Anu Productions & CoisCéim Dance Theatre discuss

THESE ROOMS

From 'Uninvited Rebellion' to 'Collective Dreaming'

David Bolger, Owen Boss, and Louise Lowe, in conversation with Karen E. Till, 10 February 2016, Dublin.

Overview

In this edited conversation, Anu Productions' and CoisCéim Dance Theatre's artistic directors, **David Bolger**, **Owen Boss** and **Louise Lowe**, reflect upon their past projects, creative practices, and reasons for working together. They further describe their responses to the testimonies of the 38 women whose stories inspired THESE ROOMS, and their motivation for trying to create a visceral means for future audience members to understand what it must have felt like to have an 'uninvited rebellion' crashing into their homes. At the time of this conversation – seven-and-a-half months before the launch of the performance – the artists discuss the possibilities and challenges of collaboration when they didn't have a performance venue. Their artistic journey, a kind of 'collective dreaming', was built upon mutual trust that enabled the artists to move between visual, theatre and dance artistic forms, while maintaining an ethical impetus to bear witness to the civilian murders of North King Street.

Booklet edited and designed by Karen E. Till (2017).

This conversation took place at the Anu Productions office in Dublin, and was supported by the *Bodies Politic* project, curated by Fearghus Ó Conchúir, as part of *The Casement Project*, one of the nine ART: 2016 projects in the Arts Council's centenary proramme.

Bodies Politic included artistic-academic pairings and a symposium, held on 26 February 2016 at Maynooth University, where Owen Boss, Emma O'Kane and Karen E. Till presented talks about THESE ROOMS.

Photograph above: Emma O'Kane, Niamh McCann and Craig Colton in THESE ROOMS (2016) by Ros Kavanagh.

Karen Till: Can you tell me about the history of THESE ROOMS*? How did the idea for this project emerge, and why this particular collaboration?*

David Bolger: I'm the artistic director of CoisCéim Dance Theatre. Over the years I've seen Anu's work and my sense of what is significant …is the immersive nature of it, the intensity of it, the clarity in working on historical events, and being able to really look at those past events from the perspective of the now -- putting you through it now, so it is an immediate experience. I was really curious in how historical events are being presented to you right now, so you could feel them and touch them and smell them, and really get that kind of immediate response that really makes you think. I think also the way that Anu work is very physical. There is a hugely physical element to their work, whether that be the environment they create or the way they storytell through the body.

I've known Louise and Owen for a while, meeting them at theatre events and seeing their work. I literally picked up the phone and said 'It would be fantastic for us to collaborate together on something someday, because I'm really interested in storytelling. And I would like to make work outside the theatre that is meaningful, and would have a sense of place', which I feel Anu's work really has. Having done work with CoisCéim in hotel bedrooms and off-site stairs, I wanted to explore that a little more. So myself and Louise met for a cup of tea to have a chat. It was very general, we had nothing planned. Just to chat about what would it be like to do such a thing.

Karen: About when was that?

Louise Lowe: Two years ago. … We had a coffee with a desire, nothing more than that then a desire to say: 'I admire the way you work. I would love to know more about it. We would love to find a project ultimately that we could collaborate on.' But we didn't then go into a massive search for a project. It was more an invitation, a statement of intent.

David: When I talked to Louise, I was also thinking about my studio on Sackville Place [in Dublin 1], its history – it looks out at the GPO. …But there was never anything explicit about 1916 [in our initial conversation about collaborating]…

… The building has gone through a lot of things, it had a vast history. …When we moved into the building 15 years ago, we renovated it slightly, and we found a room that was covered up. There was all sorts of matter left. We looked into the history of it. {*Louise*: It was so beautiful.} It seemed to me that it was full of ghosts. So I was thinking we might look at the building. …

Louise: Yes, we went around. We looked in the census, but it was largely a domestic space. Many people lived there at different times, but never really a familiar face.

So David, Owen and I really did just connect back, into the 'NOW-THEN-NOW: Witnessing Future History' conference (2014).[1]

…[At the time,] Anu was working a lot with the [National History] Museum, and Lar [Joyce] – the museum historian, who is really incredible – every so often he'd throw these things [from the archive] at you, books or papers or objects, …different things. …He drew our attention to the story of the North King Street massacres [of men and boy civilians],[2] which, when I read it the first time – I remember being in a show at the time and taking it aside – I remember thinking I couldn't believe what I was reading.

Karen: What did he give you?

Louise: He gave me the 38 female eyewitness statements to the event. They are written with very much a nationalist viewpoint.[3]

Owen Boss: They were written a couple of years after the event.

1. As part of the Dublin Theatre Festival 2014 (7-8 October), following the performance of Anu's performance of *Vardo* that concluded their 'Monto Cycle', a two day conference curated by Lynnette Moran, was held at The Lab, in collaboration with Anu Productions and CREATE, with support by Dublin City Council. Using Anu's work as a starting point, NOW-THEN-NOW considered the ethical and aesthetic effects of immersive artistic practices that result from social, political and personal exchanges with its audiences. See: http://anuproductions.ie/now-then-now-witnessing-future-history/.

