group attending and the facilitator guiding activity within the space.

Trauma induces potential physiological changes that affect body reactions and responses. According to Stephen Porges, the Professor of Psychiatry who first proposed Polyvagal Theory, when the *sympathetic nervous system* (SNS) recognizes a threat of possible danger, the Vagus Nerve sends signals that boost neurotransmitters, so the body can respond effectively with fight, flight or freeze responses to any perceived threat. The parasympathetic nervous system brings the body back to homeostasis, by calming the body and lowering heart rate and blood pressure. Polyvagal Theory activities enable people to shift back from primitive responses, immobilization, and mobilization, to what Porges calls 'social engagement'.

Watching **Art of Attachment** is emotionally heavy going and potentially re-traumatising or triggering for anyone who has lived experienced of abuse, neglect, foster care, adoption, substance misuse or sexual, childhood or domestic violence. The space was facilitated at all times by VDT staff trained in safeguarding protocols, who encourages reflection through a pre and post film installation evaluation process, introduced the work, demonstrated the space, made sure everyone present was made aware of the contextualising material and support lines available, facilitated discussion around the work and encouraged participation in the engagement tasks to process the work. I designed several ways to support the calming of the autonomic nervous system for audiences watching the work, placing simple tasks and activities in the room and designing the space itself to engage in both a supportive, communal experience but also allow for people to individually withdraw should they need to.





*Art of Attachment* in Coventry Artspace, November 2021 (Photo: Sian Williams)

I placed air-drying clay in the centre of the table for audiences to press, shape or mould as they watched the work, which supported the inhibition of the SNS response and enabled people to remain regulated. I placed crunchy snacks, chewy sweets and lollypops to offer the opportunity to engage in resistive chewing and resistive sucking, offering a calming oral sensory input. Whilst the sound track with its hard-hitting testimonies played through individual headphones, I also played soft ambient music in the space itself to provide a calm and soothing environment, should audience members need take the headphones off to provide a sensory / emotional break. I designed the central island of 4 trestle tables (the props from the production), to accommodate no more than 12-15 people at any time, so the setting remained and felt intimate, controlled and not too overwhelming in terms of numbers. Sitting together meant audiences could be absorbed in the work, but remain 'in connection' with others, providing a communal, shared experience. I provided a break out table to the side of the larger island instructions for a breathing exercise, should anyone need to turn and face away. This table also contained a little library of books that had informed the work, so could be used as a personal break to return to cognitive function of reading to play with clay to privately regulate away from the central group. The bank of smaller TV's with contextualising and helplines / support

links was separate from the main table, so individuals could turn away from the work, should they need to sit alone awhile. Support lines were printed on paper on these tables, so that people could discreetly take one away if needed for use outside of the space.

As well as the self-initiated engagement activities, I printed out several tasks that could be completed as an informal 'workshop' moment together as a group immediately after film installation work had been seen. The tasks drew together themes of home, family and belonging. Here are three of the tasks I placed in the space:

## ENGAGEMENT TASKS HOME TRUTHS

### AIR-DRYING CLAY TASK

Take a lump of white clay from the central table and a piece of white card to use as a surface to work on. There are tools on the table too. Sculpt or make a response to what you have seen, heard or felt in the installation work. You can leave the object to dry on the wooden trunk. You could also take a picture of it using your phone and share it using **#VDTHomeTruths**.

Here are some results:

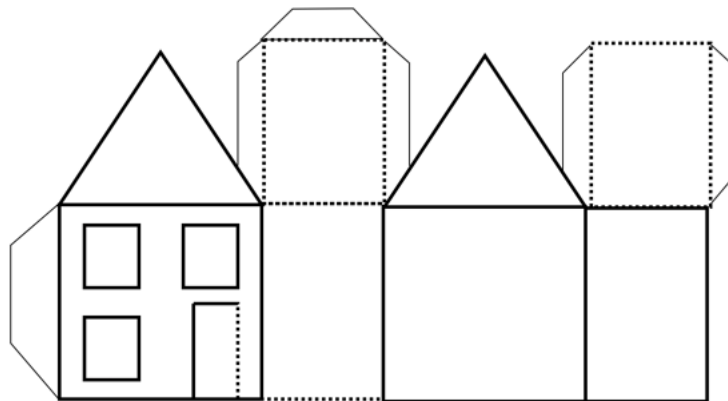


### LEAH'S HOUSE TASK

In **Art of Attachment**, Leah worked with past medical records to piece together the narrative of her life. Her thoughts circle around the abuse she suffered as a young person and how that affected her mental health later in life. In the work, she is singing a lullaby from her past, imagining a kind of comfort she rarely experienced herself as she moved from home to home as a child, looked after by aunts and uncles and staying at boarding school.

**Themes /Triggers:** Childhood trauma / Mental Health and Anxiety / Suicide / Domestic Violence / Substance Misuse.

**Using the template on the table**, cut along the SOLID lines. Cut out the windows as best you can. As you do this, consider: **What should 'home' be for a child?**

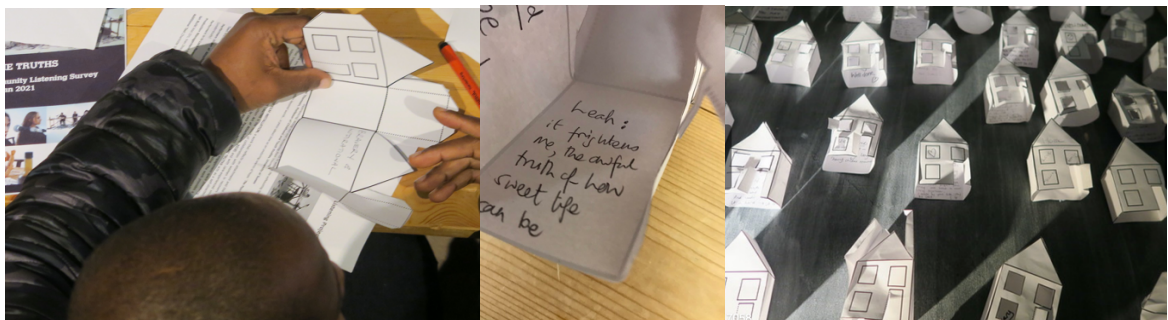


Write three thoughts on the **INSIDE surface** of the house, around the window holes, what you think **'HOME should be...'** Think about the issues that impacted Leah's life in various homes. **What would you like to say to Leah?** (In your professional or personal capacity) Write this on the large triangular surface area of the house (the side without windows). Once you have written on both sides, **construct the paper house with glue**. Blue Tac the house to the wall in the

room. Your words will be visible through the windows. The house will form part of a growing **collection of paper houses**, offering thoughts from professionals and non-professionals alike, to people whose lives are affected by adverse childhood experiences.

If you are happy to share your house, take a picture using your phone and share it using **#VDTHomeTruths**.

Here are some results:



## HAIKU TASK

Children living with parents who are misusing substances or who are living with mental health conditions often show high degrees of concern and care for their parents, with older siblings also taking on caring responsibilities for younger siblings, or children looking after themselves in the absence of 'good enough' parenting. After watching the scene, **close your eyes and sit still**. Notice what thoughts flow into your mind. Sit with these thoughts for two minutes. **Open your eyes**. Take a piece of paper and **write/draw a word burst** of thoughts and feelings you had in response to this scene. There is no right or wrong. A word burst is an instinctive response, scribbled onto a page, in whatever shape or form that comes. **Write a haiku** from your word burst. A **haiku is a very short poem, has three lines and doesn't rhyme**. Here is an example of a Haiku, from Sonia Sanchez, called **Haiku (for you)**:

*love between us is*

*speech and breath. loving you is*

*a long river running.*

In a Haiku, the first line has **5 syllables** (beats) / the second has **7 syllables** / the third line has **5 syllables**. Write your **own haiku**. It could be addressed to the girl, to the mother figure or about a scene you have just witnessed within the work, or to one of the performers in the work.

Pin your Haiku on the wall and /or take a picture of it using your phone and share it using **#VDTHomeTruths**.

Here are some results:

*caring carelessly  
you're slipping between the cracks  
that will swallow you*

*you are amazing  
your strength astounds me always  
keep going keep on*

*Home Truths* was facilitated as a listening project to reach new and different audiences - primarily targeted at social care, family intervention and medical practitioners, therapists, foster carers, adoptive parents, attachment leads in schools and children's trusts. *Home Truths* was designed to test how *Art of Attachment* could best be of practical use to them in their work, caring, parenting, learning, training or general practice. We also opened certain sessions to the general public over a three-week period, two weeks as part of Brighton Digital Festival, and for one week at Artspace Arcadia Gallery, Coventry, in November 2021.

## **THERAPY / NOT THERAPY?**

*'I have gained such confidence during this process in a way better than any therapy I have had in 35 years of trying. Your work, patience and commitment has changed my life. Thank you so very much.'* Annette

British writer and curator Adrian Heathfield (2002: pg. 106) cites performance as '*an ephemeral act... the experience of performance is often something like a trauma... it remains unresolved, haunting our memories, documents and critical frameworks.... It stalls notions of progress, ruptures certainty and eludes historicisation.*'

Since 2016, I have been developing a 'trauma informed' approach to my interdisciplinary, socially engaged, artistic and participation practice, providing safe spaces for imaginative exploration. I am an artist, not a therapist, nor an art, drama or dance therapist. My work involves 'holding a space' for a creative process to take place – a process which can have therapeutic value. Using a gentle and non-intrusive creative approach, facilitated over months, this practice infuses creativity with an understanding of how trauma can affect people, recognizing signs of trauma, resisting re-traumatization and being able to respond to traumatic responses in the room.

*Art of Attachment* brought together experts by experience (the women participants) and experts by profession, (the artistic collaborators, substance misuse and therapeutic professionals), to make sense and creatively represent aspects of Attachment Theory. Through engaging with and exploring the women's attachment narratives, the process aimed to connect self with self, and self with others, through stories told and heard, offering creative pathways towards healthier internal working models for the women involved, increased personal agency and as a result, a slow stepping towards recovery. The work we made together is unsentimental and doesn't demand pity for its subjects. In everyday life, we all present parts of our lives and ourselves as fictional performance. *Art of Attachment* does this publicly and in extremis, with its uncompromising representation of four women's lived experiences 'haunting our memories'

after the event not only because of the unapologetic creative articulation of their trauma, but also because we witness the women conquering the act of performance itself.

Working collaboratively on this project, asking participants to 'bring themselves' to the room to engage in the creative process, both Oasis staff and I were legitimately concerned that the devising process for these particularly vulnerable women might retraumatise and re-enact the women's traumatic pasts, leaving them more vulnerable than before.

As Gabor Mate (2019, pg. 25) states: '*artistic expression by itself is only a form of acting our emotions, not a way of working them through.*' The material we were discussing was dark and challenging and as Van Der Kolk suggests:

*'Freud... believed that re-enactments were in an unconscious attempt to get control over a painful situation and that they eventually could lead to mastery and resolution. There is no evidence for that theory – repetition leads only to further pain and self-hatred.'* (2019: pg. 67).

At times the reliving of past traumas did take place, requiring careful management from trained Oasis staff. One woman said talking about her life to others in the early sessions '*pulled me out of me... reminding me that I'm not there anymore... but part of me doesn't like to disclose the details as it is raw, it's painful. I feel I'm opening rooms that I closed myself and I don't want them to be re-opened.*' She explained that this '*can create a fear of not knowing what I will uncover and what that could do for me*'.

Another woman, who consequently left the process, said one session had left her *'feeling sick... My body is physically responding to the narrative dialogue. Tense, crossing my legs, holding myself. Holding in. Tensing muscles. Clamping jaw. Tapping... I shared too much... I'm not comfortable about going in as deep into my past with the group as much as I did... it feels gross, shameful, sad... I'm in a safe space in my life, but it's a lot of energy. It also makes me reflective of what I've done in terms of drug use and neglecting my son... I can feel unsafe when I share a lot of this.'*

Despite the need to address and manage these challenging moments with the women carefully, *Art of Attachment* had the potential to aid the path to recovery, restoration and repair through the participants managing their relationship with their past, and with the potential failure to continue with the project, as part of the creative process. Through the practice of being together, communicating their emotional and practical needs, expressing their inner selves, discovering different ways of thinking and forming different points of view and being heard, it felt possible for the women to reinforce and find positive steps towards recovery. My process created an environment where the women sharpened their self-reflective, self-protective tools in order to endure the work, set personal boundaries around how much they could comfortably offer into the space, take responsibility for themselves and their own safety and to take care of themselves, their fellow collaborators and the work – all of which engendered emotional and psychological progress, individual agency which aided healing. As well as this, the physical practice we developed had tangible therapeutic benefits to the women who worked with me over several months.

As Preston suggests (2016: pg. 50), bringing 'self' to the creative process and using emotions as source material is *'complex and problematic'*, requiring great agility, responsiveness, skill and



'emotional labour of the facilitator'. Annette expressed some of the cathartic, motivational and therapeutic benefits of our work together: *'I have enjoyed getting the traumas out, banging on the table to get the aggression out... 'I have been in the mental health system for 35 years and I feel the last 9 months has been the best kind of therapy I've ever had and it's created a lot of new beginnings for me. I'm volunteering, I'm doing yoga, I'm getting out of the house every day.'*

According to the European Association of Dance Movement Therapy, Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) is defined as the:

*'therapeutic use of movement aiming to further the emotional cognitive, physical, spiritual and social integration of the individual', offering 'people of all ages, and abilitates a space to explore what drives them, assisting people to develop self-awareness and sensitivity to others and also find a pathway to feeling more comfortable in their own skin.'* (<https://eadmt.com/what-is-dance-movement-therapy-dmt>),

DMT works in the present moment with a facilitator (the therapist) *'remaining alert to emerging metaphor and imagery and attuning to the client's rhythm and flow.'* Working with participants in a playful, person centred, safe and respectful way begins a process where the experience of the present can begin to rewrite the past. Essential tools in Dance Movement Psychotherapy (DMP) are to mirror, synchronize, amplify and interact with the participant's movement material, not only in movement, but also in words. The therapist aims to help a client to find words for their embodied experience, kinaesthetic perception, emotional response or trains of thought. In my practice I notice a strong link between DMT (which I am

not trained in) and Skinner Releasing Technique (which I am) – both of which *resource* the participant to explore and express themselves with body and text. My facilitative role in my own creative process blends performative, improvisational and directorial skills: I suggest, lead, facilitate, compose, construct, support, choreograph, respond, listen, react, absorb and work with whatever comes up physically, emotionally, personally and intellectually in the room. Follow. Lead. Follow, until I can clearly reshape content into a coherent compositional structure that collaborators can follow in performance. The creative process for *Art of Attachment* ‘resourced’ the non-professional participants with a wide variety of skills, practices and approaches and provided an opportunity for ‘relational exchange’. The creative process shaped challenging lived experiences into a shareable (bearable) form. My methodology uses movement and writing as a method of enquiry, developing non-verbal and text-based approaches to create both metaphor and meaning.

My process also involves a kind of ‘mentalisation’ (the ability to understand ones’ own states of mind and emotions), alongside the intersubjective relationships that necessarily build and develop through the collaborative process and the ‘sense making’ involved in creatively translating the lived experience of those involved (sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly). For co-collaborator Vikki, hearing an outsider’s perspective seemed to help:

*‘Charlotte knows which questions to ask from a performing arts background. Care workers are cautious and avoid asking difficult questions. I need to be challenged. That is what brings the healing. Telling your story to someone who is learning about the subject rather than someone who has heard it all before.’*

The process of making *Art of Attachment* followed several key principles of DMT: interrelating the body and mind, using and capturing 'self-propelled', self-initiated movement; resourcing the participants through close support and mentoring, sharing skills, training regularly, developing trust, fitness and confidence. We worked with body memory, used physical mirroring to make participants feel understood, found beauty in the form which is imperative for good health. My process encouraged the women to try things out, play, fail, try again, fail better. Vikki commented: *'Here you can confide things that you wouldn't say in group therapy. Turning things into art helps you process them. It is a transformation. Before I drew and made poems to process how I feel. This is taking it one step forward. It neutralises the pain.'*

Writing about concepts of 'being with' and 'third-ness' in the context of performer training, Roanna Mitchell (2022: p222-237) talks of *'not doing therapy, but not NOT doing therapy'*. She discusses how *'structured encounters'* between an individual or group and a therapist *'invested in promoting mental and emotional wellbeing'* takes place and how this aims *'in some way help to 'heal', relieve or repair...'* as Barba (2010: pg. 185) put it, to *'caress a wound in that part within [us] which lived in exile'*. Mitchell suggests (2022: pg. 225) that a training where we *'see each other, make an impact on each other, and have agency and the capacity to change each other... sustain connectedness to the other's mind while accepting separateness and difference.'* is therapeutic. As Mitchell states (2022: pg. 222-237) *'resourcing practices exercises that settle the nervous system'*, enabling *'nourishment from other people, situations and happenings.'*

Dr. Ironside had acknowledged the therapeutic benefits of making work around challenging themes in our conversation: *'Once the stories become a performance then they aren't literal, they are symbolic.'* According to Van Der Kolk (2015: pg. 256), when a process of integration and re-interpretation of memories is complete, *'the [traumatic] experience is integrated with*

*other life events and stops having a life of its own.'* After the work had been performed, Vikki stated, despite the clear therapeutic benefits, the creative process had been '*massively different from therapy - that's just one pair of eyes, you're not artistically changing it into something that's more general - [with this] it's not personal anymore.'*

Whilst unapologetically cataloguing the abuse suffered at the hands of men, *Art of Attachment* reframes the women as powerful and articulate, moving towards hope and regaining some personal agency in their lives. In the months after the live performance, in early 2019, I met up with three of the four women to screen a capture of the live production and to check in with the group. At this reflective meeting, Vikki said that being involved in *Art of Attachment* '*helped me to integrate really... I achieved something and I maybe achieve other things now. It's helped me change my idea about my capacity around what I could do.'*

Leah said: '*Everything that's in this production can happen again. That's a scary reality. It reminds me how fragile everything is.'*

The women who took part in *Art of Attachment* broke silence and spoke out about their past experience of domestic violence, adverse childhood experience, substance misuse and their experiences of multiple traumas, slowly, carefully writing themselves into a different kind of existence, becoming visible through performance, using the creative process as a tool for empowerment. In the interview that formed part of the contextualising content for the film installation, participant / performer Annette reflected:

*'At the beginning I was quite low. I was very nervous coming to the first few activities and I would pull back and not talk, and I was a bit scared... if I'd been told it was a show, I don't think I would have turned up. I've never done*

*theatre or dance.... The wall I've built up over the years and it was due to the traumas I've been through and I'd built it up and up, so that people couldn't get close to me. I wouldn't allow people to love me....I was very anxious and wouldn't want to be touched, wouldn't want to dance, but before the summer we were doing activities and I was able to do the yoga, I was able to be touched, I was able to move around freely... we gradually started supporting each other and trusting each other and even with the professional dancers became equals towards the end and that was very encouraging.'*

## **RISKS AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The full ethical considerations of *Art of Attachment* and the writing of this PhD have been discussed with my supervisor, Professor Angela Pickard. As discussed in the **HOLDING SAFE SPACE, RESPECT & SUPPORT** section of this thesis (pg. 36), the delivery of the project itself was framed by clear rules of engagement, following VDT and Oasis' extensive Safeguarding Policies (*See VDT's SAFEGUARDING POLICY in Appendix 7*). Clear Disclosure Protocols were agreed with the partner organisation before activity took place with participants and reviewed regularly with Oasis' integrative arts therapist Jo Parker and the then Director of Oasis Joanne Welsh. Disclosure Forms and Safeguarding Policies were talked through and physically handed out to all professional facilitators. No professional was left alone in any of the spaces we worked in without another professional adult present. Risk Assessments were carried out for all VDT's activity and stored on a secure administrative platform. The women taking part in *Art of Attachment* did so voluntarily and could opt out at any time. Group Principles (*detailed in Appendix 2*) were adhered to throughout the process, with confidentiality agreed and consent given by participants for public use / performance / screening of any personal lived experience material within the work, the implications of going public with which were discussed with

participants and the partner organisation. Consent was gained for all audio film and photography recordings and in perpetuity clauses agreed for any film based material placed online, with appropriate break clauses to be acted upon if necessary and if requested. Material was anonymised when requested.

