

Charlotte, tell us what *In Loco Parentis* is about.

In Loco Parentis follows on from VDT's 2018 production **Art of Attachment**, where I was commissioned (alongside poet and broadcaster Lemn Sissay) to create a new production with substance misusing women from Oasis Project (<https://www.oasisproject.org.uk/>). Over nine months of work, research and making, **Art of Attachment** explored the impact of drug and alcohol misuse on the attachment between mothers and their children and was shared with a sold-out audience of theatre and dance lovers, professionals in mental health, substance misuse, childhood studies, social care, social work, medicine and child development at ACCA (<https://www.attenboroughcentre.com/>) in November last year.

Art of Attachment made clear the cycles of rupture and repair that impact children from one generation to another. It explored the stigma of 'losing your child' into care and revealed the individual pain and loss involved in separation. The work focussed on the women's story and as one piece always leads to the next this production made me want to revisit the children's experiences I had come across, to chart their journeys and hear their experiences of care.

Children are taken into care because of abuse and neglect (and very often both) in their early years. They go into emergency or temporary foster care, are sometimes returned home or go on to be placed in special guardianships with birth family members, placed in long term foster care, are adopted or placed in care homes. Children with attachment issues often display behaviour deemed to be antisocial, aggressive, withdrawn and extreme. They fight, freeze or run away. They are terrified they will lose everything familiar again, confused about their identity and sense of belonging, floored by transitions and defined by reports written by social workers and professionals who come and go from their lives and in pain from separation anxiety from their birth families. Their complex life stories are layered with difficulty and disruption. Their development is marred by There are holes in their emotional, physiological and psychological development and they are full of shame.

Everything bad that could happen has already happened to them. And then they have to live with complete strangers.

In Loco Parentis attempts to tell their stories, detailing how early trauma impacts on young people's lives and results in behaviour that society struggles to understand. Based on real-life testimonies, the work addresses cycles of rupture and repair and the extraordinary resilience children, their carers and parents develop to cope with change and loss. The production is part of a four-year programme of my work on stage, on film and online that explores 'home, family and belonging' and illuminates the extraordinary inner worlds of care-experienced children, their parents and carers and in so doing reflects on a more universal need to be looked after, to be safe and to belong.

Who do you think this piece will most appeal to?

Anyone (14+) who enjoys stories. Anyone who enjoys interdisciplinary, intergenerational, crafted, thought provoking performance! Anyone who cares about understanding difference, children, parenting, families, safeguarding, social care and social work. Anyone with experience of the care system - as a young person, youth worker, social worker, doctor, nurse, mental health worker, foster carer, adoptive parent, therapist, clinical supervisor, play worker. Anyone who has grown up in a non-conventional family. Anyone who hasn't.

As an artist, what drives your exploration of these challenging societal issues?

Equality, mostly. The need for understanding and compassion rather than judgement. The need for young people to be heard. If I can use the platform I have for any of that then I'm in. need to be heard. IN the past 5 years the company's work has integrated the voices of people in marginalised sectors of the community through our socially engaged practice that takes place throughout any given year and often encourages experiences, stories and narratives that usually remain hidden to come to the surface. The company is using its' position to try to be as inclusive as possible, making high quality work with non-professionals, illuminating experiences and encouraging understanding. Something like that...

In Loco Parentis features text from the brilliant Wendy Houstoun. How did you come to be working with her?

I've known Wendy for a long time and we collaborated way back in 2000 on a piece called If We Go On. She worked on Art of Attachment, translating medical records and some of the womens' stories into searing, beautiful texts. I think she is a fantastic translator, an expert wordsmith, an exceptional artist whose words cut like a knife and melt like butter. The women were gobsmacked and extremely moved by how she captured and crafted their thoughts into words. Wendy 'gets' what I am trying to achieve, I think. Wendy is an experienced performer and she appreciates how skilled VDT collaborators Aurora Lubos, Janusz Orlik and Robert Clark are in their approach to making work like this and working with texts she offers to the process.

This piece is the result of recording conversations and running workshops with care-experienced young people and the adults in their lives. How have you incorporated this research into the work?

The research has helped me process and understand what it feels like to be in care, what preoccupies kids in care and their carers and just how much support they need to feel safe. The same themes occur around loss, resilience, hypervigilance, avoidance, diligence, fear, comfort and the need to belong and be loved. I have many recordings and am looking forward to editing them into useable texts – that performers may use to generate material, that Wendy may use as starting points for her imaginative flights, that may form part of the soundtrack of the work itself.

The last two live productions have provided the choreographic and performative material for consequent film installation work. Does the company have plans to do the same with In Loco Parentis?

Yes. We will tour to 7 venues in March 2020 and again in September / October, film the work on location in May next year and premiere the installation in October / November 2020. We may stage ***In Loco Parentis*** film installation with its' sister ***Art of Attachment*** film installation (which will premiere next year too), as the content and form of each production will fire off each other in interesting ways I think. So, watch this space!