2. During the Easter Rising, on the eve of Friday 28 April and the early morning of Saturday 29 April, 1916, sixteen men and boy civilians were shot or bayoneted to death by soldiers from the 2nd and 6th South Staffordshire regiments. Before the massacre, North King Street was a major scene of fighting for the entire week, located just north of the militarily strategic location of the Four Courts, with many casualties and injuries, especially inflicted by British troops. For details see: Tim Pat Coogan. *1916: The Easter Rising* (Phoenix Press, 2001).

3. A Fragment of 1916 History (Sinn Féin). The catalogue of the National Library gives 1919 as the likely date of publication. Available online from the South Dublin County Libraries: http://source.southdublinlibraries.ie/bitstream/10599/11507/5/Fragment1916.pdf.

Louise: They are written really nostalgically and nationalistically.

Owen: These statements were written during first couple of years [after the establishment] of the Irish state – that kind of timeframe -- with a very particular framing of events.

Louise: …There was an inquiry of the events that happened a 100 years ago thanks to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington;[4] as a result of that inquiry, a different [British military] inquiry was conducted. The finding of that second inquiry about King Street was that we can never release the findings of this inquiry because it would be enough to cause another rebellion. It was locked through a hundred year rule.

So all we have at the moment are these slightly skewed testimonies, some recordings from the time, mixed with two or three different statements from soldiers who were involved and came back to court. … From the army records we know that they had a massive line up in the Curragh, of 703 men; Bedman and the other soldier were not in the country when it happened. That's all we know for sure.

Louise (cont'd): …I came back to David and said 'I think that this story is incredible. And it was something that we could potentially consider.'

Karen: Did you talk to Owen first?

Louise: I probably talked to them at same time. And I said, 'Look at this'.

Owen: I wouldn't have heard about the King Street massacres.

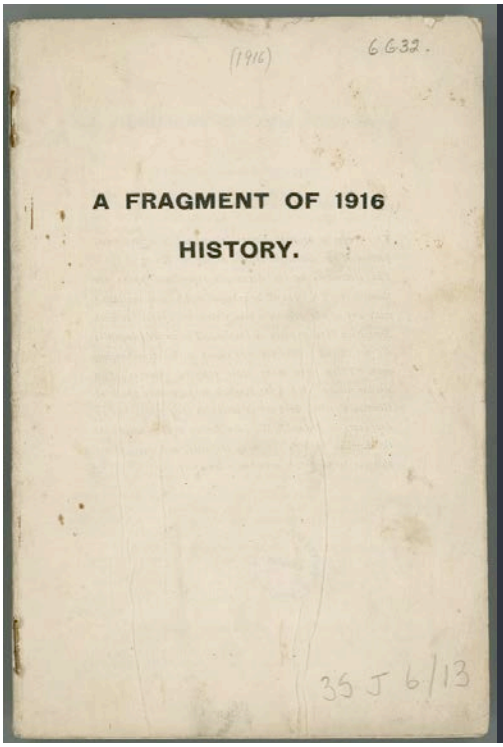
Louise: Most people haven't.[5] …We also had to give this project time for the documents to be released due to the 100-year rule, to see what we discover and see where that takes us on the next part of the journey. – So on that we decided to apply to the 1916 project through the Arts Council. It wasn't that it was that there was project award that we should apply for. We have really thought about this quite deeply and over a long time.

Owen: I've worked with Louise for eleven years and she's talked about CoisCéim a lot. The first project

Owen (cont'd): Louise and I made together was in 2008 at the Fringe Festival, and we were there with CoisCéim. Louise just wouldn't stop talking about CoisCéim's performance.

Louise: It was the first time I went back to a production for a second time. Ever.

David: We made a piece called KNOTS based on R.D. Laing, a hip 1970s psychologist.[6] It was about the double bind: 'I love you because you love me because I love you'. Or: 'I want you to want me because I want you'. Or: 'I want your want of my want of your want'. A complete cycle of things. The show was built on the text, of how he wrote the pieces, and then physically responded to the relationships, potential relationships, he was talking about, this double bond/bind, and how our parents influence our life. If we don't break some of the habits our parents taught us, we continually use those and then pass them on through our own relationships. That's the idea of knots. Laing's theory is that in order to heal from the past, we have to break the knots. These knots are quite deeply rooted.



4. The first inquiry on 10 May 1916 occurred after the discovery of the bodies of Patrick Bealen, a pub foreman, and James Healy, who worked at the nearby Jameson Distillery, two weeks after the massacre in the cellar of the bar where Bealen worked at 177 North King Street, on the corner of Ann Street. 'The men had been buried under the cellar floor. At the inquest into the death of the two men, it was stated in the case of James Healy there were bullet wounds in his body and that his skull was smashed in "with some heavy instrument", the doctor stating that these latter injuries were inflicted while he was still alive. Patrick Bealen had been shot six times' (Reddin, Stewart, April 2016). The discovery of these bodies led to a British military inquiry, which opened in late May 1916. No individual soldier or officer was held responsible in that inquiry.

5. The massacres were not well known by the general public until recently. In 2001 'a secret government memo was released which admitted that some of the (British) troops could have been guilty of unlawful killing' (RTE News Online, 30 April 2016). In the context of the local and national 1916-2016 commemorations, the event began to be publicised on webpages (such as by the local Cobblestones Pub in the area) and through the built environment, such as the memorial plaque unveiled on Saturday 30th April 2016 by the Stoneybatter and Smithfield People's History Project (at the juncture of North King Street and Church Street) that remembers the 'sixteen local victims of British imperialism'.