Whilst engaged in the creative process with VDT, all participants were engaged in the Recovery Phase 2 programme at Oasis, which included therapeutic input. At least 3 of the 4 women involved intensively with me throughout this process were also engaged in additional therapy or group work to address trauma, mental health or substance misuse issues (eg: attending Narcotics and Alcoholics Anonymous, attending trauma therapy). Oasis also offered the professional artists involved in the project, including myself, supervision.

Despite all of the above being in place, the personal, creative, reputational and organizational risks of this project were daunting. It was a challenging project to administrate, manage, contain and control. Oasis' Project Manager had a limited experience of what was involved in making work on the scale we were working on, so I asked VDT's then General Manager Niamh Lynam-Cotter to support the management and marketing of the project. As well as Lynam-Cotter's time, VDT also invested heavily in the process with my time as the lead artist / Director, with free studio space, administrative support, marketing costs and by employing all the creative collaborators (performers, lighting design, production manager, film maker and composer) to make the production possible. VDT's 'investment' created some difficult power dynamics between VDT and Oasis – the Director seeming keen on the end product (the live production at ACCA), with little understanding of the delicacy, time and complex process involved in making it.

Risk of course also existed in the heartbreaking, explicit content of the work. I had been commissioned by Oasis as an experienced performance maker, but there seemed to be little understanding about the nature of the work I was likely to create from the subjects coming up from the women. There was also a lack of understanding of the potential - with four women involved not known for following through on former recovery pathways they had been on - for the whole project to fall apart at any point- after considerable time and financial investment from both organizations, and creatively from me as an established artist.

Project Advisory Group member Dr. Leslie Ironside had thrown a creative gauntlet down when I first spoke to him:

*'You can go absolutely safe and there is little point in doing it... As a parent we need to expose our children to danger within safe boundaries – and that's what you'll be doing. There ought to be this tension in your work...It's got to be edgy... Jo Anne [Welsh, Director of Oasis] will go for safety... we need creative edginess.'*

Dr Ironside understood the need for a degree of provocation, so I took this as a green light to proceed instinctively with my creative process, fully aware that my creative and organizational reputation was at stake with the project, working towards a hard, public performance deadline with little understanding of how we might get there. In the end, despite many private moments of doubt, fulfilling the brief – in fact overreaching the original brief by some distance - relied entirely on me trusting my own artistic process as a director / choreographer, whilst also making sure the organizational and support frameworks were in place for the work to be carried out safely and within budget as the Chief Executive of the organisation. I also had to

'age rate' the work to attract appropriate audiences for it. There are no formal age ratings available for live dance performance in the UK, so we took our lead from the film world with a trigger warning for *Art of Attachment* (on stage and on film) that *stated 'some scenes may be upsetting'* – placing an age rating of 14+ on both works.

Due to scheduling issues, Oasis' therapist Jo Parker was not always present in my sessions as agreed, so Safeguarding protocols took a while to establish and I took responsibility for checking the group in and out of some sessions where she was absent. I felt uncomfortable with this as it blurred the boundaries of my role as the lead artist, but it did also become a way of embedding safeguarding and a protective mindset *into* the creative process, to keep the women and professionals as safe as we could. Knowing there were Ground Rules and supportive processes in place meant the women felt freer to express themselves, as one participant stated: *'there were a lot of things I never spoke about before. Through this project I have learnt it is ok to share it. It has been a safe space to put it out there.'*

A less obvious risk to try to address and mitigate was the unspoken power and financial imbalance in the room, which, it could be argued, contradicted the intended 'co-creation' ethos of the creative methodology involved in the making of a piece of work. The women took part in the project via their involvement in the Phase Two Recovery programme at Oasis, and were essentially working hard as unpaid volunteers, who could walk away at any time. The management team, therapist, myself, the understudy and professional collaborators were all employed on contracts to deliver the work. Although never discussed or stated as an issue by the women, most of whom I believe were in receipt of state benefits and disability allowances at the time of their involvement in the project, as their time and commitment to the work intensified this became an issue for me as something to address in future planning of projects



with non-professional co-collaborators. The impression I had gained from Oasis at the start of our work together was that the women were well on the road to recovery. However, I later found out that in fact several of the women were still misusing substances, something our conversations had not covered. The project was therefore consistently vulnerable to the women relapsing or dropping out, so my process had to ensure the circumstances were right for them to manage to continue over many months. For three of the women, this worked well, and has since reaped many personal, and psychological rewards and health benefits. For one, however, who at first seemed to be on the most confident path to recovery, but who had taken on too many other projects and a new college course whilst also working with me whilst also parenting, the risk became very real. Sadly, she relapsed following a holiday directly after the live performance and was hospitalized on her return. The production became more poignant as we filmed it in November 2018, but also potentially creatively compromised due to her absence. However, having anticipated some disruption throughout the process, I had employed Understudy Anna Clasper to work with the group from early on in the process, so she was well equipped to step in to replace Louise in the filming of the work. Clasper's performance is delicate, respectful and imbued with Louise's presence, but could be charged with lacking authenticity as she is a professional performing a non-professional participant's role. Despite this, Clasper's performance adds weight to the work as she joins Grove and Clark to hold the piece together with skill and sensitivity.

There were personal risks for me directing *Art of Attachment* around publicly outing myself as an adoptive parent – a personal detail that I have worked hard not to disclose in my professional career to date to keep my own child safe. It felt at times necessary to remain

objective, to depersonalize my role as the leader of the project, whilst remaining human and approachable.

As Preston considers (2016: pg. 51), applied theatre facilitators adopt various performative strategies as a means of *'inducing and producing a playful and positive emotional state in others.'* As an former performer I feel this keenly. I am fully aware of when I am facilitating and drawing on performative skills to respond to what is offered into the room and when I am authentically feeling a response. As a facilitator, I practice encouraging a playful approach to researching and generating ideas and material. As a director I employ a different, more objective skill to scrutinise and compose material and tighten it into a shape for public consumption. As a woman and mother, if I have an emotional response to a participant's offering, I instinctively know what to do with it. For *Art of Attachment* I practiced empathy, appropriate safeguarding responses, as well as creative intuition daily. I led from the front, buffered everyone's insecurities and concerns, often at the expense of my own, which I processed privately. I deployed humour to dispel anxiety and sometimes consciously demonstrated and articulated the act of directing whilst directing the work, explaining to participants what I was doing and why, so they could see my professional experience and skill set in action in order to feel that their contributions were in safe hands. This approach seemed to work: *'Charlotte is a force to be reckoned with. She is so raw and powerful. She is more powerful than any man I have ever known.'*

Another risk was that the cast of four women could be seen as a 'clique' by other Oasis service users. Many women who contributed to very early workshops but couldn't commit to making the work with me as they didn't feel ready, didn't understand what was involved, found the sessions too demanding or who felt the work 'wasn't for them'. Dr. Ironside and Therapist Jo

Parker asked me to 'keep in mind' the service users who were not taking part and to somehow represent them in the work too. I felt that the lived experience represented in the work did manage to represent did reflect conversations I had had with the larger groups of Oasis users I had started the project facilitating. Honing in on individual stories – knowing that the personal will always represent the political - was therefore the only way I could imagine to offer universal insight into the issues the majority of the women at Oasis seem to face.

With such a vulnerable group, my facilitative skills of holding what could be an emotionally chaotic space were being tested to the limit of what I had experienced in my career to date. The weight and darkness of the stories I was working with for 9 months meant there was a real risk of emotional burnout and exhaustion caring for the women's welfare alongside absorbing the hard-hitting nature of the work for an extended period of time. I also carried anger about the stories of abuse and violence that have shaped these (and so many other) women's lives. After sessions had finished, their experiences and stories stayed with me for many days, leaving me feeling lost and bewildered at times when I reflected that adults, including mothers in some cases, have stood by and allowed their own children to be hurt, that the social work system and our community doesn't provide children or women with appropriate support.

I was also concerned about being unable to identify whether the re-telling of these stories was playing a part in the women's relapsing behaviour. Oasis did little to help me understand whether this was the case, both due to data protection, confidentiality and staff capacity issues, which at times seemed irresponsible when I was working so regularly and so deeply with their clients.

For performers Grove and Clark, the process was challenging too. Like all of us working on the project, the work made them reflect on their own attachment, family and parenting situations, which was not always easy to process. We checked in and out as professionals and reflected on our work together each week as part of our concurrent creative process. Limited supervision with Jac Matthews (offered by Oasis) helped Grove field this a little, but perhaps not sufficiently. Many questions around how to safeguard practitioners when working with vulnerable groups emerged for all three of us, with ongoing discussions about how the blending of facilitation of others and maintaining integrity as experienced performers threading through our process together. I held the space for Grove, Clark and the women as best I could, which, on reflection was a heavy load to carry and, proud of our achievements though I am, did take a toll on my own emotional wellbeing at that time

## **IMPACT AND OUTCOMES**

In *50 Contemporary Choreographers* (2019: pg. 290), Josephine Leask writes that my work has *'given a voice to women in dance across generations, casting a much-needed spotlight on women's issues, and fighting to raise the profile of female-led arts practice in the UK.'* *Art of Attachment* achieved many personal, operational and artistic outcomes. The process I led over many months cemented my socially-engaged, collaborative practice and had recognizable value for those involved in it, those who commissioned it and those who have since witnessed and engaged with the resulting production work.

So, what have I learned, through the socially engaged making and sharing of *Art of Attachment*?

The project:

- reasserted my need as an artist to take creative risks and 'shout from the spaces that matter'
- given me space to experiment
- deepened my practice and reinstated my belief in following my instinct and trusting my creative process
- allowed me to take stock and acknowledge the creative skills and tools I have as an experienced maker / facilitator
- reminded me that sharing our lived experience is the key to understanding and empathizing with even the most challenging human behaviour
- reminded me why women need platforms to express themselves freely, without censorship
- re-ignited my feminist drive to place the female experience centre stage and to continue to expose the daily challenges women face within a patriarchal society
- reinforced the need to use public platforms to campaign against and begin to combat misogyny and abuse of women and children and to continue to question how society upholds that abuse in order to combat it
- developed my understanding of the therapeutic possibilities of my creative process
- reinforced that working with non-professionals, community groups or young people the approach needs to be trauma informed and attachment aware to be safe and to have maximum impact
- brought home an understanding of the therapeutic outcomes of arts-based activity
- reassured me of the healing power of the arts and the part they might play in recovery journeys
- developed the design of creative regulatory physical activities and tasks to calm the nervous system

- reinforced the need for meaningful creative projects involving non-professionals to be conducted over extended periods of time to build trust and genuine connection, allowing time for emotional barriers to break down, authentic personal growth and the slow building of skills in participants.
- clarified the use and application of my work beyond ‘entertainment’ and outside of the arts sector and into health and wellbeing, attachment, trauma, psychology and social work sectors
- consolidated my creative process of transforming live work to film in order to more widely distribute and apply the work in arts and non-arts contexts
- radically enhanced and refined my / VDT’s Safeguarding Policies and disclosure procedures, which are now applied alongside a protective mindset in everything I and the company does
- reminded me of the need for check ins and check outs and confidentiality for participants
- reinforced the need to provide supervision and support for artists (including myself) working with emotionally demanding or upsetting subject matters.
- become the main reference point in the development of VDT’s new online resource *Safeguarding Questions for Working in the Arts* (<https://www.vincentdt.com/project/safeguarding-questions-for-working-in-the-arts/>). created in collaboration with Playing On Theatre Company in 2022, which encourages facilitators, gatekeepers, producers, programmers and arts organisations to scrutinise and question their approach to safeguarding and wellbeing within the planning, creation and delivery stages of creative projects, productions and programmes for artists, participants and audiences alike.

- offered an opportunity to properly evaluate a long-term project, collect evidence and articulate the impact on participants, audiences, organizations and collaborators
- reminded me that focusing on process not product will create the most authentic response from participants and collaborators and the rest will follow
- brought my personal and professional life closer together, allowing reflection on both
- provided Volunteer Sherryn Watkin with valuable work experience before attending a MA in Dance Therapy at Roehampton University, where she cited her involvement in the project as equipping her with knowledge well beyond the experience of other her first year fellow students when she joined the course
- levered further funding for work from University of Warwick for VDT to develop foundational work with Survivors Network and Oasis working towards **Art of Recovery**, a new work in 2025 that will look at the impact of domestic violence on women and children, funded by VDT's National Portfolio funding
- resulted in VDT's pledge to provide training and performance opportunities, ensuring a third of all cast members and participants in all VDT projects and productions are care-experienced / people with lived experience of Adverse Childhood Experience
- given me a rich and complex project on which to base this PhD by Publication

Involvement in *Art of Attachment* has also promoted life and career changes for three of the four women involved in the project, from concept to delivery. In her contextualising interviews Leah said:

*'It is excellent. You get to build up your trust of other people and feel safer to do things. Before I never used to be able to be touched. We are holding hands or touching legs. I feel OK about that now.'*

Vikki said:

*'From the initial amount of stuff that was bubbling over, it's kind of quieter... things don't go away... but to play around with that subject and then its more peaceful as a topic for you... putting my past to bed...I think it's being listened to.'*

Louise said: *'Art allows you to talk about issues in a different way.'*

Annette said: *'I didn't think from the beginning that I would be on stage. I thought I would help make the tea.'*

Practically, the project provided Vikki with a stepping stone to employment after I offered her administrative work with VDT once the project was over. She used this paid administrative experience, along with a reference from me, to get back into employment, which has since kickstarted her new career as a trauma informed practitioner working with substance misuse within the NHS:

*'I need to say thanks (once again) ... I just started working in a part time admin job. Pretty sure having recent VDT office work on my CV helped get me in there... Your process helped me start changing my life, I will never stop saying it.'* Vikki

I also provided Leah with a suitable reference to pursue her ambition to train as a Probation Officer and encouraged Annette to take up yoga, use public transport and become more physically healthy. In her article for University of Sussex Art/Law Network, *Integrative Arts and Art of Attachment* (2019, therapist Jo Parker wrote:

*'Everyone involved in the project came out changed. I am confident that there has been rich learning and I know that for myself it will take time to process fully. The project was a courageous experiment into the shadows of those who felt able to share. It showed that this messy process could deliver clean outcomes, through*



*careful collaboration. Bodies moved, so too were emotions and the witnesses in the final show's audience... People talk about giving people 'a voice', often referring to marginalized people. Lemn Sissay said that you can't 'give someone a voice', when it is not yours to give – each of us has a voice of our own. Working alongside the artists has enabled not only the participants' voices to be heard, but for them to be seen, in the spotlight – unapologetic'.*

*See full article in Appendix 4: PRESS & ARTICLES, ART OF ATTACHMENT (LIVE PRODUCTION, 2018).*

**Art of Attachment** developed visibility and expression for a group of marginalized, stigmatized, vulnerable women whose voices are seldom heard. The project offered an opportunity for self-development and confidence building too:

*'I think I've learnt stuff I'll carry forward for the rest of my life... My confidence, that I like expressing myself through moving.'* **Vikki**

The end of one production always kickstarts the next. Having run 12 workshops with young people from Oasis creche as part of the *Art of Attachment* project, the absence of children's voices in the work led me to create *In Loco Parentis* in 2020, a work based on the testimonies of adoptive parents, foster carers and care-experienced children and informed by a similar durational and targeted research methodology.

## **ONGOING APPLICATION OF THE WORK**

Having tested and evaluated *Art of Attachment* as part of VDT's *Home Truths Listening Project* in 2021, *Art of Attachment* is being put to work in 2023 as a full installation and via facilitated

screenings, to stimulate engagement and discussion in participatory contexts, face to face and online, exploring the issues, themes and methodologies outlined in the work within and outside of the arts sector. It is currently being used and developed as an arts-based resource and training tool to support professional practitioners and students training in social work, children's services, youth work, teaching and education contexts, to better understand the lived experience of the women and children they work with.

*Art of Attachment* on film offers an opportunity to discuss the medical, ethical and attachment issues encountered within the fields of substance misuse, domestic violence and childhood sexual violence and to think about attachment, birth families, adoption and fostering differently - from an emotional as well as neurological or scientific point of view. The work also offers an opportunity to unpack the emotional labour for both practitioners working with vulnerable groups and the clients themselves.

In 2022, VDT's Digital and Participation Development Director Sian Williams began developing the potential use and application of **Art of Attachment** on film, researching and building academic partnerships that will allow for 'co-production of knowledge' and the development of opportunities for knowledge exchange involving the engagement of 'less well heard voices' in our communities.

Williams has also been delivering foundation workshops with Oasis Project and Survivors Network at VDT's studio in Brighton, based on the engagement tasks from *Art of Attachment* and other sensory regulating creative tasks. VDT has secured funding from Sue Addis Memorial Fund at Sussex Community Foundation to deliver further foundation sessions that will lead towards *Art of Recovery*, a new live production / film installation based on research into

domestic violence, planned for 2024. Further testing the use of my work in a therapeutic context, Williams also delivered a peer delivery session for Orange Collective in Brighton (December 2022, <https://orangecollective.co.uk/about>), an organisation that provides a space for Arts Practitioners and Therapeutic Practitioners to test out new ideas and projects, form new collaborations and create community in Arts and Wellbeing contexts. VDT's workshop reflected on how practitioners use art for their own wellbeing, on the issues raised through my work and processed responses to *Art of Attachment* using craft-based making activities. Ongoing supervision for both Williams and myself is being discussed with the collective to support the emotional labour of our own interactions with vulnerable adults.

With VDT's ongoing partnership with Dr. Cath Lambert, Associate Professor of Sociology and Co-Director of PhD Programmes for Sociology at Warwick University, (<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/sociology/staff/clambert/>), *Art of Attachment* is being used to work with Birmingham-based project Breaking the Cycle, located within Birmingham Children's Trust. Breaking the Cycle is an organisation working with families who have lost a child to adoption. Through close, ethnographic attention to the experiences of families and staff, including using arts-based methods to explore emotional and embodied modes of engagement and understanding, Dr. Lambert and VDT are researching ways in which parents can make sense of their experiences and, where possible, break cycles of trauma and loss.

Lambert's research addresses loss and repair in relation to family, located within a wider research agenda around damaged and reparative kinship, and addressing specific questions around re-imagining adoption. The research works closely with a group of family practitioner and birth parents who have had a child or children removed from them and placed for adoption. Having piloted *Art of Attachment* on film as part of *Home Truths Listening Project* in

Coventry (November 2021), Dr. Lambert applied to Warwick University for a Strategic Award as part of her larger current research project asking '*Is adoption working?*' The participatory practice I design and facilitate offers a unique approach to developing creative engagement spaces that draw on the aesthetic of my production work, alongside the development of workshops that model ideas for professional use and a context for academic research to take place within. Dr. Lambert states in her Strategic Award funding application to Warwick University, that using *Art of Attachment* within her research is an '*empirically rich project*' that will '*generate timely and important findings around the question of 'how can adoption be done differently?' and will also lay foundations for future funded research working with Birmingham Children's Trust.*' VDT will help generate bespoke resources for participatory workshops with birth parents, with input from Breaking the Cycle staff, to generate rich empirical data that will contribute to a greater understanding about the resources necessary for birth families to break the cycles of trauma that lead to child loss and to develop strategies to build stronger and sustained connections between birth and adoptive families. Results will be written up in an academic journal article or book chapter and participants will be asked, as part of the research, how VDT's materials might best be used, with their feedback factored into decisions about the dissemination and application of the work. This research approach mirrors the cycle of involvement and consent that VDT factors into every socially engaged project it now embarks upon.