6. In 2006, KNOTS received test Production Award for the Dublin Fringe Festival and the Scotsman Fringe First Award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Emma O'Kane and David Bolger in KNOTS (2005-06). Photo: Chris Nash.

Emma O'Kane in THESE ROOMS (2016) and in VARDO (2014), left. Photographs: Pat Redmond..

Karen [to Louise and Owen]: So that was the first time you saw CoisCéim's work?

Louise: Yes, in Ballymun at the Dublin Fringe Festival.

Owen: …When Anu started doing other work, Louise always referenced it. So there is this long germination period between CoisCéim and Anu.

Karen: You've worked with other dance artists before.

Owen: Actually, Emma O'Kane who worked with us in VARDO in 2014.

Louise: Emma is the cross-over.

Karen: With this long development and a shared appreciation of each other's works …does this mean the way you work with David is a bit different than how you've worked with other dance artists before?

Louise: It's different in that we are embracing it as a form that might inspire us, or project us to somewhere else, rather than saying that we are working with a dance artist within this project on this space. So it might take us in a completely different direction. It is very deliberate.

…We strive where possible to make work that is kinaesthetically connected. When I see David's work, it is clear that it is kinaesthetically connected! So there is part of me that wants to learn more about what David does.

Louise (cont'd): And there is part of me that wants to know what would happen if you fuse that level of skill [with Anu's existing practice]. I'm not a dancer, nor a choreographer. I very frequently put people together to move, but there is no …underpinning methodology in terms of movement beyond the look and feel of a space or place.

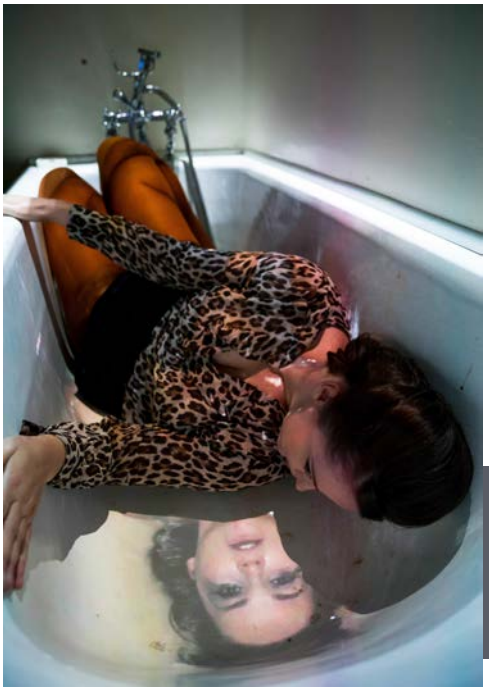
Owen: It is very intuitive.

Louise: Yes, it is intuitive. …I feel that David adds a layer of criticality beyond that and a discourse that I don't have.

Karen: And for you David? …What might be new or different for you [working with Anu]?

David: I love collaborating. But collaborations are hard, I just know that: we collaborate with artists all the time. But to do it in such a major way, where there is quite clearly, whether I know it or not, a CoisCéim way that has emerged, and the same would be true of Anu. There is always a desire to explore another way of working and get yourself out of a comfort zone, if that is the right way of being.

For example, one of the things we thought about was the legacy of, the aftermath of our collaboration. What might happen after we separate? Where might that collaboration bring a spark to our work? What is Irish dance? What is Irish? What is movement? What is storytelling? We are quite a literary-based, word-based culture, so movement needs to define its own way and motor. (cont'd)



Úna Kavanagh (left) in THESE ROOMS (2016). photo: Pat Redmond.
Niamh McCann (2016); photograph: Ros Kavangh.

David (cont'd): …It is difficult to make work anywhere. There is a difficulty here, and it is not just a funding difficulty, it is the acknowledgement of the form, of dance, of contemporary dance in particular. …There is a fear, when you use the word contemporary: 'What does that mean?' And contemporary dance together – it is hard. So that is not a selling point. Which is actually why I call ourselves CoisCéim Dance Theatre.

I felt that the dancing we were doing has the impact and power that theatre does. I know dance has that power – to bring us to an emotional place that the word might take longer to do. We can get there more quickly, in a few ways, where actually maybe for a writer it would take longer to do.

Louise: It is somewhat similar for the visual artist. You feel it like dance ...For both art forms you feel before you have a narrative on top of it. Is that true for you Owen as well?

Owen: Yes. Obviously for a visual artist, the input is through your eyes, that's how you read it. Within that you're feeding off the viewer, the audiences, the contexts, what they're putting on top of it, what they bring to it.

Louise: When it comes to theatre, I don't want to think, I want to feel. I want the visceral connection.

…We decided that if we are going to collaborate together, the most truthful way to go about this was through a hybrid form, that would be new for both of us, that isn't about making something in a theatre and isn't about making something on site. But if we were seriously going to collaborate, then we should be looking for a new form, a new way, a new interrogation, or a new thinking, I suppose, or a new critically, or a new provocation. All of these at once.

Louise (cont'd):

Karen: David, how did you respond to the King Street testimonies?

David: I read them and thought they were kind of scary. I didn't know what I would be able to do with it necessarily straight off. Then fragments came back to my head, of the women being taken away, or being separated from the men. That was very strong, a very basic thing. The possibility of hearing something going on, and that the picture's been made in one's head of what might be going on, but that might not be the case. It is the old thing of what we don't see is nearly as bad – {*Louise*: Worse.} -- yes, worse, as the thing itself. The darkness of it.

…There was this huge energy in it. And there was this notion for me that I didn't know about it. It seemed unfair in some way -- it seemed like a waste of life. Louise really put it very well: 'an uninvited rebellion had broken into the houses', an uninvited piece of this history being thrust upon us.

Karen: Louise, what did you think after you read the testimonies?

Louise: … I was thinking about the female body. That is what took me first of all. The 38 testimonies, and the idea of the women's experiences in this space. In these places. I was thinking about the female body. (cont'd)

Louise (cont'd): …What would the impact of this in your house, your home? How would you feel?…One of the [women] described this: at exactly the same time, they [the men] were going to the wars in our history, to both sets of opposing groups. At the same time. For the first time. Which is kind of amazing. So literally through the night, at exactly the same time, … suddenly the wars came through the walls to them. Just imagine that in your house! Imagine that into your home, into the environment and structure of your own space, this calamity comes on top of you!

The residents are not going to go out to see what's wrong. There's obviously and clearly a crisis happening outside, and they were embroiled with the hungry and the starving. They're exhausted already. There are teams of refugees already living in their houses. … The local residents started to […] bring in all the neighbours into their houses because they were still quite safe. But then they got rid of most people that day, bring a lot down to the church to the local priest who took some away. But that meant it was only the residents, and their surrounding neighbours involved [in this violence]. … It wasn't as though they were relaxed in their houses. But it is where it [the wars] came from the street inside to them.

Then there is the opposite side of it, from the British side. Where you have a young soldier apologising [for the murders]. First of all, the soldiers were speaking French because they thought they were in France. They were exhausted. They were -- drunk. They were being kept drunk on rum to keep them awake. They were only given one instruction [from General Lowe], which was: 'Don't take any prisoners'. So, what do you do with those instructions when you're 21 and you think you're back [in France]? Do you say: 'Bonjour madame?' Lots of their fellow soldiers had been killed. Lots of them were in heavy spaces of fighting. And so they're angry. And exhausted. And young. And suddenly they come upon this situation and they say 'We're instructed to take no prisoners'.

Louise (cont'd): …So you see the aftermath [of the killings], that of a young man coming back to apologise and to say 'I got to know your husband. I played cards with him. We had tea. We had a meal. And I'm sorry.' Both sides of it. …It's a very universal subject. It might be a hundred years ago …but looking at it now, we can see that impact across the world and the world we're living in. It's a very resonant and contemporary exploration, as much as it is about 100 years ago.

Karen: For Anu, women's experiences and bodies are so important. This is true from what I've seen of David's work…

Louise: The first thing we talked about was the older female actually, as not necessarily the twenty-something female. I say 'older' with a degree of complete respect. Not 'old women'. They're in their twenties when these events happened and their testimonies were given in their thirties, which at that time would be considered very old. They were almost old women at that stage. {*Owen/David*: Yes.} The average life expectancy in London at that time was 50. In Dublin it was 33 or 34. So our women were old. They were *not* young. …We'll have to work with that age, 'older' women. …Their bodies are different. Their movements are different.

I was thinking about the impact of what was happening on their other senses. They couldn't see what was happening. They were listening to it. Feeling it. They're engaging with it and their houses in different ways. That seemed to be a good opportunity to *consider* how might we *ever* kinaesthetically respond to it [the 1916 Rising], rather than in a robotic piece of theatre, the easy way to look at the testimonies. But that is not what we want to do. We are not trying to recreate the testimonies. But want to consider how we can interrogate [the testimonies] in terms of the trauma on the body, let's say, or the place, or the architecture of the space? (…cont'd)

Justine Cooper, THESE ROOMS project development, 2016.
Photograph: Ros Kavnagh.

Louise (cont'd): And that resulted in a massive search: Where were these houses? … We couldn't find them on maps. We couldn't find the real houses where this happened in.

Karen: Why couldn't you find them?

Louise: We were driving around on the modern streets, and looking for numbers, asking ourselves 'Where do the houses exist?' As we were driving, we couldn't see the buildings, there was 4 King Street, then 5 on the map. There was an oxygon [in the layout of the streets], but where were the houses?

Eventually, Catriona Crowe came back with a different map from the National Archives. This map [from the archives] wasn't numbered. So, we figured out where the historic houses were – grass, a garden space is there now.

Karen (Owen shows pictures, including image below): This was a large space.

Louise: There were nine houses there, with shops, with living spaces above them.

Karen: How will this present-day geography affect your collaboration?

Louise: I suppose that [initially] the idea was that the buildings would be still there. So we could understand what they were… But they're not. So we have to go back old plans, relevant streets, and imagine. So that is what we've spent time doing, working in the studios, just wondering what it was like. What it might be.

…We decided that we could make something that could move. Or we build a structure, something that is other than either of us are used to working with. So the journey and the application of that journey is completely new.