VDT is currently also pursuing opportunities with Politics and International Studies at Open University, developing our ongoing partnerships with the Universities of Sussex and Brighton and aiming to pursue research opportunities at Canterbury Christ Church University, following this PhD. I also currently use excerpts of *Art of Attachment*, along with other works, as a

teaching tool to develop student understanding of socially engaged choreographic practice in higher and further education dance and performance settings.

## CONCLUSION

*'When I look, I am seen, so I exist. I can now afford to look and see.'* Winnicott (2005: pg.154)

My work with VDT is known for drawing powerful performances from non-professional collaborators within the company's intergenerational, interdisciplinary productions on stage and on film: *Motherland* (2012), *Virgin Territory* (2016), *Shut Down* (2017), *Art of Attachment* (2018/2021), *In Loco Parentis* (2020) and *Hold Tight* (2022). VDT's model of working examines the limitations and social barriers that participants face as core principles driving the work. My productions adopt a 'people-centred' approach and 'risk-tolerant' process that maintains artistic integrity whilst offering a public platform to those whose voices may seldom otherwise be heard.

VDT's work now reaches a wider and genuinely more diverse audience than conventional 'middle scale touring' ever allowed. Distributing a repertoire of work on stage, on film and online, across a wide range of gallery, theatre and academic networks to new professional and community based audiences, reaches a demographic that exists way outside of the traditional dance theatre sector. This approach to dissemination, pioneered in 2015 and continued to date (ahead of the digital curve that Covid forced artists to follow), achieves my political and creative ambitions to place women's lived experience centre stage so 'her stories' may be more widely heard, seen and acknowledged. My work uses the public facing platform I have built, over 30 years as a practising artist, to provoke political thought concerning gender equality and around issues concerning the lives of women and children.

As well as providing programming content for venues and galleries, permanent and freelance employment and childcare support for practising dance artists, non-professionals, young people, composers, production managers, chaperones, technicians, designers, film makers and administrative staff, my work contributes to the dance theatre sector in the UK through its distinct, authentic, accessible, socially-engaged approach, provocative feminist political content and consistently interdisciplinary form that the *Case Study of Art of Attachment* within this thesis reflects on.

The presentation of my work on film – in socially engaged spaces, where the act of creative engagement and the witnessing of production work exists symbiotically, turning participants into audiences and audiences into participants – also contributes to the democratisation and wider dissemination of dance theatre as a form.

My work draws on contemporary visual art, film and sound installation practice in the interdisciplinary form of the work, and is designed to offer a different model for programming of dance for arts and theatre venues – a free, drop in set up that gives audiences access to the work as a museum or art gallery would. This approach also allows partner venues to host specific, targeted focus groups, invited to test and evaluate the work and crossing thresholds of buildings and contexts they might otherwise not set foot in. Socially engaged practice will become more common place from 2023 in the UK, following Arts Council's 'Lets Create' strategic agenda for the arts, but was not so in the dance sector 2014, when VDT started developing engagement spaces in Warwick and Brighton, or in 2017 when we presented our first film installation work. My practice on film contributes uniquely to the dance theatre field and to academic research through its practical application and use as part of funded research

projects (for example, Dr Cath Lambert's use of the work with *Breaking the Cycle* described above). My work is designed – like academic research – to question societal norms and assumptions. Through a testimony driven methodology, my work offers insight into the lives of those with lived experience other than our own, so that we might reflect more fully on both their and our own lives. My work takes the risk of '*dwelling*' in the other's position' (Mitchell, 2022: pg. 232), offering an opportunity for a more compassionate and empathic consideration of the complexities of being human. It also profiles female identifying voices and perspectives that might not otherwise be given space to be heard.

My practice provides structure and safety for professionals and non-professionals to experiment and play. We see parts of ourselves reflected in it and that allows us to process new thoughts and feelings. Whether through creative tasks or rigorous discussions, in workshops, research periods or devising processes, through watching live performance, film screenings or performance workshops, my work with VDT aims to strengthen participants personal capacity through engaging, taking part, listening out for what they need, calibrating, collaborating and believing in their own creative agency.

It empowers participants and encourages empathy, acceptance and curiosity. It allows people to practice being together. It resources people, rather than depleting them. It teaches us all to navigate failure and build resilience. It can begin to heal the nervous system where trauma is stored. It can support mental and physical recovery. If you tell a story enough times, it can appear to be about someone else and this can be both healing to the participant and helpful to others with whom that story resonates.

My work aims to ‘move people and make them think’. As Rachel Thomson, Professor of Childhood and Youth Studies, School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex, writes in her *Reflection on Art of Attachment* for the Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth (the full version of which can be read in *Appendix 4*):

*‘the creative process mirrors the attachment processes involved in recovery.*

*‘Being there’ is the starting point, giving rise to consistency, repetition and development. Trust is crucial, and inevitably it is challenged. So, the ability to survive disruption and to rebuild and to carry on is everything.’*

## **SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE FIELD**

This writing about *Art of Attachment* represents key values of my creative practice, offering an in-depth understanding of how I craft and transform lived experience into new, socially engaged dance theatre work from my initial research with marginalised, and often stigmatised, groups in our community.

My work makes a contribution to the field by exploring the complex tensions between community and professional practice, between text and movement, recorded testimony and music, direct address and fiction, personal and the political, live and filmed, articulated as a clear model of equality of practice, with participants at its core. Widely distributed on stage, on film and online, the work offers opportunities and space to think and reflect on issues that reflect our lives, in this case, witnessing the labours involved in experiencing, acting out and recovering from substance misuse and trauma.



My work contributes to the field by redefining conventional notions of 'inclusivity' within the dance sector. Consequently, this PhD makes the case for how an 'attachment aware', 'trauma informed' approach to facilitation and creative engagement is impactful through its prioritising of participants' wellbeing, resilience and personal development. This contributes to an inclusive model of practice that could affect future policy change within the dance sector and encourages new approaches to safeguarding and supervision as integrated elements of the creative process. The published work and this thesis demonstrates the potential for dance to have currency, use and application outside of the arts sector.

My productions make significant claims for gender politics, and increasingly for social change, making a contribution to the field with their clearly recognisable interdisciplinary, aesthetic form and persistent feminist content.

The practical and written aspects of this PhD also mark a precise moment in a choreographic career spanning 30 years and also capture a deeply challenging, post-pandemic moment in global history. As a project *Art of Attachment* bridges the pre and post Covid years. Devised and filmed in 2018, before the pandemic struck, edited in the middle of lockdown in early 2021, with the final design, editing process and opening of the film installation directed by me whilst ill in bed with Covid for a second time.

Writing this PhD and premiering the film installation as the publication aspect of it, has given me an opportunity to reflect on my artistic practice in general, on what I have lost and what I have gained since making the original live work. *Art of Attachment* encapsulates my socially engaged creative practice at its best, with strong and meaningful results for everyone involved -

participants, professionals, audiences, critics and myself and my creative and administrative team. Covid changed everything, with a glut of poorly conceived and crafted film work flooding online and into the dance theatre market. This 'replacement' for live work, fused with the current political drive from ACE to engage everyone in artistic practice as a pre-requisite for funding, sometimes without the necessary skills, interest or drive to do so safely, is in danger of usurping authentic, long-term facilitative approaches driven by research, experiment, instinct and imagination.

*Art of Attachment* proved that socially engaged practice, safe touch, sharing stories and spaces together manifests in wellbeing for those participants involved. The past three relentless Covid impacted years, planning and re-planning creative activity, cancelling events involving live audiences, the prohibition of shared physical spaces, our retreat into the digital online world and the very real isolation we have felt has all resulted in a lack of play, energy and wellness in our culture. *Art of Attachment* testifies that home - a place of safety for most - is not so for others. I see the trauma of being forced to stay home playing out everywhere I work, everywhere I look, especially amongst young people. Attachments have been broken and confidence demolished. Many of us have become more avoidant, ambivalent, disorganised or just want out of what we did before because it no longer makes sense. Anxiety is the new pandemic.

Writing about this work has been helpful to reflect on and remind me of the therapeutic value of creativity, to acknowledge the need for more self-care, more space, more breath after this period of suffocation. Wendy Houston's brilliant words rain down hard now for all of us, as they five years ago for the women involved in *Art of Attachment*. We are all now in recovery:

*'Taking on the search for what we lost -*

*The cost we paid in full.*

*Not that its laughter- or that happy ever after stuff*

*Just bits of hope, to cope,*

*to bend, not break,*

*to reach, not ache,*

*To weave and breathe*

*A chance to step - with one foot - then another.*

*Hold onto stuff that matters...*

*Count the breath -*

*Count 1*

*Count 2*

*Count 3*

*Breathing in and out...*

*A step to where we might be heading*

*Breathing in, and out.*



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## **APPENDICES**

### **APPENDIX 1: ATTACHMENT INFORMATION DISPLAYED IN INSTALLATION, 2021**

#### **SECURE ATTACHMENT**

##### **WHAT ARE THE FOUR MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF ATTACHMENT?**

- Safe Haven
- Secure Base
- Proximity Maintenance
- Separation Distress

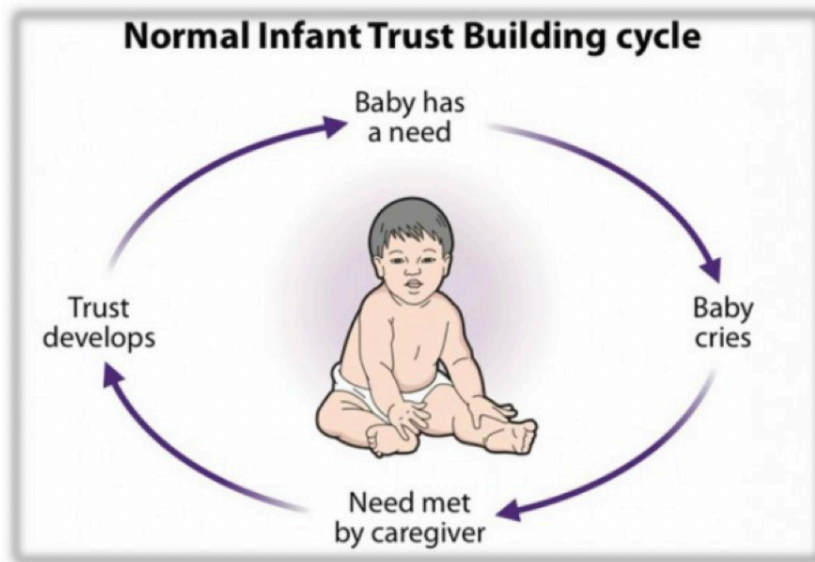
##### **WHAT DOES A SECURE ATTACHMENT LOOK LIKE?**

- Caregivers offers a secure base from which to explore the world.
- Children feel protected by their caregivers, knowing that they can depend on them to return after an absence.



- Caregivers provide a sense of safety and security for the child.
- Caregivers support children’s emotional states by soothing distress, creating joy, and supporting calm. To do this, caregivers must be in a position to regulate their own emotional states.

## SECURE ATTACHMENT CYCLE CHART



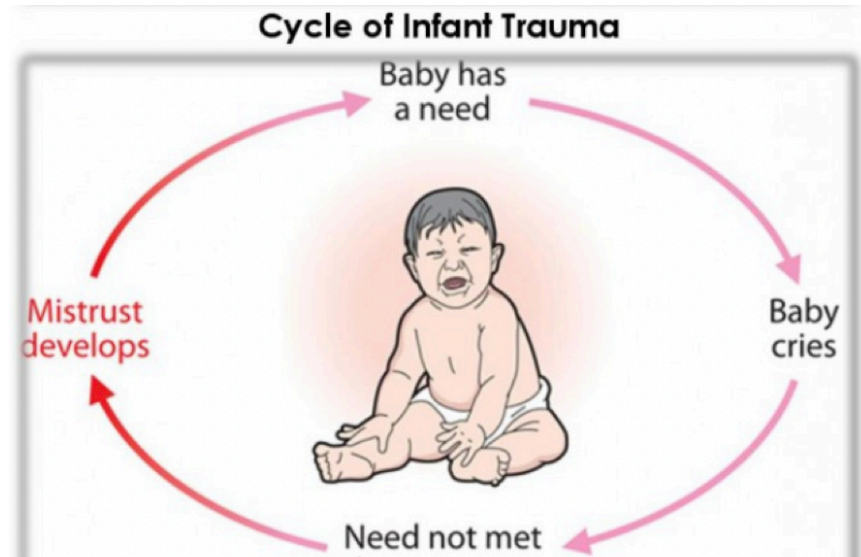
<https://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/product/attachment-cycle-chart-free/>  
Attachment and Trauma Network Inc.

## INSECURE AVOIDANT ATTACHMENT

Insecure avoidant attachment occurs when infants have learned to suppress their emotions in order to stay close to the parent without risking rejection.

In other words, the babies “deactivate” their normal attachment system and stop looking to their mothers for help. Therefore, they present as:

- indifferent to the primary caregiver
- act unstressed when caregiver leaves
- exhibits similar behaviour with a stranger
- When caregiver returns after a separation, the baby /infant might avoid her
- instead of problem-solving, they are more likely to ‘sulk’ or withdraw

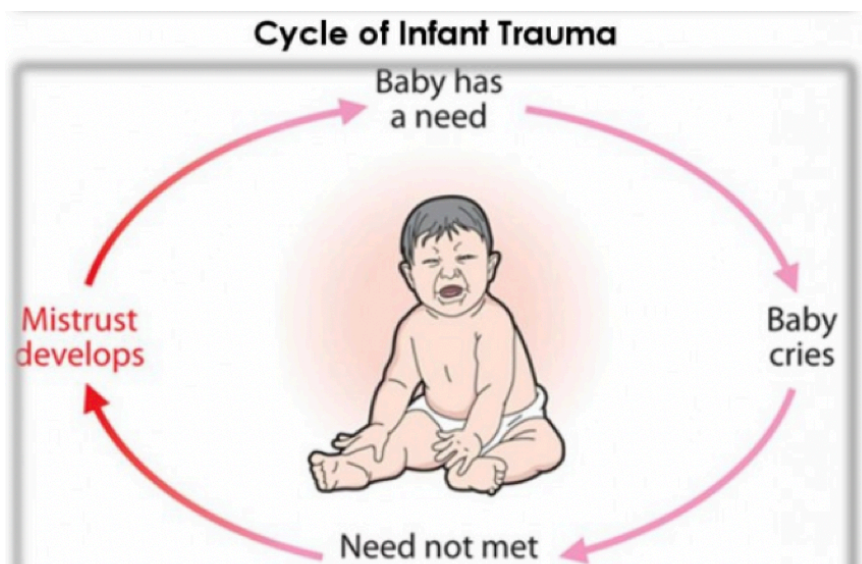


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Attachment and Trauma Network Inc.

### **INSECURE AMBIVALENT ATTACHMENT**

Insecure ambivalent attachment occurs when the mother's inconsistency and insensitivity undermine the baby's confidence in her responses. Infants therefore present as:

- distressed when the caregiver leaves, and when they return
- vacillate between clinging and angry resistance
- don't explore or play in the caregiver's presence.
- are not easily comforted



<https://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/product/attachment-cycle-chart-free/>  
Attachment and Trauma Network Inc.

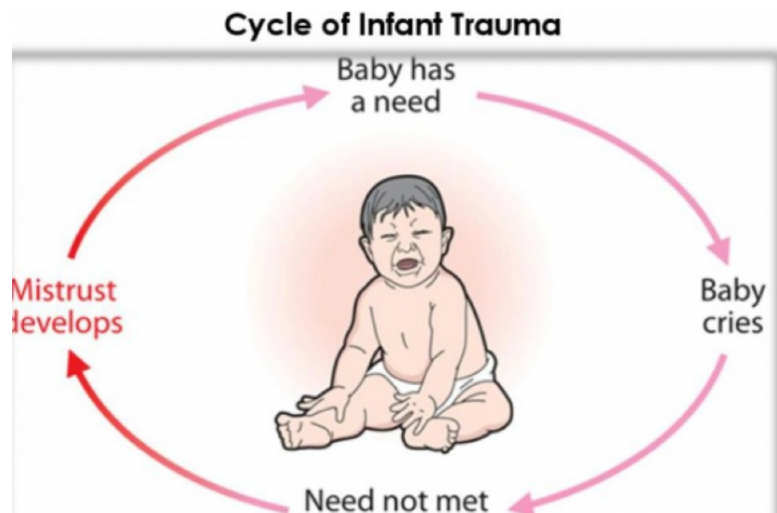
### **DISORGANISED ATTACHMENT**

Disorganised Attachment can occur in families where there is abuse or maltreatment. The primary caregiver, who is supposed to be a source of support, is also the person who frightens the child.

Such caregivers may be directly neglecting or abusing the child, and they may have their own histories of unresolved trauma. Then infant is presented with an irresolvable paradox wherein the haven of safety is at once the source of alarm.

Infants with disorganised attachment can be:

- flooded with anxiety
- appear “checked out” or dissociated
- show a flat, expressionless affect or odd, frozen posture. even when held by the primary caregiver.



<https://www.attachmenttraumanetwork.org/product/attachment-cycle-chart-free/>  
Attachment and Trauma Network Inc.

## APPENDIX 2: GROUPWORK PRINCIPLES

A Code of Conduct / Set of Principles to ensure we took care of each other in sessions, agreed with the Participants and the Therapist, reiterated at the start and end of every session:

- This is a safe, confidential space
- It is structured session (by me) and not a free for all space
- Demonstrate respect for each other’s (differing) experience and thoughts
- Speak from the ‘I’ (not ‘we’)
- Give space to others
- Listen to each other

- Try not to talk over each other
- Don't 'over share' (could be too triggering)
- Don't make assumptions about other's experience (or feelings or situation)
- This is a challenging process and we all accept that
- We will offer peer support
- We will check in from last session at the start of every new session
- We will check out at the end
- Individually you are supported inside and outside the group – if you are feeling wobbly / triggered inside the session you have permission to leave whenever you need to, or talk to Jo Parker (Integrative Therapist) who will offer support. If you are feeling triggered or upset after the session, go to your Care Co-ordinator at Oasis. Do not suffer alone.
- Managing disclosures – a clear protocol was in place
- Text will be anonymized so it isn't clear who owns what experience on stage (we can hold each other's stories)

*Participants were asked to sign a consent form for their photographs to be used in publicity, but before signing it, Oasis prepared a list of possible implications of using the photographs so that their consent could be well considered.*

## **APPENDIX 3: ART OF ATTACHMENT SCRIPT (FILM INSTALLATION, 2021)**

### **SCRIPT / DIRECTION FILM INSTALLATION**

*CLOCK TICKING, AIR SOUNDTRACK*

**TONI** - 'My Baby...'

*[MUTTERING VOICES / SOUND OF SHUFFLING PAPERS]*

**VIKKI** - So picture this:

Here I am.

Sitting here. In my seat.

And I want things.

I want all sorts of things.

Mainly I want to be happy.