Owen: Yes, the performance will not be in a theatre. But it's also not site-specific: the performance can't be on that historic site. So it will be something that is held within a[n architectural] space…

Louise: We want to make a space, but for it to have structural, architecture resonance to that site.

Owen: Yes, and really interrogate that movement.

Karen: So how do you develop work to get that visceral connection? Do you intuitively work in the sense of 'it just feels right'?

Owen: It is more than that.

Louise: You have to be able to talk about it. You have to be able to explain it. …

David, Owen and I worked together in a studio for a week with the performers. We realised that the language that Anu and CoisCéim have, in terms of building things around tasks and engaging with artists, was fundamentally similar. But yet we approached it in a different way.

So I left that week for the first time in a few years in my career really genuinely feeling something special had happened, really special. {*David/Owen*: Yes.} Beyond words, beyond just feeling. The interrogation. The robust interrogation dramaturgically that they were all engaging in both dancing and acting simultaneously. (…cont'd)

Project development for THESE ROOMS, Collins Barracks, 2016. Image: Courtesy Owen Boss.

Louise (cont'd): There has to be a 'why' behind every moment, or time, or piece, or suggestion, or gesture. It wasn't just about it just 'feeling right'. That is too wishy-washy. Yes, it feels right, but that is because of the robust interrogation it has gone through. And when it doesn't it doesn't.

Karen: What was the same and what felt different that week?

David: We talked about tasks.

Karen: Is that a challenge?

David: Yes. We create a movement sequence about something that leads back to the original research and impeteus for the project. In order to lift that from a page and onto the floor and into the stage, you have to allow the actors and the dancers to bring themselves to it, but you have to guide them. You don't want them to take on the whole subject matter all at once. {*Louise*: Or a character.}

You want them to explore. I'm going to use the word spiritual, just because it is there [laughter]. But there is a spirituality in setting rules or in setting confinements. That is how an improvised structure can take place.

[*To Louise and Owen*]: They were all movement based I think, weren't they?

Louise: That is how we normally work. So that wasn't strange for us. We usually work with the body.

David: Everything was about generating physical movement.

Karen: What is an example of a task you did that week?

Louise: We paired them off together, actors and dancers, one actor and one dancer. We extracted one sentence or a phrase from the testimonies that was quite obscure or abstract. We asked them to choose one. As we were looking to have rooms built in the National Museum in case Moore Street was not available for *Sunder*, we were able to use the spaces in the museum in a different way. Some dancers and actors chose the staircases. Some chose in between levels of floors.

Karen: So you let them explore the spaces of the museum?

Louise: Yes, the building. Some were caught between buildings, literally between floors, sometimes in between spaces. But it was in always in response to something else, something structural, something architectural, because we were looking at space and place that week. Their responses were deeply considered.

…Each [pairing] was assigned the same thing but they responded in different ways to their space, to their body, to the forms they were using, as they were actors and dancers performing simultaneously. And they were all moving. The actors were dancing and the dancers were acting. That was all there. There's something brilliant about it!

David: When we were working, we were able to view what we were doing on many different angles, which actually became quite a really interesting way of viewing the work.

Louise: Yes, we were asking them as artists, dancers or artists, to imagine spaces or to design spaces.

David: Yes, and how much do you see of the body or of that story? This goes back to the source material, of someone looking through a keyhole and seeing. Or hearing something and building the picture themselves. And seeing glimpses of something that entices them.

Boss, Bolger, Lowe and Till

Louise: The women were trying to build a story over a period of thirteen hours of things they think might be happening inside their own homes. They started to construct a story that's made, that's a falsity, because they couldn't see it. They are only looking at it in terms of chinks, moments, or glimpses. That's what they have in terms of testimony. It's not necessarily 'factual' in terms of what happened from hour to hour. It's what they remember.

Owen: Yes, it was a few years later.

Louise: It's what they think might have been happening when they heard that sound. So even the testimony we are working with is a form of untruth.

David: It's absolutely interesting how we remember things.

Louise: Owen works a lot as an artist dealing with how we remember: how truth is captured; how memories happen. Once you remember, it is altered.

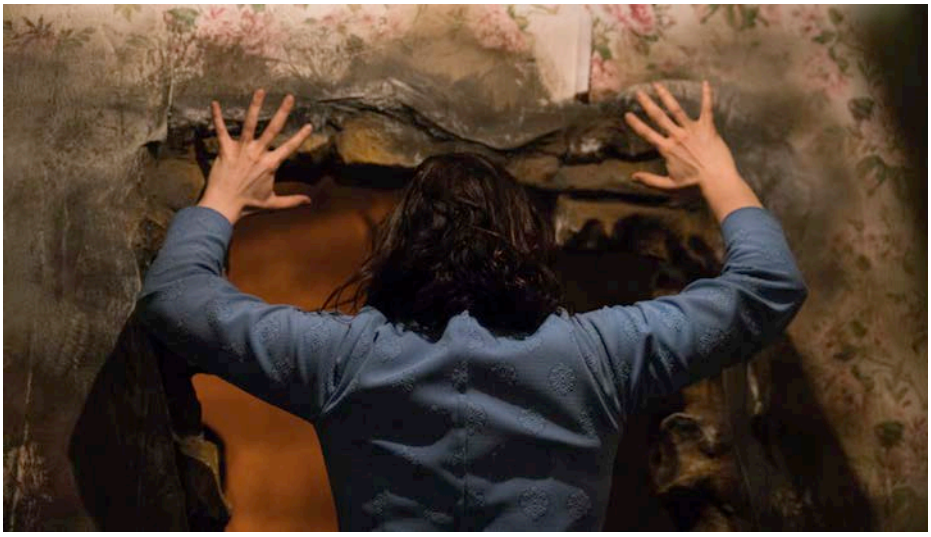
Owen: Memory is malleable. You put it back, it changes. Remainders are there for next time.