And content.

Just like everyone else.

**ANNA** - But picture this.

I am alone.

I am feeling alone and sad.

**LEAH** - And I am in a dark room.

Behind a brick wall.

Inside a relationship.

Because I am stupid.

Look at me. I am stupid.

I am mad. I have gone mad.

I have gone completely mad and I have done all sorts of things.

**ANNETTE** - And I want to talk about them...

Difficult. It's difficult. I am difficult.

I was difficult.

But words get in the way.

Words I couldn't read get in the way.

**VIKKI** - Words like:

Birth. Reject. Birth. Reject. Repeat. Birth. Reject.

Alone. Alone. Miles from home. Evil man. Abuse. Death. Grieve.

Reject. Reject. Reject. Dope. Coke. Dope. Coke. Battle.

**ANNETTE** - And the words keep getting in the way.

Words I don't even want to say:

**LEAH** - Escape. bedsit. 16. Loner. Man. Older. Control. Children. 2 children. Escape. Alone.

Refuge . fighting. Courts. Lose. Family. Gone.

**ANNA** - So here I am.

Miles from nowhere. With this brick wall around me.

And just the words: Partner. Crash. Dark. Car Crash. Stop. Drink. Go. Stop. Coke. Stop. Drink. Go.

Dark. Stop. Coke Once a week. Twice a day. Every day. Years. 1 year. 2 years. 3 years. 4 years. 5 years. 6 years. 7 years. Dark. Stop. Dark. Stop.

**VIKKI** - Then picture this.

Here I am. Sitting here.

Here I am. Sitting here. In my seat.

And I want things.

I want all sorts of things.

Mainly I want to be happy. And content. Just like everyone else.

*RICHTER 4b*

**VIKKI** –

History, Subjective.

Age: Unrecorded.

Parental Information Maternal: Still alive

Paternal: Unknown

Adopted: Foster Care (Sexual Abuse)

Race: Unknown

Sexuality: Unknown.

Substance Abuse: Multiple. Alcohol. Cocaine. Cannabis.

History of Self Harm.

Other: Patient has two children but is now sterilised. No partner.

Previous partners whereabouts unknown.

History, Objective.

Expresses belief of being bad (i.e. Bad Mother. Bad Person).

Verbally displays visible signs of loneliness and isolation with associated symptoms

(shame, sadness, powerlessness). Multiple reports of feeling “different”.

**PROBLEM LIST:**

1. Birth mother rejected x.
2. Passed on through fostering and adoption.
3. Sexual abuse between age of 7 and 14.
4. Unable to read as a child.
5. Experienced racial taunts (Paki, Paki, Paki).
6. Drank and self-harmed at young age.
7. Eating disorders.
8. Two children in abusive relationship.
9. Early sterilisation (Age 26).
10. Mental health issues.
11. Lost court battle for children.
12. Substance abuse (drugs and drink).

**ANNETTE - POSITIVES.**

1. Stopping substance abuse.
2. Desire to be loved.
3. Desire to be happy.
4. Desire to be a good mother.

**VIKKI (WHISPERING) –**

**OTHER OBSERVATIONS:** Repeatedly affirms a belief in her own badness and expresses the idea that something is missing. Has developed protective coping strategies which she refers to as wall building.

While she has reported multiple painful life events she continues to affirm desires

To recover, to feel valued, to be happy and to love.

She has drawn pictures of a bird, a flower and a teddy bear on her notes.

The pictures are soft, gentle and in pencil.

*RICHTER 4b* FADES, CLOCK TICKING, SOUND OF SHUFFLING PAPERS]

**ROB, TO BABY DOLL, PROPPED UP ON TABLE –**

It's good to see you again. There's been a process. A rigorous and thorough process. Do you understand? If you don't understand, you can ask me and I'll explain that to you again and again and again until you do understand. OK? There's no need to be scared. I know change is scary, but with the right support, I think you'll grow to understand the reasons. We really value your thoughts and feelings. Well, then we can all feel good about this...About what we're...doing to you..with you...err...for you

*[ROB SOLO]*

*LOW STRING MUSIC, FLOATING, HEARTBEAT*



**WOMAN 1** - I was scared that if I had my baby, because I was... even if I didn't use while I was pregnant, which I would have had to have had a withdrawal...even if I didn't, that I thought because I still have an addiction problem I won't bond properly with... like 'coz attachment is a two way thing and I felt like I won't be available enough to give my baby what it needs. But it's like, yeah, I think I was so scared that it wouldn't have everything it needed and I felt like, well I'd rather not have a baby than have a baby that's not happy and hasn't got what it needs

**WOMAN 2** - But everyone's got...Everyone's got a different story. When I was at my worst, I had the kids and then I kicked him out and I got clean, and then he died, and then about eight months after that, I lost the girls and yet I was clean, so it was...I got made to tell my children. We got told we had to tell the children. We got told...

**TONI** - There's something I need to talk to you about and I need you to listen. Are you listening?

**WOMAN 1** - I have still got the letter that I wrote to it before I decided to get rid of it, and I've actually read it to it. It's the hardest thing I've done in my life.

**WOMAN 3** - Daddy, please don't shout at mummy

**WOMAN 1** - I think it's important they know it's not that fault that's why they make you tell them, because as a child, you sort of think like that indicates: 'was I not enough for you?' I was like 'why aren't you, happy mum? We're still here' but.. 'Aren't I enough for you Mummy?'

**WOMAN 2** - She didn't understand. She didn't understand.

**TONI** - There's something I need to talk to you about and I need you to listen. Are you listening?

**WOMAN 3** - I was about to say that, it's almost like they became the adult -

**WOMAN 2** - A role that they didn't need to take on at that age - I feel like I felt that she felt full.

**WOMAN 3** - And, um, yeah, it all makes perfect sense to me now, that she did know what was going on. She *did* know when Mummy changed. I didn't have to be absolutely paralytic for her

to know that something was going on and the same with my little boy – he'd be like 'Mummy's gonna get ill'. It would be 'Mummy, wake up, Mummy, wake up.'

**WOMAN 1** - When I was like, oh my God, there's a life, and it's the first time I've ever made a life, I had a massive respect for that and I would, I would argue, even though some people might not understand and some people don't agree with abortion, but for me, it was out of my respect that I was like, I have to protect you by not having you, literally a mother figure saying to her kid, you know, that everything's fine and then keep putting things under the carpet and it's clearly *not* fine.

#### *RICHTER 4 & INCY WINCY TEXT*

*[ROB AND ANNA BOTTLE DUET]*

**ALL** -

*Don't do it! Stop! Put it down.*

*You don't want it. Stop. It's not worth it. Put it down. Think of your kids*

*Think of your children. You can do without. Think of your children.*

*Stop. Put it down. Don't do it.*

*Put it down. Please! Think of your children.*

*You've done so well. Stop. Put it down. You don't need it. Think of your kids!*

**WOMAN 3 (recorded)** - *Incy Wincy spider climbing up the spout, down come the rain, completely washed him out and then the sunshine comes out dries up all the rain and then what does the Incy Wincy Spider do? He climbs all the way up again That's me...climbing up...Then I have a drinking binge. The hangover's gone. And then what does the Incy Wincy Spider do? He climbs all the way up again. Climbs all the way up again. He climbs all the way up again. Climbs all the way up again. I was happy climbing up that spout, yeah, it was hard work, but it was fine. I was managing. But then came the... (PHOOF sound). It takes control, doesn't it? That's why it's an addiction.*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Aren't I enough for you, Mummy?*

**WOMAN 3 (recorded)** *It's bigger than you, it's bigger than your own being, it's bigger than your soul as such.*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Aren't I enough for you, Mummy?*

**WOMAN 3 (recorded)** *Just have a couple of glasses of wine.*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Mummy. Mummy.*

**WOMAN 3 (recorded)** *I was like, 'yeah, I'll bounce on the bed with you!' Next minute I was throwing up and I'm in bed.*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Mummy, wake up. Mummy, wake up*

**WOMAN 2 (recorded)** *And I did that for a long time. Just brush it under the cover.*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Wake up.*

**WOMAN 2 (recorded)** *Just brush it under the cover. Get on with it. Wake up, wake up. Get on with it. I had all the best plans...*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Aren't I enough for you, Mummy?*

**WOMAN 2 (recorded)** *So, I stopped. And I stopped for so long. But then I got complacent. And I got back on it*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Daddy*

**WOMAN 2 (recorded)** *We wasn't... other than the drug, we wasn't that chaotic... We kept it to a routine. D'ya know what I mean?*

**TV (recorded):** *'It's not fair!' SHOUTING, POLICE SIREN, DOOR SLAMS*

*[ROB AND ANNA BOTTLE DUET ENDS /BABY REMOVED, ANNA LIES WITH BOTTLE]*

**WOMAN 4 (recorded)** *Mummy wake up. Mummy wake up*

**WOMAN 3 (recorded)** *Daddy shouts at Mummy. Mummy gets upset. Mummy has a bad drink, Mummy gets ill*

**WOMAN 1 (recorded)** *It's kind of like not a happy story, is it?*

*RICHTER 4 MUSIC FADES*

*[CLOCK TICKING, LEAH HUMMING LULLABY]*

*[HEAVY BREATHING - SOUND OF PANIC ATTACK]*

**ANNA -**

History. Subjective

Age: Under 30.

Parental Information: Parents divorced.

Maternal: Dead (cause: suicide).

Paternal: Remarried.

Aunt and Uncle (In Loco Parentis) 5 years.

Grandmother (In Loco Parentis) 2 years.

Nationality: unknown

Schooling: Boarding School from 9 years of age.

Substance Abuse: Recorded as Cannabis, Alcohol, Cocaine.

History of self-harm.

Other reports multiple relocations across countries and continents.

Witnessed Domestic abuse of mother at young age.

*LEAH STOPS HUMMING*

**LEAH SINGS:**

*I've a dear little dolly*

*She has eyes of bright blue*

*She can open them and shut them*

*And she smiles at me two*

*In the morning I'll wake her*

*And we'll go out to play*

*But I like best to rock her*

*At the end of each day.*

**ANNA –**

History. Objective.

Expresses feelings of rejection and abandonment on more than one occasion.

Repeated use of the word...

**VIKKI - Cope**

**ANNA - or the need to...**

**VIKKI - grow up and get on with it**

**ANNA - As a way to be considered normal or loved. Sense of requirement to be...**

**VIKKI – grateful**

**ANNA - for family support. Frequent attempt to express understanding for extreme events.**

**VIKKI - I guess she had enough of what life was giving her**

**ANNA - in response to suicide of mother.**

*LEAH SINGS PART 2*

**ANNA**

#### **PROBLEM LIST**

1. Parental divorce.
2. A difficult stepmother.
3. Paternal abandonment (aged 5).
4. Maternal alcoholism.
5. Witnessed abuse of mother in home (aged 5- 9).
6. Sent boarding school (aged 9).
7. Sexually abused by female students.

8. Mother committed suicide using gun (aged 10).
9. Multiple homes (aged 9, 10, 15, 16 and 18 ).
10. Taking mothering role for father's family.

*GROUP TO JOIN IN HUMMING WITH LEAH*

11. Misuse of alcohol.
12. Promiscuous behaviour.
13. Drug misuse (Cannabis).
14. Sexual and verbal abuse from partner.
15. Isolation.
16. Depression.
17. Suicidal thoughts.
18. Drug misuse (cocaine).
19. Loss of job.
20. Loss of mental health.

*GROUP STOP HUMMING*

21. Loss of self.

**LEAH –**

**POSITIVES**

1. Ability to relocate and adapt.
2. Experience of looking after others.
3. BA in Business Administration
4. Capable of holding down a good job
5. Appetite for recovery.
6. Religious belief.
7. Commitment to self-protection

8. Ending destructive relationships.

9. Desire to be a mom

*FIREFLY*

**ANNA –**

Other Observations:

Things to do before you're 30.

Quick. There's not much time.

You're born.

Then suddenly.

You're 5. So, hide.

Hide and watch your dad leave home.

Hide and watch your mum get drunk.

Hide and watch you mum get thrown around like she's a rag doll.

Quick. You're 9.

So, leave home. Go to another city. A school. A boarding school.

But don't remember that stuff. Painful memories. Was it abuse?

Don't know. Just shame. Just guilt. Move on.

You're 10.

You're 10. And your mum shoots herself.

Well. I guess she had enough of what life was giving her.

Move on.

Back to school.

No time to grieve. Not when those other kids are calling your mum crazy.

Move on. Move away. To normal happy times. With aunt and uncle.

Ok. Relax. For a year. For 5 years.

Ok that's enough.

Move on. Move in. With sister.

You're 15 now. Keep up. Move on.

You're 16 now. Move in with Grandmother.

And that's it. No. Time.

To move on.

You're 18.

### *TONI PANIC ATTACK BREATHING*

Move in. With your father.

And look after his 3 kids.

And while you're at it, do a degree. Be a mother. Cope. Cope. Cope.

Have a drink. Have a binge. Have sex. Have a lot of sex.

And while you're at it. Why don't you find someone to have a relationship with.

Who makes you feel whole.

H.O.L.E – hole. Just a hole. Good for nothing. Worthless. Fat.

Ugly. Good for nothing. Like trash.

You were 24 when that started.

Now you're 26. And it's time to move again.

Move on. To England.

And while you're at it. Quick.

Have a couple more relationships that make you feel

Even better. Like nothing matters. Or is that the drugs?

That too. Get high. Stay high. Forget. Repeat. Get high. Stay high. Forget. Repeat.

Move on. Quick.

You're 28. You fall in love. At last.



At last. Here you are. In love. With cocaine.

You're out of control. You have no cares.

A bit of shame maybe. A bit of fear.

And you're spiralling.

Quick.

Is it the cocaine? Is it the weed?

You're spiralling.

And here you go.

You lose your job.

You lose your brain.

Your mental health.

You lose you.

And you want to die. You wish you could die.

And you have no more will to fight.

But you move on.

You move on.

You're 29 now.

Getting close to 30.

*TONI PANIC ATTACK ENDS*

And now you turn it all around.

And you are fighting.

You are fighting for yourself.

For hope.

You are learning.

You are trying.

You are moving on.

And you're not even 30 yet.

FIREFLY FADES OUT / PAPER SHUFFLING, SCRIBBLING SOUNDS

ROB / TONI LOVE & PAIN DUET

PENDULUM / HEARTBEAT AND THIS RECORDED TEXT:

**WOMAN 1 (recorded)** *I can appear to trust people. My ability to detach from someone who I'm having a physical relationship or something...My skills at that are good, my skills at that are good.*

*Love and pain have been confused. They've been so mixed up.*

*Don't think I should have a kid or bring up a kid. That makes me really sad.*

*Sometimes people say things to me and they just make me feel so hollow and sad.*

*If I ever got there, it would be so far down the line.*

*Love and pain have been confused. They've been so mixed up.*

*So, there's this big hole.*

*I tend to go round in circles.*

*Sometimes people say things to me and they just make me feel so hollow and sad, like, uh, 'The Faulty Woman'.*

*I tend to go around in circles.*

*Love and pain and have been confused.*

*They've been so mixed up*

*'The Faulty Woman'.*

*It makes... it makes... I feel... Like, I feel...*

*Your whole body just...*

*I can definitely feel.*

*It's like I've become just a point in my head.*

*Sometimes it's quite scary, but people can... people can even see it, and I guess it must be a bit creepy sometimes.*

*I'm still there.*

*I'm still there.*

*It's like I don't know...*

*I don't know what it looks like...*

*Yeah, I've lived that situation where you start sharing your feelings and wanting a hug off someone.*

*I can appear to trust people.*

*My ability to detach from, like, someone who I'm having a physical relationship or something,*

*My skills at that are good.*

*SIFT*

**TONI -**

Who's that trip trapping over my bridge?

She was 14

he was 45

She was 8

She was 10

She was 15

She was a child

She did not say yes

She did not consent

She did not know it was wrong

She covered up the bruises and the blood

She covered the scars and the cuts

It was a cover up  
And she carried on  
And she carried on  
She carried on with the world on her shoulders  
She carried everyone else's shit  
She took the blows  
I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down  
Blow by blow  
It was a blow by blow account  
She didn't know it was going to end like this  
She's poorly  
She's a poorly girl  
She's a mess  
She's a disgrace.  
**ROB** - You're scum  
You asked for it  
You deserve it  
It's all you know  
A Bed of nails  
A punch in the stomach  
Open up  
Give me all that you've got  
Give me all you've got  
I'll take it anyway  
I'll take you away

Run

Run away

Run for your life

Run for your fucking life, [BANGING ON TABLE]

Bitch

**TONI** - She can't handle it

She can't handle her drink

**ROB** - She can't handle anything

She's lost the plot

GET UP!

STAND UP!

GET ON YOUR FEET!

STAND UP!

NOW!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

YOU'RE PATHETIC!

LOOK AT YOU!

YOU'RE A MESS.

YOU'RE DISGUSTING.

YOU MAKE ME SICK.

STAND UP!

STAND UP!

STAND UP ON YOUR FEET, NOW!

NO ONE WANTS TO SEE THIS

GET UP

YOU'RE SUCH AN ATTENTION SEEKER

YOU JUST WANT EVERYONE TO LOOK AT YOU...

ALL THE TIME

**TONI** - GET UP YOU PIECE OF SHIT

WHAT ON EARTH IS YOUR PROBLEM

**ROB** - GET UP YOU PIECE OF SHIT

NOW

**LEAH** - IDIOT WHAT'S WRONG WITH YOU? GET UP!

[VIKKI CRAWLS AWAY]

*PENDULUM*

**VIKKI** - I hear his slippers on the floor

I hear him breathing

I smell him close by and

I know what he's coming for.

Big man hands over young pale skin

Heavy breathing

Like oil on a seabird.

Gifts and

Day trips.

I was not ready

And I cannot forgive you.

I cannot wash him off me

I try to erase him with the next man the next man the next man.

I am cold on the slab.

Do what you want to me.

His dirt. His hands.

[LOUD BANG, BLOOD ON TONI]

*RICHTER 4D AS WOMEN DELIVER TEXT*

[ROB / TONI DUET]

**LEAH**- The past is not enough to stop us,

to stop or block our way. *MOVE MIC/WALK ROUND TABLE*

**VIKKI** - So watch us now, stand up, stand tall

Stand all the shit and let it fall.

We cry, we try, we fly into breath. *MOVE MIC / UNDER TABLE*

**ANNETTE** - Stop.

Count 1.

Count 2

Count 3.

Count Death. *MOVE MIC/WALK AROUND TABLE*

**ANNA** - Stop.

To all our fights and flights-

We stand.

We strike.

Strike out on our own. *MOVE MIC/WALK AROUND TABLE*

**VIKKI** - Stop.

Turn corners,

Turn tricks

Turn tables

Turn heads

Spin ourselves into care.

**LEAH** - Stop.

Reach out

to friends,

to right directions

**ANNETTE** - To our kids with new affections

Taking on the search for what we lost-

**VIKKI** - *STEP* - The cost we paid in full.

Not that its laughter- or that happy ever after stuff –

Just bits of hope, to cope

to bend, not break,

to reach, not ache,

To weave and breathe-

[TONI AND ROB START BREATHING AT TABLE]

**ANNA** - *STEP* - A chance to step - with one foot - then another.

**VIKKI** - Hold onto stuff that matters -

**ANNETTE** - *STEP* - We breathe.

**LEAH** - *STEP* - We breathe.

**Louise** - *STEP* - We listen

**VIKKI** - *STEP* - We breathe.

**ANNETTE** - *STEP* - We feel.

**LEAH** - *STEP* - We listen.

**VIKKI** - *STEP* - An eye of how we might be feeling, in and out -

**LEAH** - Stop. *STEP* - Count the breath -

**ANNETTE** - *STEP* - Count 1



**ANNA** - *STEP* - Count 2

**VIKKI** - *STEP* - Count 3

An ear to what we might be hearing

Breathing in and out

**ANNETTE** -An ear to what we might be thinking,

In and out

**ANNA** - A step to what we might be hoping,

In and out

**LEAH** -An eye to what we might be missing

In and out

**ANNA** - A step

**ANNETTE** – A step

**VIKKI** – A step to where we might be heading

**LEAH** - Breathing in, and out.

[4 WOMEN LONG EXHALATION]

[4 WOMEN LONG INHALATION]

[4 WOMEN LONG EXHALATION]

[4 WOMEN LONG INHALATION]

[4 WOMEN LONG EXHALATION]

[4 WOMEN LONG INHALATION]

[4 WOMEN LONG EXHALATION]

[BREATH STOPS, **RICHTER 4D** PIANO MUSIC SLOWLY FADES] [FADE TO BLACK] **END CREDITS**

## APPENDIX 4: PRESS & ARTICLES, ART OF ATTACHMENT (LIVE PRODUCTION, 2018)

### ART OF ATTACHMENT: IT FELT LIKE A CONVERSATION

by Isobel Todd, Psychodynamic Counsellor and Arts Journalist in *The Psychologist*, 22 October 2018



‘People say more in their art than in reports and case conferences,’ declares Lemn Sissay towards the start of this extraordinary evening. Sissay is an award-winning wordsmith whose blistering poems and plays have explored his sufferings as a child in the care system of the Seventies and Eighties. Last year, in a radical testing of the connection between theatre and therapy, he staged a public reading of his own psychological assessment at London’s Royal Court theatre. He couldn’t bear to read it himself, and wanted a live audience there with him when he heard the report for the first time.

So Sissay knows all about art as expression, art as empowerment and protest, and art as containment. But he has, he says, discovered it all afresh through *The Art Of Attachment*. This unique project has seen the Brighton Oasis Project, a substance misuse service, collaborate with three different artists. Using Attachment Theory as their starting point, Sissay, feminist choreographer Charlotte Vincent and filmmaker Becky Edmunds spent 18 months working with

women and children at the service, exploring and giving representation to their often deeply traumatic life experiences. These are women whose stories have been subsumed in case reports or eclipsed by social stigma. This one-off public performance, sensitively accommodated by the theatre with a dry bar and a pop-up creche, is by no means the sum total of the project. But it certainly involves the sell-out audience in a transformative act of witnessing.

Sissay's reading interweaves his own poems – each one an act of survival heaving with anger and hope – with writing produced in his workshops at Brighton Oasis Project. 'You're the bloody baseball bat to the killer clown,' goes the opening of a poem by one eight-year-old boy, who was asked by Sissay to describe somebody he loved. Sissay reads the first line several times over, relishing its word power, its resilience. 'The institution is in itself an attachment disorder', he declares in the subsequent Q&A, recalling how, between the ages of 12 and 18, he was given multiple diagnostic labels – but never a hug.

The piece of dance-theatre feels like an enactment of Sissay's earlier insight about how much more we can communicate of trauma through art. The stage is set for a report or a case conference: a long table, chairs, microphones, and piles of notes that are routinely and perfunctorily shuffled. Joined by dancers Antonia Grove and Robert Clark, the four women from Brighton Oasis Project are at first merely presented to us: their 'histories' itemised with detached thoroughness, their 'problems' glossed like boxes on a tick sheet. Every substance listed puts another brick in the wall.

But it is clear from the outset that an alternative version of these stories is going to be told – one that is agonisingly visceral, and often beyond words. In the opening moments, a woman gives birth to a baby. They are connected by an umbilical rope, and we watch it uncoil and

tauten across the stage as the baby is slowly removed from its mother. Suddenly the rope is cut, and she curls into a foetal position around its loose end.

Attachment Theory doesn't just apply, here, to the nurturing bond between mother and child. The piece is also about the connecting red ribbon of trauma, the cruel predicament facing women who, through motherhood, find themselves re-confronted with the emotional deficits in their own childhoods. It is a piece about what happens when love is absent, or lost, or all mixed up with pain; or when love just isn't enough. Through narrative and movement, the women tell stories of sexual, physical and mental abuse, and above all of loss. Sometimes the onstage action is overlaid with recorded dialogue. It is chopped up roughly, suggesting the way trauma assaults our sense of continuity and coherence.

But this is also a piece about love as an enduring source of hope. Taking back the microphones, seizing control of their stories, the four women counter the case notes by listing 'positives' about themselves. Again and again, they cite the desire to be a good mother, and the desire to be loved. Perhaps the fact they have managed to stick with this 18-month project, form a company, allow each other to inhabit their stories, is itself proof that attachment patterns can change. Performance, after all, is a supreme act of trust.

'I still don't feel like a performer,' says one woman, during the post-show Q&A. 'If I hadn't of had Charlotte's help for eight months, I wouldn't have been on the stage. I wasn't performing, I wanted to communicate something. It felt like a conversation.' 'That,' responds Sissay, chipping in from the seat he has now taken up in the audience, 'is the best description of art I know'.

**Art of Attachment: Reflection by Rachel Thomson, Centre for Innovation & Research In Childhood And Youth (CIRCY) At Sussex, 21 October 2018**



'I don't see myself as a performer', said Vikki at the premiere of the Vincent Dance Theatre's *Art of Attachment*. In this 50 minute piece, professional dancers Toni and Rob work alongside four women from the Brighton Oasis Project, to explore themes of addiction, loss, love and hope and recovery. The premiere of the work at the Attenborough Centre for Creative Arts last night was greeted with a standing ovation and, in a post-performance discussion, audience members described their feelings of awe and empathy in response to a work in which women tell their stories of attachment to damaged and damaging parents, to drugs and alcohol, to lost children and ultimately to life, breath and the future. The **Art of Attachment** has been in gestation for nine months, during which Charlotte Vincent has led a programme of research, experiment and rehearsal with service users at the [Brighton Oasis Project](#) which provides holistic drug and alcohol treatment services for women and their families in the South East.

A monochrome and stripped-down set focuses attention on a long table at which six performers are seated behind microphones, absorbed in synchronised paperwork and whispers – introducing motifs of outer bureaucracy and inner voices connecting a series of set pieces at

the front of the stage. These begin dramatically with birth and the symbolic enactment of attachment and loss with the cutting of an umbilical cord. The struggle to tell one's story and the question of whose story that is (mother, daughter, daughter-mother) is communicated in a looping and layered way, with fragments of recorded speech, gesture, testimony, nursery rhymes and lullabies working together to make the unspeakable heard and the unbearable contained.

There are moments of genuine peril in the performance as we share the hiding child's terror of an approaching abuser to the refrain of the three little pigs (*I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down*) – and as we witness the explosion of violence on the stage when the struggle to communicate is just too much. But we are also moved to hope as a litany of damaging experience gives us an alternative bucket list of things achieved by the age of thirty: the desire to be loved, the ability to adapt, a BA in Business Administration.

There is no sentimentality in this piece, it does not ask us to judge or to pity – but allows us to witness the exhausting labours involved in experiencing, acting out and recovering from trauma. There are no quick fixes nor inevitable outcomes. It is a slow process, involving repetition, honesty, the building of trust, noticing rather than reacting. One step forward and two steps back, like *incy-wincy spider climbing up the spout*.

Introducing the evening, Jo-Anne Walsh – the director of the Brighton Oasis Project – explained that while she had hoped that their clients might be involved in some way in the final performance she had not dared to imagine a work that so fully supported them to tell their own stories. This achievement has involved careful, detailed and committed work on their part. Charlotte Vincent explains:

*'After 9 months of working together Vikki, Leah and Louise and Annette are carrying themselves and their life stories differently. Well established defence mechanisms, well-worn scripts and distrust have been usurped by a shared sense of purpose, empathy and self-worth, alongside a visible lengthening of bodies and strengthening of resolve'.*

That was very evident at the performance. The women owned the stage and the audience. Yet they were also clear that this was not a 'performance', it was their truth.



As a member of the project advisory team I have observed something of Charlotte Vincent's method, and how the creative process mirrors the attachment processes involved in recovery. 'Being there' is the starting point, giving rise to consistency, repetition and development. Trust is crucial, and inevitably it is challenged. So, the ability to survive disruption and to rebuild and to carry on is everything. Over the course of the project we have had many debates about attachment as a theory: questioning its' role in social work and court decisions, engaging with feminist critiques of mother-blaming and cautiously interpreting the findings of neuroscience. Yet through the project we have also witnessed the power of attachment as a metaphor – communicating something we all understand, and operating at different levels in ways that

both unite and divide us across boundaries of parent/ child, professional/client, victim/ perpetrator.

The **Art of Attachment** performance is part of a wider project funded by the Wellcome Trust and the Arts Council – involving a number of artistic commissions including poetry by Lemn Sissay, film by Becky Edmunds and paintings, drawings and illustrations by Jenny Arran, Laura Bissonet and Oscar Romp. It shows what is possible when artists are invited to lead processes of social research and innovation. The ACCA was sold out last night, but I hope that more people have a chance to witness this work and unpick the many insights that are contained within its rich tapestry. This extraordinary work that deserves a wide audience – but especially students of social work and other caring professions for whom ‘attachment’ is a working theory. **Rachel Thomson, Professor of Childhood & Youth Studies, Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth, School of Education and Social Work. University of Sussex.**

**Integrative Arts and Art of Attachment by Jo Parker, Art/Law Network,  
22 January 2019**

**Integrative Arts psychotherapist Jo Parker speaks of her involvement in Brighton Oasis Project (BOP)’s ‘Art of Attachment’ project, and how art can transcend and transform in the name of justice.**

*‘The authentic voice may not be the one you want to hear. All true art is subversive at some level or other, but it doesn’t simply subvert literary clichés and social conventions; it also subverts the clichés and conventions you yourself would like to believe in. Like dreams, it talks for parts of yourself you*



*are not fully aware of and may not much like'. The Writer's Voice, Al Alvarez*

**(2013)**

I have been working for ten years as an integrative arts psychotherapist at Young Oasis, a service of BOP, specifically for young people and children with substance misuse in the family. Working with creative processes is integral to BOP in its unique provision of drug and alcohol treatment to women and services for children and young people affected by histories of substance dependence.

Inside the therapy room I work using the arts as a way to access the unconscious. I use words and metaphor. There is also a sand tray with objects, clay, paint, felt tips, musical instruments, puppets, dressing up clothes. I might invite a client to 'show me' what they are feeling by making an image. This process can be a powerful way to externalise internal processes and work on them. As a team, over the years, we have delivered Outdoor Art groups, exhibited in local galleries, worked alongside local artists and collaborated with organisations such as South East Dance, Fabrica and Brighton and Sussex Universities.

The Art of Attachment project was one of our flagship projects and was conceived as a way of researching and exploring individual experiences of attachment. Attachment theory, originally put forward by John Bowlby in 1969 and developed with collaborator Mary Ainsworth, remains a dominant theory in the field of scientific research today. It examines the human need for connection and relationship, with particular focus on the parent-infant bond. Funded by the Wellcome Trust and Arts Council England, the Art of Attachment project was comprised of a programme of workshops, exhibitions and seminars that took place over eighteen months 2017-18.

Lemn Sissay MBE, poet, author, broadcaster and self-proclaimed ‘child of the state’; and Charlotte Vincent, choreographer and director, were the lead artists, alongside other artists Becky Edmunds, Oscar Romp and Laura Bissonet. Adults in treatment services and their children were engaged in an exploration of substance misuse, parenting and attachment issues, which culminated in a performance at the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA), Brighton, in October 2018.



Lemn Sissay and the children (taken by Project Manager Alison Cotton)

### **A Secure Base**

One of Ainsworth’s principles was the idea that the caregiver provides a child with a ‘secure base from which to explore’, and this principle was present throughout the project. Working safely and without compromising the participants or the art, was at Art of Attachment’s heart. Attachment behaviours are activated in times of stress, danger, fear, excitement; working with the unknown during the project, involved taking risks for and with the participants, as well as the artists and for the organisation. Establishing a strong working alliance to build a ‘secure base’ was essential.

The project advisory group was multi-disciplinary and vital in its guiding role. My role was as clinical lead on the ground, observing, tracking, feeding back on the process and providing a

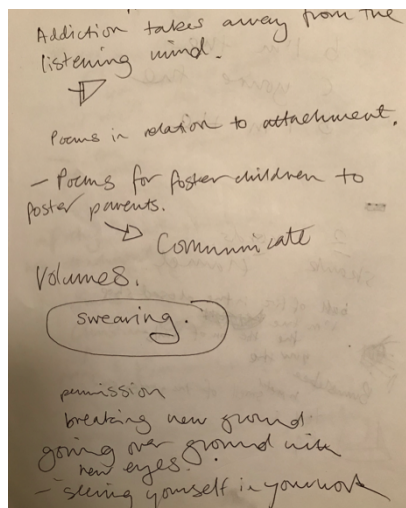
holding function, alongside programme manager Alison Cotton who had the difficult task of straddling all aspects and making everything happen.

It is not a clean business at BOP, it involves working with trauma, chaos, pain and loss; it is neglecting, violating and violent. It is messy and it is not in the securely attached world.

Therefore, the way the arts fit in with this has also been complicated and multi-dimensional.

### Containment and Expression

Both lead artists' approaches were very different, both successful. Lemn Sissay's workshops were ninety minutes long, they were sharp and went deep. Charlotte Vincent's nine months of workshops and research, involved a slow building of trust through time, culminating in a public performance. Over the course of the project, illustrations were commissioned by Oscar Romp and a film 'So heartbroken, so long' by Becky Edmunds.



*'Poetry is a place where the truth speaks'* Lemn Sissay

Lemn's first workshop offered containment from the very beginning, providing a space that felt safe enough for the children, not just to sit, but to delve into their imaginations. It started on time and ended on time, keeping a tight boundary. The strip lighting was turned off and low

lighting introduced. The room changed from 'institution' to 'home'. Children were welcomed individually and by name.

The workshop began with Lemn telling them, 'I will be with you and not leave you for the next hour and a half'. His presence demanded their full attention. The further a child drifted, the closer he kept them by his side. He invited the children to think of someone significant to them, without disclosing who this was. He encouraged them to think of an image and then to 'go wild' with the words, but within four lines, all beginning with, 'You're the.....', which grew into four verses as the workshop progressed. I felt deeply moved as I watched some of the most dysregulated children I have worked with write with intensity, focus and in complete silence. There was an immediacy to the process and the children produced poems that were extraordinary, lines such as:

'You're the cold that makes me solid'

'You're the hot that makes me steam'

'You're the blustering breeze brushing through untamed hair'

Charlotte Vincent's approach was polar opposite, her workshops required stamina, commitment and grit. I was present for check ins, check outs, crises, dramas, and struggled when it felt like the boundaries were being pushed in what felt like counter-therapeutic directions. The constructive tension at times felt appropriately dangerous, and demonstrated the fission between art and therapy in the task of containment that the project aimed to create.



*“The performance you see tonight is the result of many hours of talking, sharing, writing, recording, questioning, listening, moving, crying, retracting, redacting, translating, thinking, improvising, trying out, walking out and walking back in again in order to carry on”.* Charlotte Vincent

This is a very accurate account of the process by Charlotte. Working intensively with a group of four women over nine months, produced the most powerful performance. This group experience invited people to share the raw material of their lives. Working alongside professional dancers and through Charlotte’s direction this material was translated into movement. Working with the body, movement and breath the group developed a strong bond, the workshops helped provide a rhythm and structure in the participants’ lives. One participant could not move for the first two months, refusing touch and keeping her coat on. By October, she was laughing and rolling on the floor in the group, on stage she was able to hold a three hundred-strong audience captivated as she performed.

On the night of the performance, starkly staged in the style of the Last Supper, the six performers were sat at a table, each with a microphone. There were few props – piles of paper, microphones, some wine bottles, and a baby doll. With deliberation, poise, timing and breath, a

lone voice spoke: *'I want to talk about the difficult. It's difficult. I am difficult. I was difficult, but words get in the way. Words like, birth, reject, birth, reject.'*

The looping, repeating voice samples, interrupt and overlap, stopping and then returning.

Sound was a constant: heartbeats, breathing, testimonies and lullabies, a recurring theme.

There was visceral emotion where an infant one minute was enveloped in the sound of its mother singing, to interruption the next by sounds of violence and aggression. To be shunted rather than lulled, this brings us directly into the content of the Vincent Dance Theatre performance. It was beautifully executed, professionally performed, with shocking content; it was theatre based on truth, hard-hitting, indigestible truth.

The impact of performing this by the women themselves alongside the dancers to a sell-out audience was transformative. In a thankyou card, these words were written by one of the women:

*'Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be part of Charlotte Vincent DRAMA, I have suffered mental health, drink and drugs for 33 years and The DRAMA has been the BEST therapy I ever had and I will be eternally grateful'*

### **The Art of Attachment – a Dynamic Relational Model**

BOP works with a 'developmental' model of attachment, understanding that relational patterns can be influenced by new experiences. The Art of Attachment was expansive in its ambition and approach. The participants were no longer reduced to a report, or a referral in need of a service, their experiences were relayed as deeply human, they were applauded with a standing ovation.

Everyone involved in the project came out changed. I am confident that there has been rich learning and I know that for myself it will take time to process fully. The project was a courageous experiment into the shadows of those who felt able to share. It showed that this messy process could deliver clean outcomes, through careful collaboration. Bodies moved, so too were emotions and the witnesses in the final show's audience.

### **Art and Justice**

People talk about giving people 'a voice', often referring to marginalised people. Lemn Sissay said that you can't 'give someone a voice', when it is not yours to give – each of us has a voice of our own. Working alongside the artists has enabled not only the participants' voices to be heard, but for them to be seen, in the spotlight – unapologetic.

Both the practice of art and of psychotherapy are concerned with truth, in this case the women and children of BOP were its subject. The **Art of Attachment** has allowed for the overlapping of many worlds and has facilitated deep listening. BOP is an innovative organisation that took a risk in doing this, which feels rare in our overly cautious world. As Al Alvarez in the quote above eloquently stated, 'the authentic voice may not be the one that you want to hear'. This is exactly what the Art of Attachment achieved, it got people listening. A rare glimpse into the world of substance misuse and peoples' lives was shared through art. This assures the power and necessity of art in society.

## **Challenging Perceptions of Women with Substance Misuse Issues** by *Charlotte Vincent, Brighton And Hove Independent, 24 August, 2018*

The **Art of Attachment**, an evening of two new works made in collaboration with women and children at Brighton Oasis Project (Oasis) is to be performed alongside new work by poet Lemn Sissay in October.

There is widespread judgement around women and mothers who misuse drugs and alcohol and who risk losing their children into care. What are the real stories behind these chaotic lifestyles and all this potential loss?

Since February, I have been facilitating workshops with clients from **substance misuse service Oasis**, and interviewing professionals involved in attachment to explore the complex emotional bonds that exist between women in recovery and their partners, children, family and friends.

A core group of four Oasis women are creatively exploring their relationship with attachment and trauma, and, together with regular Vincent Dance Theatre performers Robert Clark and Antonia Grove, are creating a new production that begins to tell it how it is.

Whilst there is little understanding of attachment theory outside of specialist networks, it is influential in child protection settings where decisions are made daily about whether a child should be removed into care. Attachment theory describes the way in which a parent or carer can respond sensitively to their child's needs at times of distress and fear in infancy. It is thought that children who are securely attached develop greater independence and self-esteem than those who are not. However, some academics and practitioners have recognised that the application of attachment-based principles in practice has its limitations, particularly for families where there are recognised risks and vulnerabilities.