Karen: Are you also interested in memory David?

David: Absolutely. Our bodies are full of histories. Even in a day, in the hour that we've been in this room, we are going to change, by the time we go out. There is constant movement in our bodies, which is extraordinary. To describe movement: The body in space and time, that is what movement is.

Karen: What inspired your philosophy of movement as a dance artist?

David: Early influences for me would be circus performers, …trapeze artists, and a sense of freedom, of flying.



David (cont'd): That's what I remember from an early age. They were live: I was not so much watching TV. The near experience of something live, something moving through the air like that. I was a little obsessed with circus and a sense of travelling, and how they appeared and then disappeared. I loved that. And I hated that as well. I loved when they appeared. I hated it when they disappeared. …The memory of the circus, where the ring would be left on the ground, like a solace mark on it. It is interesting that it would still be there. The extra structures are gone, the tent, but it [the ring] is still there.

Louise: For another piece, Owen drew a mass physical score. It was extraordinary in terms of drawings, of what you are talking about -- the shape, structure.

Karen: It is very primal. It reminds me about what archaeologists discuss as the shared memory left through artifacts…

Louise: Artifacts are interesting. What [objects, spaces, movements] the women choose to remember in their testimonies were purposeful. We combed through the testimonies -- …we really went through a lot of stuff, moment by moment.

Owen: The way we work is much like how a visual artist works. In a visual arts studio, we work with lots and lots and lots of information. Normally visual artists will be alone in their studios, and their job is to sift through all of that information to find interesting ways through it, through the loads and loads of research and influences. It is like a magpie picking through the different spaces, the different spots.

…When you bring people in to collaborate in that way, you get different levels, using geography, sociology, history, psychology, theatre, movement, contemporary dance –whatever it is to explore the project. ….With this kind of work, there is a reservoir of fact, something that is based on truth. But in saying 'truth', it's history.

Louise: It's somebody's 'truth' originally.

Owen: …When we started off doing WORLD'S END LANE [2010],[7] we talked to Terry Fagan, the local oral historian: that was a certain kind of truth. Then you read books: a certain type of truth. All these interesting things start to happen when you start to collaborate with performers, dancers, performance artists, sound artists and consider where those links are. (cont'd)

7. *World's End Lane* won the Absolut Dublin Fringe Festival Best Off Site Production Award (2010), and nominated for the *Irish Times* Theatre Best Production Award and the Fishamble New Writing Award.

Photo: Emma O'Kane (2016) by Ped Redmond.

Owen (cont'd): How do they link? How would what Karl Kennedy, a sound designer, says influence Emma O'Kane, a dancer, will influence me, will influence Louise, will influence David.

Louise: We treat performance artists *as* performance artists, that's a difference. They're not just coming in to realise our vision. We want them to think autonomously and physically.

Owen: That kind of respect, for their artistry is important. That's why we are working with them because they are really good – they can bring something to the table. They're also not expecting us to ask: 'What do you want us to do?'

We have to all bring the production up together. We have to build it together. We build, build work together. It has to become solid. We don't make a *Bourne Supremacy*, where … you [the audience member] can sit back and watch, and be guided through a narrative of a story to a final end. It's not that. We build something other than that. It's more interesting than that…

Louise: The audience is part of the final part of process. The final part of that build is missing. There might be three of us in the room, but there is also an other that has to be there. The audiences have to be there. They're bringing a sensitivity – an understanding, and an awareness – and from us an invitation into that work. It's not that they can just sit there and be voyeurs. Our work always needs the other.

Owen: Absolutely. The audiences will activate the work.

Louise: They will completely transform it.

Owen: I'm really comfortable with that way of working.

David: In VARDO, as an audience member, you are very close to the actors or the performers. My reaction as an audience member to an event obviously has a consequence for the performer. I take something on. Or I might go a different way. The complete ownership is really important then, for, within that story we have to be able to shift. It isn't like we have to do it in 'this way'.

Louise: It isn't formulaic.

David: It's about fluctuations. And it's about allowing the audience member to be that final key.

Louise: That is the critical bit.

Matthew Williamson in THESE ROOMS (2016). Photo: Pat Redmond.

Daniel Monaghan in THESE ROOMS (2016). Photograph: Pat Redmond.

Anu Actor (joining the conversation): Peter Crawley [of *The Irish Times*] made a very interesting point about Anu, that the audience member becomes the dramaturge of his or her own experience. So, I suppose even as far back as WORLD'S END LANE, the really important thing was that each audience member brings something different to the work. So it's constantly evolving, constantly changing with each performance. Because they are *it*. The audience members make the show. There's a framework to it. But it is not done in a very rigid way in the sense that you can't get it wrong as an artist. …

Louise: But you also can't get it wrong as a performer because it is *not* improvisation. That's the thing. It is rigid. It's timed. It is *so* orchestrated to a time. It is so *not* improvised! It's so rigorously critical. It almost like a score, a performance score. And yet, there is space within that score for action and reaction, but not necessarily for improvisation.

Anu Actor: I find that helps as a performer because there is so little room – there is no room – for indulgence. For other productions, you can get on a stage as a performer and say 'I'm loving this bit and I'm going to drag this part out today'. But there is no room for that with Anu Productions, because you are thinking: 'Liana is going to walk by the window in two minutes and she is going to take my audience member'. And so I need to keep on keeping on. Every five minutes someone is going to come in and completely change the performance and because of that, everything that you are doing – even though it is rigid and it is set and it is timed to an nth of a degree – is completely refreshed. Because every impulse is coming from that audience, and every response you give is a response to that person. …A perfect example: I had a question once for a production that was: 'Do I look like Rudolf Valentino?' After I ask that, it's up to you the audience member to say 'Yes' or 'No'. The choice is there for you to do whatever you want. Or you don't have to answer that question.

Louise: But I suppose once you ask a question, you have to be prepared for response.

Anu Actor: You're not just asking the question because it's part of the script. You *have* to ask the question.

Louise: And you need the answer!

Anu Actor: Because you're going to get a real answer. I think one time, I lay down on the bed with someone and asked 'If you can change one thing in your life, what would that be?' And it's a very big question. There's a bit of responsibility in that question then, because nine times out of ten the audience member is going to give you a real answer that they've never shared with anyone else before.

Karen: David, have you had intimate experiences with audiences and the dance artists you collaborate with?

David: Yes. CHAMBERMAID[8] (2004-5) started in the foyer before the audience members gathered or were checked into the room, and then they were shown into a lift. But the performance started downstairs as the audience gathered, so they didn't know who was in the show. (…cont'd)

David (cont'd): One of the performers was actually in the lift with the audience members, and that also crossed that boundary, and as they were going through the corridor, there were performers who became characters in the room. The idea for that the room holds memory. I was interested in the idea of the room holding energies, that these energies still exist. What would happen if we could find the stories in the room, in the layers of the room, and put them all together, across and in time. How would they speak to one another? There was an audience of ten or twelve, so there were intimate moments with the audience. And I really liked the fact that the audience was so close to us while we performed.

I also did a piece, [SWEPT [2003-4)[9], in the downstairs bar in the Peacock Theatre instead of doing the show using the actual theatre. It was a very challenging space. Being that close to someone moving, particularly in a space like that, when you are running or throwing or lifting somebody, it could be quite dangerous. It is their responsibility as well as your own.

There was one moment when we ran toward the wall, where the audience thought they were safe. So the audience had to move quickly! [laughter] It is an interesting kind of concept when you do that. So when people didn't check their bags in – we had thought this through beforehand – when they'd move, they'd leave the bag behind them, which immediately got in your way. It was an interesting challenge. So one day, when I and another dancer, Diane O'Keefe, went to the wall – we were to go immediately upside down and play the scene upside

David (cont'd): down – and the audience moved. As we were performing, I had to move the bag and kind of shifted the bag around, and this audience member went up to me and said 'I'm sorry love but that is my bag.' [laughter] Anything can happen!

Anu Actor: I love those moments something gets in your way, or when it doesn't go according to plan. That's a catalyst moment for something absolutely new. There is this expression that there's no honesty in theatre. But those moments, like when an actor forgets his lines -- those moments when [breathes in dramatically] it becomes completely real. 'There's a bag in my way. I can either ignore it or make it part of it.' And you made it part of it. …I love those moments. That's why I do – what I do.

David: That's the probably the big thing. Is to work with performers that are able to do that. They are skilled enough to be comfortable with that.

Louise: You're right: it is a skill that is really real. It's not going to suit everybody. Sometimes the most brilliant performer in the world would not not suited, or suitable, or enjoy making work like this. And that has to be part of the conversation and interrogation to make or find the thing. …