As Jo-Anne Welsh, then director of Brighton Oasis Project, says: *“There should be recognition that people can change and attachment-based principles should be used to support families to stay together wherever feasibly possible”*.

To work imaginatively and creatively with vulnerable women and children and those professionals who support them, is personally moving and professionally challenging. There are personal, psychological, neurological, moral and socio-political issues at stake with this kind of work and my job is to try to create something that gives voice to the issues the women are facing in their lives and to articulate the possibility for change.

I have formed a strong rapport with the women and have a heartfelt understanding of the complexity of their individual journeys. I am hoping what we make together might allow anyone who sees it to better understand the paths these women’s lives have taken and why; and the empowering nature of the arts to heal, integrate, strengthen and empower women, many of whom have had a really tough start in life.

Whilst hard-hitting in terms of its subject matter, **Art of Attachment** is ultimately insightful and uplifting, celebrating the everyday resilience of women and children overcoming adversity whose stories demand to be seen and heard.

Art of Attachment is a one-night performance at the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts on October 18 at 7pm. Lemn Sissay will perform new work, informed by his poetry workshops with BOP and his own experience as a ‘child of the state’. And a collaboration between women from Oasis and performers from Vincent Dance Theatre combines real-life testimonies, movement and spoken word to evoke the emotional, personal and social impact of attachment



## APPENDIX 5: FEEDBACK, ART OF ATTACHMENT LIVE PRODUCTION, 2018

‘Congratulations on a deeply moving and brilliant show. I was speaking to a super young vulnerable YP tonight - visibly shaken but remarkably strong. We spoke about the show and her experience of being a looked after child. She said the therapy she was offered was so patronising through CAMHS. What your show tonight offered her was a platform to open up and discuss her feelings about her situation... it really did open up the debate for our young people which is important. I really look forward to working with you on THRIVE (care leavers performance project in Farnham, May 2019) and giving these kids a much-needed voice. You truly are remarkable at what you do Charlotte - I really look forward to working with and learning from you. Please pass on my well wishes to the cast and to Charlotte for a truly brave and brilliant piece of theatre; it was so sensitively written and created. You really honoured those women and provided a platform for them to speak and be heard.’ **Rachel Deadman, The Dance Movement at Farnham Maltings**

‘I thought the show was wonderful. The participants/cast looked so confident and professional, and the story was pure/not sensationalised, coherent, complex and life affirming’. **Annabel Jackson, External Evaluator, Art of Attachment**

‘The show was really wonderful and mirrored the ‘using creativity for social change’ agenda I’ve always been interested in within the NHS.’ **Martha Robinson, Brave PR**

‘I just wanted to say how moving and powerful I found the performance. Both Lemn’s poetry and the performance itself.’ **Pamela Kent, Marketing Manager at Worthing Theatres**

‘It was an extraordinary privilege to be at last night’s phenomenal performance of [#ArtofAttachment](#) by [@VincentDT](#) together with the amazing women from [@Brighton Oasis](#). It will stay with me for a long time. Thank you for sharing your stories with such courage’. **Dr. Fidelma Hanrahan, Research Fellow (Against All Odds Programme) at University of Sussex, School of Education and Social Work**

‘Thank you, it felt a real privilege to witness such an extraordinary performance, I feel I’m still catching my breath.’ **Dulcie Alexander, Relationship Manager - Engagement & Audiences, Arts Council England**

‘Absolutely amazing performance by women of [@Brighton Oasis](#) [@VincentDT](#) [@AttenboroughCtr](#) this past evening. A wonderful culmination of the [#ArtofAttachment](#) project supported by [@wellcometrust](#) [@southeastdance](#) My thanks to all involved but especially those who told their stories’. **Bobbie Farsides, Professor of Clinical & Biomedical Ethics, University of Sussex and PAG member**

‘That was quite an amazing evening. How the cast were able to tell their stories like that was astounding.’ **Alick Mighall, VDT Trustee and Digital Product Manager**

‘Well done team [#ArtofAttachment](#) on making piece of real art together, with real voices and real stories! Feeling proud and in awe [@VincentDT](#) [@chazzavincen](#) [@Brighton Oasis](#) [@lemnsissay](#) congrats! The whole thing was exceptional. The women, the professional performers. I couldn’t sleep for hours thinking about it. Well done all of you!’ **Rose Kigwana, Chair VDT / Senior Producer Participation at South East Dance / PAG member**

‘Profoundly moving performance bringing to life stories of recovery, resilience and hope. Humbled by the bravery of the women giving so much of themselves in this process.’ **Vicki Ellis, Social Worker, specialising in and parental drug and alcohol use**

‘Outstanding performance from [@VincentDT](#) working with [@Brighton Oasis](#) - brilliant work and brilliant women. Thank you, I feel honoured to have been there.’ **Janet Boddy, Professor of Child, Youth & Family Studies; Director Centre for Innovation and Research in Childhood and Youth, University of Sussex.**

‘I wanted to send you my congratulations for the performance last week. To say we enjoyed it doesn’t feel quite the right expression, thought there was much to enjoy and Lemn gave the evening a fascinating start as he touched on so many different emotions and experiences. Wilf (husband) said the dance had the quality of a Shakespeare play and that it was the kind of production he would have written. Praise indeed! I am sure that you have had loads of praise, particularly of the part played by the women who were magnificent and courageous. It worked

on so many levels and I know how hard the journey was for everyone involved in the process, and I wish that there was more than one performance! It has been an extraordinary project and I guess quite unique in its focus and breadth of vision. So very best wishes to you all – it was great to be able to come along and see the results of so much hard work and commitment despite the pain, and it was a testament not only to the courage of the women, but also the strength and vision of the Oasis team.’ **Janet Wilde, Child Psychologist**

‘I wanted to say thank you to you and all the women involved in producing such a brave, honest and heartfelt performance, supported by Lemn Sissay who was wonderful. Such a privilege to witness and be part of another reminder of how crucial BOP is as the only service in the country providing women and family centred specialist services.’ **Jessica Taylor, Co-Chair Brighton**

#### **Oasis Project**

‘The performance was amazing. One of the best I’ve seen in any performance genre. It was fantastic, gripping, honest, disturbing and uplifting piece. And the elements of theatre (visual, aural, vocal, action, movement) were in a rarely seen perfect alignment – which made the communication TOTAL!’ **Oscar Romp, ACE-funded artist on Art of Attachment**

## **APPENDIX 6: FEEDBACK, ART OF ATTACHMENT, FILM INSTALLATION, 2021**

**Audiences were asked - *What if anything was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting or striking in the work for you?***

- The women sharing their stories and finding out that involvement in the production helped one lady stay clean and change her life.
- The use of sounds - breathing, crying I found the split screens engaging - it created a space for movement in watching and kept it fluid and transient.

- One of the women was doubtful and seemed to lack confidence, but she took up the challenge and produced quite an inspirational and insightful piece.
- The power of words.
- Echoes in the words of people I've worked with - things they have said re the tensions between professional language/case history.
- I think the voice over in relation to alcohol misuse was helpful in understanding the thought process behind addiction.
- It was very physical and intense - you become very drawn into their stories and almost feel part of it
- How graphic and protracted the agony of childhood experience can be. Thinking about the value of communication of painful reality - but also about the extremity of the challenge - leading to emotional distancing to cope with the material.
- I found the production very powerful and inspiring. I think is amazing how 4 women have come together to share their experiences.
- Evocative Sound - the table scenes with the speech, hand gestures, banging, really intense and intriguing the heavy breathing, panic, intense.
- I think I can hear more true voice form the work, know their feelings, experience in the context when they go through that it was impressive. I want to experience more.
- The film/installation was extremely moving.
- The experience was powerful - to see how these women have had the strength to empower others and inform others whilst being on the road to recovery too. It was so informative and really gave a meaningful insight to trauma and the affects into adult hood. To have it portrayed through dance and performance was striking and helps me keep it in mind. It is really making me think about people's journeys and experiences and now that shapes an individual - both positively and negatively.

- The message was clear and I really empathised with participants who were involved.
- The raw material collected channelling the unnerving braveness of the individuals sharing their stories. The way it was edited as very profound - as it gave order to the depth of emotions despite the messiness rather than the narration of each person's trauma.
- The stories/work shows the different ways in which children grow up in and how sometimes the system fails them and how it takes courage to get out of it. In addition, it was an experiencing having the headphones - it was immersive. It also reminded me of the different experiences I had while working with children.
- The text felt very meaningful and evocative - maybe more so than the movement. I found the interviews very interesting and of course the way we as audience members were welcomed, briefed on the piece content, invited to get creative and process our emotions - that was really inspiring and insightful to me as a choreographer.
- The way the women were supported to find their voice, they found who can listen to their stories without necessarily sitting and carrying the trauma home.
- The strength at the survivors who took part is incredible! It shows that it is important to give survivors another way of working through their own trauma in their own way. The paper pushing, all seated at the table is very striking as to how it can feel social care deal with tick boxes and not real people.
- Being able to explore the story through dance. More powerful than just words.
- The court process: 'the othering'. The individual stories. The power of the body holding the pain. The way trauma goes so deep and what we need to understand.
- The many different feelings, events going on - helping capture the many layers and complexities involved.
- The sense of the experience being theatrical - 2 screens in dialogue organisation and aesthetic of the room, houses, set. The presence of the real through screen sharing

interviews. The interplay between text and body - the idea that we carry our stories in our bodies and tell them through the body when words fail, or through words when body fails.

- The whole work was striking - having women speak their own story in a powerful way was striking. Also dance and embodied content of story – powerful.
- Honesty despite the pain.
- Alcohol and drugs used as coping mechanisms for underlying life experiences and then consequences of that.
- Evocative stories, sharing of stories between women, sense of a community between the women in the film, useful to have the man represent shifting roles.
- How the cycle of abusers having been abused was addressed.
- The language... The nursery rhymes. The experiences and use of art to express these powerful narratives.
- Hearing from lived experiences and how this process has helped them. Humanizing this and the trauma they have overcome in their lives.
- Nursery rhymes to explain addiction - the idea that a cycle of shit repeats.
- I am struck by the way in which connections and interconnections are made between the personal embedded experiences of the individual women, their stories and voices and the processes of healing and recovery. The installation/performance exposed the harm inflicted by the procedural and documented versions of these lives. The piece recovered the intimacy beneath the surface.
- Emphasis on positives in victim's lives, very important to add.
- It was Amazing! So powerful, the symbolism and visual representation was so moving and will stay engraved on my memory. It allows you to FEEL some of what these women experienced.



- I think the props used were impactful as it helped you visualise the situation and some were quite striking (baby, rope, blood etc). The use of the voice and slamming the table was striking and intense.
- I have lived this, I have overcome it and I can help others get through stuff like this.
- Knowing that the women involved were giving true accounts/personal experiences rather than text book examples.
- Exploring the polarities and complexities involved in trauma. Very powerfully communicated.
- Really powerful Embodiment - the body keeps the story and using power of movement and theatre. Really loved it.
- How taking part in the arts has helped them deal and overcome their trauma how it is useful to use different forms of therapy as partaking in this film has helped them to deal with the trauma.
- The spoken word was very meaningful as you could fully listen to the independent experiences I think the rawness and pureness of the work was interesting - if I was in the shoes of the people talking - i don't think I would feel safe enough to talk about my experiences - so I think they are all extremely brave.
- The visual combined with the audio was powerful. Particularly hearing the women's inner dialogue and negative self-talk.
- The chaos in the music made me feel like I was experiencing with them.
- New to this, so struck by how skilful dancers were, excellent in movement, tempo, expression - how this flowed/created into the story of the films.
- I loved the piece. It was beautifully produced and worked really well on screen (I often think dance loses something when not live but this didn't - the close ups of the women's faces were incredibly powerful). Very moving overall.

- Watching the interviews after it was interesting to hear the lady say how she spoke about the trauma by writing just random words, they formed sentences and then were put into packaged disasters - In the play the powerful part is the one step, breather, step. It's a hard journey but you take it a step at a time.
- The use of language and the negative words that professionals have used and the impact that this has on individuals. Makes you think about what you write about people and how this may impact on them. The video was very powerful.
- The fact that it was real women, with real stories to tell. It hit home so much more and you could see how much it mean to them. Also, the positives they spoke about themselves was really moving, as we often forget and we shouldn't.
- The courage of the women included was striking. I found the juxtaposition of professionals and non-professionals, of dance and narration, exciting and impactful - and also the use of sound, short sentences, repeated words and themes, breath work and music helped create an urgency and intensity in the work - and a sense of almost the claustrophobia of the lived experience of the woman.
- The audible content very visceral - it felt like a whole-body experience evocative stories that made me emotional approachable, doesn't feel out of reach, headphones make it more personal.
- Really powerful and reflective - I was able to reflect on the reality of social work and the power of words and language.
- The close-up movement with spoken words. The fixed gaze of the performers. The strength coming through from the women.
- I understood the reasons behind why mothers may abuse themselves and their unborn children which gave me more empathy towards these women.

- It really puts the power back to these women. It has helped me and reminded me to be empathetic in my approach and to remember everyone has a past and story to be told.
- The right brain communication - multi sensory/arts approach bringing/adding to understanding with its visceral affect. Moving away from the distancing of the familiar time/space/movement.
- How much pressure there was on the women, the labels, the control from the man.
- I liked the art of showing what women felt during the life, feel this is helpful for parents to see and can be used to explain their journey.
- The power, the destruction, the seen and the unknown.
- Vivid, imagery – honesty. The problem list was quite emotive for me - a difficult process.
- The depth of engagement with and meaningful experience of all participants, total commitment to the work which retained their integrity and presented their stories with absolute honesty and clarity. this was apparent in the complete conviction & bravery of their performances to camera, overcoming their fear of exposure in their determination to own their history and find positive paths for their futures.
- The use of individual headphones, creative activities to physically engage in, the mix of dance, poetry, sound, performance really creates a whole immersive experience and really invites reflection and empathy.
- From the interview after the film it became very clear how empowering the production was for the 4 women. I wonder if it was similar for the other women participating in the workshops.
- I could feel the pain of the mothers from the duets. This helps professionals think again about the 'processes' they do. The endless paper shows how clinical and cold these meetings can be and challenges how things are done.

- All the videos were stunning - particularly the voices speaking about their inner thoughts and struggles with addiction
- Hearing real life experiences, insight in how social work assessments can have a huge impact on how women view themselves. Finding the balance of risk. Good for public who don't know about trauma informed practice.
- Everything! use of passive baby - very powerful image of utter exposure/vulnerability  
Timing/duration of party scene very effective. Complexity of emotional/relational responses and intergenerational patterns etc.
- The blend of stories and dance. The 'growth'/contribution of the 4 women. The 'professionals' with their paperwork versus the real stories.
- The power of the stories told through movement, how impactful that is to an audience member but also to the women. The care and support required given deep respect.
- I usually focus on child cases - but today I could see problems for parents or another side I just remember that the face of women who had been removed from her baby - just after the day was born. If I see the same from child case that's good choice but the women's face was just so sad and it was painful for me.
- Hearing people's stories. I really got a sense of the systemic failure and how people developed survival strategies that stop them living fully.
- The work made me consider my own role as a parent how the form of the piece allowed an in-depth exploration of these difficult part lives - lists/repetition/movement.
- Hugely emotionally powerful - incredibly immersive. The materials (in the room) encouraged you to have a more visceral reflective experience.
- Seeing once more the beautiful exchange between professional performers and non-performers was very moving. Hearing the unique ways in which these women's stories are told was similarly powerful.

- The use of the words/movement/sound etc. gave a clearer more visceral response to the piece than I have felt at the live performance, which had been more empathetic towards the women and their bravery at that moment of being in front of the audience.
- The role that dance and performance has played in supporting women to recover and regarding confidence and control of their life

***Is there anything distinctive about the media or VDT's methods that makes the issues accessible and meaningful?***

- It gives you the opportunity to hear other people's thoughts and feelings.
- Hearts - opportunity to 'fill them'.
- There is a theme within the space that is translated through the tangible and tactile activities.
- Everyone has different contributions to the same simple tasks which evoke more meaning to how everyone has different experiences every day and throughout life.
- This could be a day long activity as there is so much more stuff people can do and produce from watching and listening to the women's stories.
- How therapeutic it is and easy to talk when distracted doing a creative task.
- I found the media method a good way in engagement and understanding the issues around and resulting in addiction and other issues.
- It creates a very personal approach
- Sitting around a table, watching together, doing tasks to participate - facilitate accessibility of material images - inspired for processing.
- The use of clay was very good as we could craft anything we would have felt through watching and listening to experiences.
- Making the paper houses was the most sheerly enjoyable part of the experience.

- As a visual learner, I enjoyed seeing it as a film/performance rather than reading something.
- Doing an activity after watching these clips were very helpful to reflect on our emotions and reactions to their experience. It was very meaningful.
- How safe and accepting the environment is and how open everyone is willing to be.
- Doing the crafting gives you the opportunity to analyse what we saw and talk with others.
- Yes, the close-ups in the films brought me very close to the performers and their stories in a way that a face-to-face performance might not have afforded. Seeing the stacks of chairs in the corners of the room and noticing that scenes had been filmed in this room also made everything very real.
- Using art makes it relaxing to share and reflect on the issues.
- The watching and listening and 'fiddling' while chatting makes you feel relaxed and informal and that its ok to speak up and that you do have things to say and allowed to have an opinion and thoughts about things.
- Very engaging conversations and creative ideas. I enjoyed the display of feelings through dance.
- I like the creative side. Nice to express feelings after watching the film with the activities after. It feels less intense and more relaxing.
- Found having the clay to play with very helpful: enjoyed the feeling of this as a way to process.
- It was great to get a chance to play! Although I'm spoilt because I saw the theatre production and it was the most profound piece of theatre I'd ever seen. The work you are doing is amazing and should be available to all.
- The multiple videos, crafts etc allow you to pull so many things out, rather than just focusing on one layer.

- I liked the possibilities, the options, the choices - I suspect that responses are so individual that options and choices are good but I think the movement of coming together as a group, chatting in pairs and then sharing responses round the circle was key for me especially as the piece is about talking, sharing being in a safe space etc.
- Having those challenging issues explained/modelled through dance and performance - very good for instance the authorities doing their paperwork – excellent.
- It helped me cope with the difficult subjects being expressed. Especially the clay.
- Having something crafty to do takes the pressure off feeling like you have to say something - allows you to engage on your own terms as silence is not 'awkward' the music helped as well.
- Watching film and discussion works very well together.
- Being able to have a creative response whilst being simulated by the work made it easier to process and reflect on it
- It was different.
- The multi-screen projection added movement and momentum to this piece. I found the interplay between stillness, bleakness, closeness and distance really engaging. Listening to voices, music, sounds, breathing, received through the headphones brought me closer to the agency of the individuals in the journeys they are revisiting and sharing.
- Simple backgrounds make it easier to focus on dancers and dialogue.
- This was quite new to me to do craft activities while watching/engaging in visual activity and as a way of centring myself - good use of this I think.
- As the film dealt with some difficult issues it's good to have opportunities for reflections and sharing thoughts and feelings.
- The discussions after watching the film were helpful as it let you think more about it and see other people's opinion

- Certainly - it is kind of participatory - you see yourself doing gestures as through you are part of the acting.
- Using clay was extremely effective.
- The discussions and interactive tasks stopped the sad/more distressing content of the film from taking over my thoughts processes and provided an area of positivity and reflection.
- Engaging with the material in bite sized pieces through discussion and craft takes us deeper into the exploration and I know will stay with me for longer.
- Our team discussions really evoked a lot of thought about how we can work harder to get other professional to empathise more with the parents we work with.
- It was intense so I appreciated the thought of focusing on something else to absorb the art.
- Of course, it makes you feel closer and lived experience like something intense and beautiful in a different way.
- Allowing time to talk and interact and discuss what we had seen provided great insight into how other people interpreted the dance.
- The paper crafting activities helped to paint/present a different world/salve to the difficulties expressed in films.
- Having the space to share personal responses after watching the work made this feel much more than watching a piece of dance theatre and I think was needed after the themes raised in the work. Having one of the performers as part of the discussion was an added extra.
- It helps you be creative, not to overthink and naturally come out with what you have felt and thought.
- The use of the language, enjoyed the use of the putty and then making paper crafts at the end, talking and reflecting with others on what we had seen. Also learnt how to make a paper heart something i can then take back and do this with the children and families we work with.



- Group discussion was helpful in processing the film - and for me especially the paired discussion.
- The crafting activities and modelling clay were especially useful for processing afterwards and helped discussions to be more accessible and meaningful.
- It was nice to do a paper/small activity as we all got to talk and share our thoughts in a calm and open environment.
- The crafts activities have real potential to open up the conversation.
- Watching the film with headphones to block out distractions made it more powerful.
- It's just nice to take an environment outside of normal working space to be reflective and to remember why I do what I do. It is easy to forget when you have deadlines etc. Great to have a different medium and bring the arts and nominations together - it doesn't happen often.
- The clip was so meaningful and enabled me to enter into the experience without applying intellect and moving to a cognitive place - I felt it.
- The slowness/speed up/spliced/disconnected/flowing nature of time and space - helping move away from another left-brain rationalising point of view.
- The visual form of dance was very clever, it helped me to connect with subject matter.
- crafting activities are a good distraction when talking I guess so that parents don't give that eye contact and can talk whilst doing the activity.
- Switching between these is ideal mixes up what is felt on a sensory level, larger movement (dance) feels like a unique way to explore something that is usually so paper based (trauma) with document writing etc.
- Small group and enabled discussion that was well held and facilitate with a focus on listening and responding. Calm. Non-reactionary. Non-judgemental. Well-practiced.

- Metaphor in the film (needing dough, dance with bottles of alcohol) powerful sounds, breath - all really make the film so compelling. The clay and crafts reduce the intensity of the experience and contribute to making it positive.
- Interesting to hear the backstories and ideas behind the installation. Super interesting to hear about how you present and use the material with different audiences.
- Film helps you 'feel'
- Everything was helpful.
- Yes. The film reveals more than live performance. I see expressions more fully. Doing these tasks afterwards means I can leave a message of gratitude. Talking about it brings it alive in my body.
- Using the screen was so interesting. I could see a scene from two side and the combination was also meaningful for me Also using headphone as good too because on the film and respect my own mind and experience.
- Yes - doing echoed the importance of creative practice as a way of making and mediating emotional experience.
- I appreciated the tactile activities and the consideration of our wellbeing given the difficult subject matter.
- Opportunity to reflect verbally with group was welcome Listening to women's experience of taking part was moving and informative
- An incredibly holistic approach - the range of media (sound, dance, film installation, group setting, regulatory tasks etc.) was incredibly rich and allowed for different ways into experiences for participants with their own personal/artistic experiences.
- It was useful/helpful to have a task to carry out whilst chatting/discussing our responses.

- I especially appreciated the opportunity to watch films in which participants reflected on their experience of the project and the impact of it has had on their lives. Contextualises the work and validates it in a memorable way.
- Personally, I'm not sure I would have wanted to do the crafting activities as they felt more prescribed and not in the same feeling of the piece. Too much of a contrast away from what we had just watched.
- I hope it is successful in reducing the stigma for women and mothers in particular who misuse substances by contextualising this in the context of trauma.
- The mixture of media makes the experience cut across systems and organisations responses.
- A more comfortable and reflective way to discuss and reflect. The film made the experience intense and relatable.

## **APPENDIX 7: VDT'S SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

Policy written: 2015

Last reviewed: July 2022

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the Vincent Dance Theatre (VDT) Safeguarding Policy is to:

- serve as guidelines and best practice in protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults who take part in any VDT activities.
- provide anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT with clear guidelines and overarching principles of VDT's safeguarding practice and procedures.

This policy is drawn up on the basis of law and guidance that seeks to protect children, namely:

- United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child 1991
- Children Act 1989 & 2004
- Children (Performances & Activities) (England) Regulations 2014
- Equalities Act 2010
- General Data Protection Regulation 2018
- DFE: Working Together to Safeguard Children

VDT recognises it has a responsibility to promote the welfare of young people and vulnerable adults and to keep them safe. VDT is committed to practice in a way that protects them whilst providing them with the best possible experience and opportunities.

This policy applies to anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT and is approved by the VDT Board of Trustees on an annual basis.

### **Aims**

VDT recognises that:

- the welfare of all participants is paramount.

- all participants whatever their age, ethnicity, culture, disability, gender or religious beliefs have the right to protection.
- everyone working with children, young people and vulnerable adults has a responsibility for the safety and wellbeing of each person in our care.
- anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT should have the appropriate safeguarding knowledge in order to carry out their responsibilities effectively.
- working in partnership with children, young people, vulnerable adults their parents, careers and other agencies is essential in promoting young people's welfare.
- the use of information technology can present challenges in terms of how we use it responsibly and, if misused, can be potentially harmful.

VDT seeks to keep those in its care safe by:

- valuing, listening to and respecting them.
- ensuring proper recruitment and training for anyone working on behalf of VDT.
- sharing policies and protocols with external contractors and associates.
- sharing concerns with agencies who need to know, and involving parents and children appropriately.
- implementing an effective e-safety/digital policy and procedures
- ensuring all documentation and sensitive information is treated confidentially and held securely.
- ensuring that the relevant consent procedures are taken for photography, filming and audio recording.
- ensuring that there is sensitivity to the content of project sessions which considers the age, gender and abilities of all participants.
- ensuring at least one adult will hold the appropriate DBS check and have had references checked. If only one adult is available, then appropriate measures will be identified and action taken to mitigate against risk.
- Following the necessary steps as set out in VDT & Playing On Theatre Company's <https://www.vincentdt.com/project/safeguarding-questions-for-working-in-the-arts/> when starting a new project.

### **Safeguarding Code of Conduct**

Anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT are expected to adhere to the safeguarding code of conduct, which promotes good practice, challenges inappropriate behaviour and serves to maintain professional and respectful standards of behaviour whilst representing VDT in any capacity. It is designed to protect children, young people and vulnerable adults from any form of abuse and to reduce the possibility of unfounded allegations of abuse.

It is expected that anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT report any concerns or breaches of this code of conduct to the **Safeguarding Officer**. A serious breach may result in a referral to the Police, Local Children's Safeguarding Board and the DBS.

Working with children, young people and vulnerable adults when representing VDT it is expected that you:

- treat everyone with respect and your conduct leads by example.
- avoid favouritism.
- do not allow yourself to be drawn into any inappropriate or attention-seeking behaviour.
- do not make derogatory gestures or remarks towards or in front of anyone.
- ensure that there is more than one adult present during activities with children and young people.
- avoid being alone with them.
- respect their right to personal privacy.
- ensure they are not left unsupervised at any time.
- challenge inappropriate language or behaviour.
- avoid physical contact where possible, unless it is clearly set out within a physical activity.
- encourage them to feel comfortable enough to point out attitudes or behaviour they do not like.
- ensure contact is appropriate and in relation to the work of the project.
- recognise that caution is required when you are discussing sensitive issues.
- choose music with lyrics and content is appropriate to the age and ability of participants.
- report all allegations/ suspicions of abuse to the **VDT Safeguarding Officer** as soon as possible.
- avoid jumping to conclusions.

Working with children, young people and vulnerable adults when representing VDT it is expected that you must not:

- socialise with them alone outside project hours.
- exchange personal contact or social media details with any participant.
- offer money, or lifts home from the project.
- take photographs, film footage or audio recordings on personal devices.

- make sarcastic, insensitive, derogatory or sexually suggestive comments or gestures to or in front of participants.
- act in a way that can be perceived as threatening or intrusive.
- exaggerate or trivialise any abuse issues.
- show suggestive images on electronic devices or engage in discussions of a sexual nature.
- conduct a sexual relationship or indulge in any form of sexual contact with a participant.
- take a chance when good sense, policy or practice suggests another more prudent approach.
- rely on your good name or that of the VDT to protect you.
- believe 'it could never happen to me'.

All physical contact must be appropriate to the activity and should never compromise the physical or emotional safety of participants. VDT recognises that as a Dance/Theatre company it makes work that necessitates physical contact between performers and the director/choreographer. In the studio the company will use *safe touch* contact and adhere to the code of conduct set out as above.

*Safe touch* physical contact is that which takes place only when it is necessary in relation to a particular activity. It should take place in a safe environment with the extent of the contact being made clear to the participant and parent/carer. Once agreed, *safe touch* should be undertaken with the permission of the child/young person. Contact should be relevant to their age or understanding and adults should remain sensitive to any discomfort expressed verbally or non-verbally by the child.

- Be aware that every physical contact with a child, young person or vulnerable adult, however well-intentioned, may be misinterpreted.
- Consider if physical contact is necessary. Use your skills in demonstration, clear instruction, imagery and intonation of voice to support participants to access activity and develop their technical and creative skills.
- Where physical contact may be useful or necessary, ensure that permission is given, that clear explanation of the nature of the contact is given, and that an understanding or learning has occurred.
- No participant should be forced into physical contact against their will. It is sometimes necessary to look at body language to check comfort and safety, and respond appropriately to meet the needs of the participant.
- Any weight bearing activities should be assessed and alterations made to ensure physical safety of participants.
- Social physical contact beyond handshakes should be avoided (eg. hugging, tickling etc).

VDT will use the resource '<https://www.vincentdt.com/project/safeguarding-questions-for-working-in-the-arts/>' (created by VDT & Playing on Theatre Company) when conceiving any project.

The **Safeguarding Questions for Working in the Arts** has been created to allow artists, facilitators, gatekeepers, producers, programmers and arts organisations to reflect on their approach to safeguarding and wellbeing within the planning, creation and delivery stages of projects, productions and programmes.

The series of checklist questions emerged from extensive discussions between **Vincent Dance Theatre** and [Playing On Theatre Company](#) whilst reviewing the complex parameters that interplay when working with vulnerable and young participants to create work that addresses potentially triggering content.

The **Safeguarding Questions for Working in the Arts** is a series of prompts – allowing VDT to consider the real issues at play and to scrutinise the options for support and safeguarding for the **participants, creative team** and **audience members** involved in its work.

### **Recruitment & Training**

Anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT will be expected to undergo a thorough recruitment process, including interview and reference checks and have the necessary skills to fulfil their role. VDT will provide an induction at point of contract that requires the company Safeguarding Policy and procedures are, understood and agreed to. VDT will ensure that anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT are provided with the necessary support and supervision in their role and are offered training if required. It is expected that all staff read the updated policy annually.

Those who will be in sole charge of children, young people or vulnerable adults undertaking VDT activity will be required to go through the necessary DBS checks and written references will be obtained by VDT. VDT understands that sometimes it is not possible to gain the required level of suitability check from partners and artists who are not resident in the UK, which means they will not be permitted to work alone with children, young people or vulnerable adults, nor have access to sensitive information (including; photos, film footage and audio recordings).

### **Working with Children, Young People & Vulnerable Adults**

#### **External/ Host Organisation Setting**

Anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT will be expected to ensure the following procedures are in place:

- A signed contract or letter of agreement for the provision of the sessions (which should also include provision for a support worker to provide appropriate cover as required). A copy to be held securely in the VDT HQ.
- A site risk assessment must be undertaken if the session is taking place in any new school or setting formal or otherwise and/ or no risk assessment already exists. This should be documented and appropriate action taken to mitigate against identified risks.
- There should always be at least 2 adults present if possible, both of whom must meet policy requirements for DBS and Written References. If no second/ support worker is possible, then VDT must undertake a risk assessment and ensure any action to mitigate risk is identified and carried out. It must be decided prior to engagement who will be responsible for:
  - o Arranging provision of second/support worker.
  - o Leading the sessions.
  - o Supporting the sessions (second/support worker).
    - o Designated Safeguarding Officer (it is normally expected to be the external organisation).
    - o Obtaining all necessary consent forms.

### **VDT Initiated Project Setting**

The guidelines applied to working with external/ host organisation setting should be applied as appropriate. Additionally, anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT will be expected to ensure the following procedures are in place:

- External groups must have a support worker (eg community group support worker or teacher) to provide support for their group.
- External group support workers are expected to obtain and confirm all necessary consent has been gathered from the participants in advance of the session, providing copies of the completed consent forms to VDT.

### **Photography, Filming and/ or Audio Recording**

VDT uses photos, film footage and audio recording to document and promote its work. These will only be used when written consent is given by the parent/ carer of participants or by a relevant school authority. For those young people over 18 and not considered vulnerable written consent will be given directly by themselves. VDT recognises that some participants, their parents/ carers may wish photos, film footage and audio recording appear only in documentation which is not widely distributed and do not want these to appear through social media and will make provision for this upon request to the **Safeguarding Officer**.

VDT also recognises the *Right to be Forgotten*, if at any time either the parent/carer of the child, young person or vulnerable adult wishes data used as activity, promotional and archive purposes to be removed, seven days' notice must be given to the VDT Safeguarding Officer after which the data will be removed.

VDT will take all reasonable steps to ensure that use of photos, film footage and audio recording does not put any participant at risk. VDT will not attach names of participants to any photos, film footage and audio recording unless they have written consent from their parent/carer/guardian, in which case VDT will use first names only. All photos, film footage and audio recording will be stored securely and in-line with General Data Protection Regulation 2018 and UK GDPR (See VDT's Data Collection Policy).

Photography, Filming and/ or Audio Recording on personal devices is not permitted, doing so is a breach of confidentiality and lead to allegations of abuse. All photography, Filming and/ or Audio Recording will be carried out by professional photographers, staff photographers or film makers engaged by VDT or the participating partner organisations to do so.

VDT **Consent Form for Photography, Filming and/ or Audio Recording** is included in this policy as an appendix.

### **E-Safety/Digital Safety**

VDT recognises that children, young people or vulnerable adults that use information technology can be exposed to potentially harmful, illegal or unsuitable content, such as:

- Pornography
- Child Abuse Images
- Dangerous Advice (eg. encouraging eating disorders, self-harm or suicide)
- Excessive violence or race-hate materials.

Children, young people or vulnerable adults may inadvertently or be pressured into sharing personal information that may put them at risk of bullying or grooming. Whilst, some websites and games use age restrictions and checks to make sure that children don't see unsuitable content. Children must be at least 13 to register on most social networking websites, some join at a younger age and therefore can also be exposed to unsuitable content in this manner. Consequently, VDT seek to promote E-Safety by:

- appointing an **E-Safety Officer**.
- implementing procedures to anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT which provide clear directions on the appropriate use of ICT (through supervision, support and training).
- supporting and encouraging the children, young people and vulnerable adults to use the opportunities offered by ICT and the internet in a way that keeps themselves safe and shows respect for others.
- implementing an e-safety agreement for use with children, young people, vulnerable adults and their parent/ carers (included in this policy as an appendix.)
- dealing firmly, fairly and decisively with any inappropriate ICT use, complaints or allegations.
- informing parents/carers of incidents of concern as appropriate
- reviewing and updating the (physical & digital) security of our information systems regularly.
- ensuring only official email accounts are utilised and that user names, logins and passwords are secure and used effectively.
- ensuring that the personal information, photos film and audio recordings of participants are not published online or digitally without permission and only for the purpose for which consent has been given.
- any new online, digital or social media tools or emerging new technologies used must be risk assessed in advance before they are used by VDT.

### **Disclosure of, and Reporting Abuse**

#### **Disclosure**

Disclosure is when a person shares information about abuse. Disclosures can be verbal or physical. It is sometimes the case that a disclosure occurs during more creative or emotionally engaging activities and to an adult who is less well known to the participant. Staff need to be well equipped to deal with disclosures and know the procedures necessary to support the child, young person or vulnerable adult.

Every concern must be acted upon. It is not the responsibility of the staff member or the Designated Safeguarding Officer to judge whether the information is true. Appropriate action will be taken following a consultation between the Designated Safeguarding Officer and a professional or professionals from child protection agencies. These include the police, NSPCC and Social Services.

It is imperative that anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT knows how to respond to and report any disclosure. VDT **Disclosure Referral Flowchart** is included in this policy as an appendix.

#### **Barriers to Disclosure**

A child, young person or vulnerable adult may not tell anyone that they are being abused for a number of different reasons:

- Scared/ under threat from abuser.
- Believe it is their fault and they will be punished if it is discovered.
- Embarrassment to disclose such personal experiences and details.
- Communication or learning difficulties.
- Too young or vulnerable to understand what is happening to them is abuse.
- Fear of not being believed or of being ignored.

The person to whom the disclosure has been made may not know who to contact or what to do with the information they hold. It may be that the allegation is against someone they know and they cannot face the consequences of becoming involved. Adults also face difficult decisions when they discover that abuse may be taking place. It can be very stressful and time consuming to become involved in allegation processes of this type. Some people fear that they may have got it wrong and don't want to cause unnecessary upheaval for the child, young person, vulnerable adult or their family.

By ensuring that anyone employed by or working on behalf of VDT have read, understood and agree to adhere to this policy, VDT hope to mitigate against this.

#### **Responding to and Reporting to a Disclosure**

If a child, young person or vulnerable adult discloses to you it is important to follow these guidelines.

- Stay calm.
- Actively listen, allowing the participant to speak at their own pace.
- You **cannot promise** to keep the disclosure a secret.

- Tell the participant what will happen next and who will need to know the information.
- **Do not ask leading questions.** Only ask clarifying questions.
- Reassure the participant that s/he has done the right thing by telling you.
- Where possible ensure that you are not alone during the disclosure.
- As soon as possible, record in writing what was said using the **participant's own words**. (Include the date, time, child/young person/ vulnerable adult's name, your name and job title, location disclosure took place, what was happening immediately before the disclosure was made (the activity), any other witnesses).
- Report the disclosure to the Designated Safeguarding Officer as soon as is possible on the report form (VDT Disclosure Report Form is included in this policy as an appendix).
- If the child, young person or vulnerable adult is in immediate danger or that a crime has been committed, **call the police**.

You must not share the information about the disclosure to other colleagues, though it is recommended that you inform your line manager that a disclosure has taken place so that you can be given the support that you may need. The Designated Safeguarding Officer will discuss concerns with the Local Area Designated Officer, Local Area Children's board (MASH) Social Services or NSPCC and will take the recommended action.

If you have concerns about a participant, other staff member or volunteer, please discuss your concerns with the Designated Safeguarding Officer at VDT or the participating partner organisation.

The legal principle is that the "welfare of the child is paramount". The right of a child, young person or vulnerable adult to protection takes precedence over his/her right to confidentiality. All concerns will be reported. Names of children, young people, vulnerable adults or staff members about whom there are concerns or who have breached the code of conduct are not shared around your organisation. Information will be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, and destroyed safely after a designated amount of time, in line with General Data Protection Regulation 2018.

### **Safeguarding Staff & Contacts** (2023)

**Safeguarding Officer** (Leads on child protection and safeguarding relating to VDT activity).  
Holly Morris, General Manager | e: [holly@vincentdt.com](mailto:holly@vincentdt.com) | t: 01273 911 616

**Deputy Safeguarding Officer** (Leads in the absence of the Safeguarding Officer).  
Charlotte Vincent, Artistic Director/CE | e: [charlotte@vincentdt.com](mailto:charlotte@vincentdt.com) | t: 01273 911 616

**Deputy Safeguarding Officer** (Leads in the absence of the Safeguarding Officer).  
Sian Williams, Participation & Digital Development Director | e: [sian@vincentdt.com](mailto:sian@vincentdt.com) | t: 01273 911 616

**Board Safeguarding Lead** (Board Oversight of VDT Safeguarding Policies & Issues)  
Ella Burns, Acting Chair of Board of Trustees | e: [admin@vincentdt.com](mailto:admin@vincentdt.com) | t: 01273 911 616

**E-Safety/Digital Safety Officer**  
Sian Williams, Participation & Digital Development Director | e: [sian@vincentdt.com](mailto:sian@vincentdt.com) | t: 01273 911 616

**Brighton Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH)**  
t: 01273 290400 | e: [MASH@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:MASH@brighton-hove.gcsx.gov.uk)

**Brighton Local Area & Authority Designated Officer (LADO)**  
Darrel Clews, Safeguarding Team | t: 01273 295643

#### **Other useful contacts:**

NSPCC | e: [help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk) | Helpline 0808 800 5000 ChildLine | t: 0800 1111

### **Appendix 1: Definitions**

**Child:** The legal definition of a child is a person up until their 18th birthday.

**Young Person:** Not a legal term, widely used to include older children and those into their early 20's.

**Vulnerable Adult:** Person 18 years or over, who is deemed to require extra support with care, access or learning.

**Child Protection:** Protecting children from abuse and neglect through adhering to legislation.

**Safeguarding:** Recognised as the wider practice of supporting the needs of children, young people and vulnerable adults which also includes preventing impairment to health or development and where their welfare is actively promoted.



## **Appendix 2: Types of Abuse & Recognising Abuse**

It can take a great deal of courage for a child to talk to an adult about what is happening and it can sometimes be hard for an adult to listen or recognise what is going on. It is vital that everyone who works with children, young people or vulnerable adults is equipped to recognise signs of abuse at the earliest opportunity so that harm can be stopped and damage can start to be repaired. Even experienced child protection professionals do not always find it easy to recognise signs of abuse but it is important for you to have an understanding about some of the signs to look out for when you are concerned about a child.

**Physical Abuse:** This may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, burning or scalding, drowning, suffocating, or otherwise causing physical harm. Physical harm may also be caused when a parent or carer fabricates the symptoms of, or deliberately induces illness.

**Recognising Physical Abuse:** Most children get cuts and bruises during their day-to-day activities, which makes it hard to spot when these may not be accidental.

- injuries which a child cannot explain, or explains unconvincingly.
- injuries which have not been treated or treated inadequately.
- injuries on parts of the body where accidental injury is unlikely (e.g. cheeks, chest or thighs).
- bruising which reflects hand or finger marks.
- cigarette burns or human bite marks.
- broken bones (particularly in children under the age of two).
- scalds, especially those with upward splash marks where hot water has been deliberately thrown over the child, or “tide marks” – rings on the child’s arms, legs or body where they have been made to sit or stand in very hot water.
- reluctance to have their parents/carers contacted.
- aggressive behaviour or severe temper outbursts.
- running away or showing fear of going home.
- flinching when approached or touched.
- reluctance to get undressed for activities where changing into other clothes is normal.
- covering arms and legs when this is not usually done.
- depression or moods which are out of character with the child’s general behaviour.
- unnatural compliance with parents or carers.

**Emotional Abuse:** The persistent emotional maltreatment of a child, young person or vulnerable adult such as to cause severe and persistent adverse effects to their emotional development. It may involve:

- conveying they are worthless or unloved
- conveying they are inadequate or valued only when they meet the needs of another person.
- developmentally inappropriate expectations being imposed.
- preventing normal social interaction.
- witnessing the mistreatment of others.
- serious bullying.
- exploitation or corruption.
- 

**Recognising Emotional Abuse:** This is also hard to identify with certainty. Some children are by nature shy but this does not mean they are being abused. Experiencing physical or sexual abuse will mean it is likely there are elements of emotional abuse present.

- a failure to grow or thrive (particularly if the child thrives when away from home)
- sudden speech disorders
- delayed development, either physical or emotional
- compulsive nervous behaviour such as hair twisting or rocking
- an unwillingness or inability to play
- an excessive fear of making mistakes
- self-harm or mutilation
- reluctance to have parents/carers contacted
- an excessively high regard or level of admiration towards others, especially adults
- an excessive lack of confidence
- an excessive need for approval, attention and affection
- an inability to cope with praise

**Bullying:** The majority of calls to helplines by children, relate to bullying. Bullying can result in the child, young person or vulnerable adult feeling isolation, loneliness, worthlessness, self-loathing and can lead to suicide attempts.

**Recognising Bullying:** Bullying may be present in the form of physical, mental or verbal abuse.

**Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child, young person or vulnerable adult to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children, young people or vulnerable adults in looking at, or in the production of, pornographic material or watching sexual activities, or encouraging them to behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

**Recognising Sexual Abuse:** Both boys and girls can be victims of sexual abuse, it can happen at any age and it can happen to any child (including those with disabilities). Several factors make it difficult to identify including the fact it is likely to happen in private and abusers may go to great lengths to prevent discovery.

- pain, itching, bruising or bleeding in the genital or anal areas.
- stomach pains or discomfort when the child is walking or sitting down.
- sudden or unexplained changes in behaviour.
- apparent fear of someone.
- self-harm, self-mutilation or attempts at suicide.
- abuse of drugs or other substances.
- eating problems such as anorexia or bulimia.
- sexualised behaviour or knowledge in young children.
- sexual drawings or language.
- possession of unexplained amounts of money.
- taking a parental role at home and functioning beyond their age level.
- not being allowed to have friends (particularly in adolescence).
- alluding to secrets which they cannot reveal.
- reluctance to get undressed for activities where changing into other clothes is normal.

**Neglect:** Neglect is the persistent failure to meet a child, young person or vulnerable adult's basic physical and/ or psychological needs, like to result in the serious impairment of their health or development. Neglect may occur during pregnancy as a result of maternal substance abuse. Once a child is born, neglect may involve a parent or carer failing to provide adequate food, clothing and/ or shelter. It can also include:

- exclusion from home or abandonment
- failing to protect a child from physical and emotional harm or danger
- failure to ensure adequate supervision including the use of inadequate care-takers
- failure to ensure access to appropriate medical care of treatment.
- unresponsiveness to, a child's basic emotional needs.

**Recognising Neglect:** This is a very difficult form of abuse to recognise and is sometimes seen as less serious than other forms, but its effects can be very damaging.

- being constantly hungry and sometimes stealing food from others.
- being in an unkempt state, frequently dirty or smelly.
- loss of weight or being constantly underweight.
- being dressed inappropriately for the weather conditions.
- untreated medical conditions – not being taken for medical treatment for illnesses or injuries.
- being tired all the time.
- frequently missing school or being late.
- having few friends.
- being left alone or unsupervised on a regular basis.
- compulsive stealing or scavenging of food.

**Abuse of Trust:** Adults working with children, young people and vulnerable adults have a duty to not to abuse their positions and should behave responsibly and professionally towards the children and young people in their care. If an older person is in a position of authority, influence or trust, it is inappropriate for them to become involved in a sexual relationship with a young person under the age of 18, even if they are both over the age of consent.

**Mate Crime:** Mate crime is a type of hate crime where perpetrators befriend a person with a disability but in fact soon begin to exploit, hurt or harm them. This can include sexual abuse, forced prostitution, financial exploitation, physical abuse, violence and even murder.

**Appendix 3: Disclosure Referral Flowchart** (contact admin @vincentdt.com)

**Appendix 4: Consent Form for Photography, Filming and/ or Audio Recording**

Vincent Dance Theatre (VDT) would like to take photographs, film and/ or audio recordings of the workshop/ event that you and/ or your child is taking part in. We will only use the photographs, film and/ or audio recordings if we have permission to do so.

VDT recognises the need to ensure the welfare and safety of all young people involved in its activities and will follow the guidance for the taking and use of photographs, film and/ or audio recordings as set out in the VDT Safeguarding Policy (available on our website [www.vincentdt.com](http://www.vincentdt.com)). The recordings may be used:

- for creative purposes in the generation of material for VDT productions, either in their original form or otherwise altered (e.g. audio may form part of a soundtrack for a live or filmed work).
- for activity reporting, promotional and archive purposes on VDT, partner and associates website.
- for activity reporting, promotional and archive purposes on VDT, partner and associates web channels and social media (including brochures & newsletters).

VDT has final usage rights.

VDT will take all available precautions to ensure recorded materials are used solely for the purposes they are intended. If you become aware of any inappropriate use, you should inform the VDT Safeguarding Officer immediately. If at any time the parent/carer/guardian of the young person wishes data used as activity, promotional and archive purposes to be removed, seven days' notice must be given to VDT's Safeguarding Officer, after which the data will be removed. All data collected in the EU and EEA, and utilised in the UK will comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and the UK GDPR.

This form should be signed by the parent/carer/guardian of a child or young person under the age of 18, together with the child or young person if applicable; doing so provides permission for the photographs, film and/ or audio recordings of the child/ young person to be used by VDT as outlined above. Please note that you will have to fill in a separate form for each child.

**VDT Participant Consent Form for Photography, Filming and/ or Audio Recording 2019**

Event Title: -----

Name of Participant: -----

I, the above-named participant, consent to Vincent Dance Theatre photographing, filming and/ or audio recording my involvement in its activities under the stated conditions.

Signed:

Date:

**Parent/ Carer Consent (if participant under 18).**

Name of Parent/Carer: Name of Participant:

I, the above, named parent/ carer, consent to Vincent Dance Theatre photographing, filming and/ or audio recording the involvement of the named participant in its activities under the

stated conditions. I confirm that I am legally entitled to give this consent. I also confirm that the named participant is not under a court order.

Signed:

Date:

***Please sign and return the bottom half of this consent form to VDT workshop/ event leader and retain the top half for your information.***

## **APPENDIX 8:**

### **PRODUCTION CREDITS ART OF ATTACHMENT FILM INSTALLATION 2021**

Direction and Design: Charlotte Vincent

Film Maker: Bosie Vincent

Film Installation Edit: Bosie Vincent, Charlotte Vincent

Soundtrack: Jules Maxwell

Research / Recorded Conversations: Charlotte Vincent

Sound Editing: Wendy Houstoun, Charlotte Vincent

Text written by Vikki, Wendy Houstoun, Charlotte Vincent, Robert Clark

Devised and Performed by Antonia Grove, Robert Clark, Vikki, Annette, Leah, Louise (live production) with Understudy Anna Clasper (film installation)

Production Manager: Mat Ort

Engagement Tasks designed by: Charlotte Vincent

Film Installation 2021 facilitated by: Holly Morris, Sian Williams, Pip Sayers, Charlotte Vincent

### **PRODUCTION CREDITS ART OF ATTACHMENT LIVE PRODUCTION 2018**

Lighting Design Nigel Edwards

Press and Marketing: Chloe Gudrun, Elise Phillips

General Manager Niahm Lynam-Cotter (live production), Holly Morris (film installation)

Integrative Arts Therapist (Oasis) Jo Parker

Programme Manager (Oasis) Alison Cotton

Director Oasis: Jo Anne Welsh

Supervisor for CV / Performers (live work): Jac Matthews

External Evaluation: Annabel Jackson Associates

Lead Artists: Lemn Sissay, Charlotte Vincent

**PROJECT ADVISORY GROUP:** **Jo Anne Welsh** Director Oasis; **Anthony Flynn**, Clinical Services Manager at Brighton & Hove City Council; **Professor Bobbie Farsides**, Professor of Clinical and Biomedical Ethics at Brighton and Sussex Medical School; **Gretchen Precey**, Independent Social Worker and previous Oasis Project Trustee; **Helen Johnson**, Lecturer in Social Sciences (Brighton University); **Dr Leslie Ironside**, Child and adolescent psychotherapist working with children and families; **Lucy Finchett-Maddock**, Lecturer in Law a Sussex University and member of Art Law Network; **Dr. Neil Aiton**, Consultant Neonatologist at Brighton and Sussex University NHS Trust; **Rose Kigwana**, Senior Participation Producer at South East Dance; **Tom Stibbs**, Principal Child and Family Social Worker; **Rachel Thomson**, Professor of Childhood and Youth Studies, School of Education & Social Work, University of Sussex; **Marina Castledine**, Head of Learning, Towner Gallery, Eastbourne.

**Art of Attachment** live production was commissioned in 2018 by Oasis Project Brighton and funded by VDT's Arts Council England National Portfolio Funding and Wellcome Trust. **Art of Attachment Film Installation** (Home Truths Listening Project) was commissioned in 2021 by Dr. Cath Lambert at Warwick University Sociology Department, via ESRC Impact Acceleration Funding and by VDT's Arts Council England National Portfolio Funding.

## APPENDIX 9: CHARLOTTE VINCENT BIOGRAPHY

Vincent was born in 1968, in Walton- Upon- Thames, lived in Poole Dorset until the age of 5 when the family moved to West Sussex. An Oxbridge candidate at Sixth Form College, Vincent studied English Literature and Theatre Studies at Sheffield University and spent her second year at University of Maryland, USA, graduating with 1<sup>st</sup> class BA Honours Degree. Vincent began her choreographic career in the North of England, training in Newcastle at Dance City, working with regional fledgling dance companies Side by Side Dance Company (Sheffield) and Dance Republic (Sheffield/Leeds) making work with Gregory Nash and Sue Maclennan and briefly with Volcano Theatre in Swansea. Wales. She founded her own company, Vincent Dance Theatre (<http://www.vincentdt.com>), in Sheffield, in 1994 and has directed all the company's work to date. Performing with the company until 2002, she has also designed VDT's production work since 2005. As Artistic Director / Chief Executive of VDT Vincent worked in partnership with Yorkshire Dance in Leeds and Danceworks in Sheffield over 15 years, relocating the company to Brighton in 2013 to become Associate Company at Brighton Dome and Festival.

Vincent's work has featured in **several book publications**: Art and Science Now (Thames and Hudson, 2012); Quantum Theatre: Science and Contemporary Performance (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012); Acts and Apparitions: Discourses on the Real in Performance Practice and Theory, 1990-2010 (Manchester University Press, 2016); The Twenty-First Century Performance Reader (Routledge, 2019); The Live Art of Sociology (Routledge, 2019) and 50 Contemporary Choreographers (Routledge, 2020).

Vincent teaches <https://www.vincentdt.com/project/vincent-mentoring/>. VDT's productions are accompanied by a wide range of [Participation](#), [Professional Development](#) & [Dialogue &](#)

[Debate](#) events, led by Vincent, who also regularly mentors emerging and mid-career female artists. VDT has been regularly funded by Arts Council England as a National Portfolio Organisation since 2009. In 2018, VDT was twice nominated for Best Independent Company and for Antonia Grove's performance in our critically acclaimed work **Virgin Territory**. Several VDT's productions are hosted online on Digital Theatre + with contextualising resources about the work and practice written by Vincent.

Vincent has also directed new work for other companies/independent artists, including Keira Martin's **Here Comes Trouble**, Two Destination Language's **Near Gone** and work by Ella Mesma (Leeds), Bridie Gaine (Edinburgh), Nicola Hunter (live artist, Newcastle), Anna Clasper (Brighton) and Emma Jayne Park (Glasgow), Tai Pei's Crossover Dance Company (mature dancers from Cloud Gate), Gerry's Attic, Bristol (over 65 Dance Company), Senza Tempo (Barcelona), Anjali Dance Co with TC Howard (learning disability company); Welsh Independent Dance; Cloud Gate 2; X-IDA Dance Co (Austria), Thrive (for vulnerable NEET young people in Farnham, Surrey).

Vincent collaborated with Professor Liz Aggiss as **V&A Artefacts** (<http://www.vincentdt.com/projects/artefacts/index.html>) and with Dr Claire MacDonald to curate **The Table** (<https://www.vincentdt.com/project/the-table/>). In 2012 I initiated and curated the inaugural Juncture festival (<http://vimeo.com/54093157>) a four-week festival of experimental, female-led performance and practice at Yorkshire Dance, Leeds.

Vincent campaigns for gender equality through all the company's work, both on and off the stage. working in collaboration with Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (<http://www.pipacampaign.com/>) and Dance Mama (<https://www.dancemama.org/>) to advocate better conditions for parents returning to work in the performance sector.

Charlotte has been a member of the Artists Advisory Group at Yorkshire Dance, the Steering Group for Dance UK's National Choreographic Conference, completed several leadership courses with the Clore Programme. In 2019 Vincent gained a certificate as a Youth Mental Health First Aider (from Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England), she is a qualified First Aider and VDT's Safeguarding Deputy. Vincent is trained in therapeutic parenting and has attended conferences on **Trauma Informed Approaches in Schools and Attachment Aware Behaviour Regulation Policies** (Keynote: Dr. Margot Sutherland) and Dan Hughes' **Awakening curiosity, comfort, and joy: Daily care and therapeutic interventions for the mistrustful child** (clinical psychologist who founded and developed Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)).

## APPENDIX 10: VINCENT'S PRODUCTION HISTORY, VINCENT DANCE THEATRE

- Intercourse (1994)
- Noli Me Tangere (1994)
- Chthonian Pleasures (1996)
- In Optimo City, The Almost Perfect Town (1997)
- Body:Ink (1998, publication collaboration with EgG Design)
- Falling From the High Rise of Love (1999)
- Caravan of Lies (2000)
- Drop Dead Gorgeous (2001, collaboration with Dada von Bzdulow, Poland)
- Let the Mountains Lead You to Love (2003)
- On the House (2000, revised 2003)
- Like a Red Rag to a Bull (2004, collaboration with Annabel Bonnerly)
- Shifting Intimacies (2005, collaboration with Guy Webster and Keith Armstrong)
- Broken Chords (2005)
- Fairytale (2006)
- Test Run (2006)
- Double Vision (2008, collaboration with Liz Aggiss)
- If We Go On (2009)
- Traces of Her (2012, collaboration with Claire MacDonald)
- Blurred Vision (2012, collaboration with Liz Aggiss)
- Motherland (2012)
- Glasshouse (1998, revised 2015, Film)
- Look At Me Now, Mummy (2015/2008)
- Underworld (2012 revised in 2015)
- 21 Years/21 Works (2015)
- Virgin Territory (2016)



- Art of Attachment (2018)
- Virgin Territory Film Installation (2017)
- Shut Down (2017)
- Shut Down Film Installation (2018)
- In Loco Parentis (2020),
- Art of Attachment Film Installation (entitled *Home Truths Listening Project* 2021)
- Hold Tight (2022)

Vincent also works as an outside eye, director and facilitator, supporting the research phase in 2013 of Sue MacLaine's [Can I Start Again, Please](#) (Total Theatre Awards for Innovation 2015, Experimentation 2015 and Touring 2016); directing Two Destination Language's [Near Gone](#) (Total Theatre Awards for Innovation 2014 and Experimentation 2014); directing Keira Martin's [Here Comes Trouble](#) (touring 2016/17); reworking of Yami 'Rowdy' Löfvenburg's [OTHER](#) (2016) and supporting the R&D phase of Rachel Johnson's [Trapped](#) (2017) and directing Emma Jayne Park's [It's Not Over Yet](#) (2017).