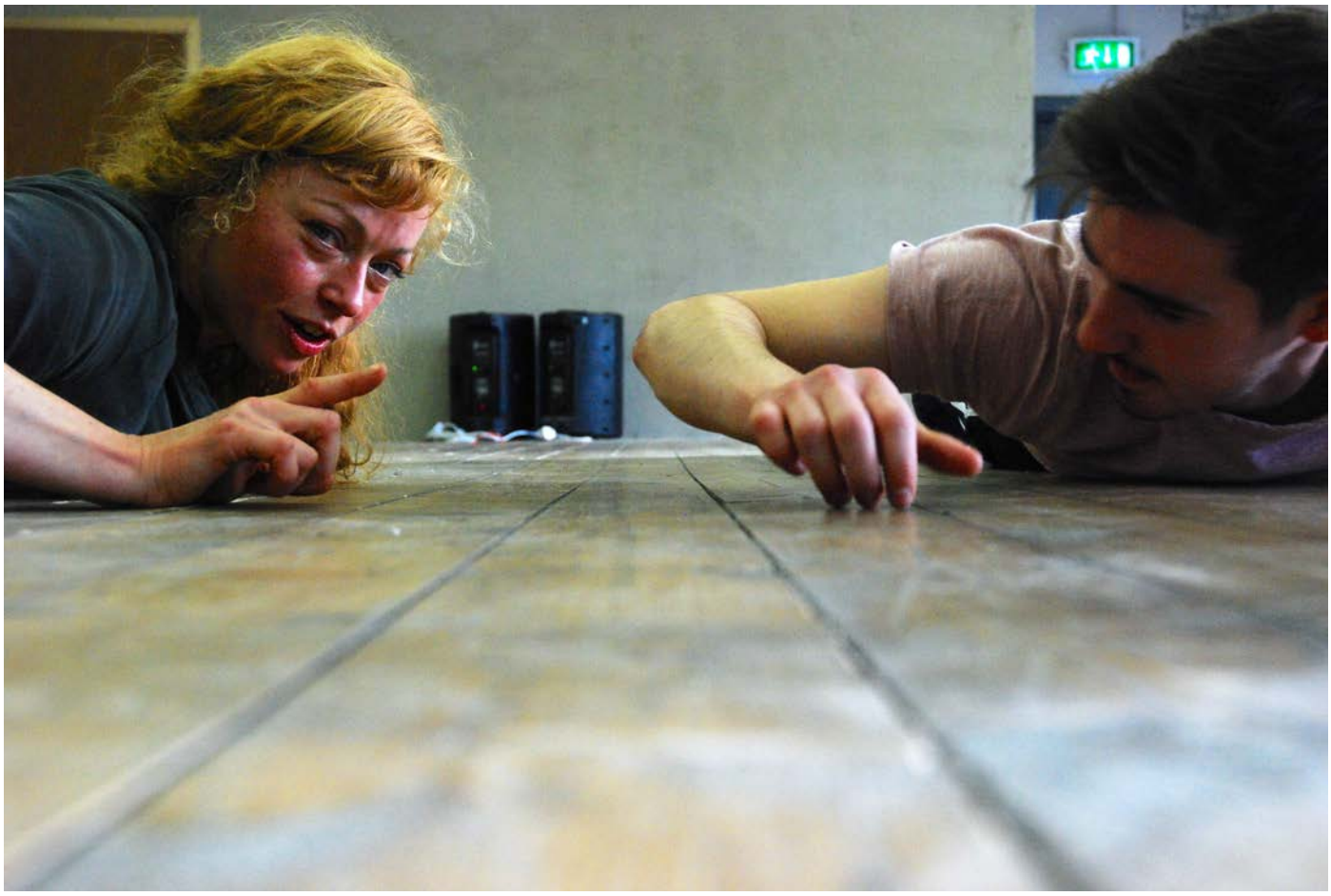
David: It all has this other elements in it. And you need people who want to stay interested, and motivated, and scared, and all those things at once.

Karen: Movement will possibly mean different things for the three of you. You are bringing those different artistic aspects together, and are creating spaces to keep those in tension. How do you negotiate the shared framework?

Louise: We drew them out. We physically drew them out and then we shared them. 'I imagine this. What do you imagine?' And then from there, created more.

8. CHAMBERMAID received the 'Sexiest Show' Award at the Dublin Fringe Festival (2004) and the 'Fringe First' Award at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival (2005).
9. SWEPT premiered at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin (November 2003) and was also performed at The Venue Bar in Kilkenny (August 2004).

Image on this and following page: THESE ROOMS development workshops (2016): photo courtesy Owen Boss.



Karen: Louise and Owen, you use a lot of mapping in your work. Is that the way you work too David?

David: Every project is different. I like that. It means that everything has a new feeling, or difference. That's probably why we are working together, to try and push where we're at. I'd hate to think: 'This is what I've done before. This is what I'm good at. These are the triggers I've used before.' It doesn't feel that way with our collaboration. I'd hate to do that.

Owen: Like David said, in development, we set the performers tasks that then evolved into four movement works.

Louise: But it was interesting that David made large movement maps on the floor, and without being asked before, the dancers and performers would end up using maps on the floor and putting their bodies in those spaces.

Owen: They'd also go off to develop work. We do tasks: like I would map out possibilities and then engage with the performers. There were three groups. So we wandered in to see what they were doing, and engage with what they were doing.

Louise: …Sometimes the three of us would wander into the same group of two [a dancer and actor]. They're interrogating it so much that we're just dropping in and out, and engaging at the moment. We're not at that point where we're saying:

Louise (cont'd): 'Try this'. That comes later, when we fit it together. At the moment we are just listening into their conversations. We are just responding in a generic way, rather than saying: 'You should try it this way now'. We haven't gotten to that point.

David: There is a huge amount of trust in the room at the moment. And I don't mean between them and us, and us and them. I mean trusting ourselves, and trusting the work, and trusting each other.

Karen: How did you invite the artists that you've worked with before? Was it a bit of a mix?

Owen: Yes. It was a three-three, with Emma [O'Kane] as a cross-over.

David: I've worked with Emma O'Kane for a long time and she's worked with Louise as well. …Knowing we were getting near to, and perhaps would be, working together, I asked Emma 'How does Anu work? How does Louise work?' and what was interesting was that Emma couldn't really tell me! I didn't come away with thinking 'Right. I know what to expect.' It wasn't that. What she said that struck me was the amount of research and knowledge, and visceral connection.

Louise: The performers really *know* these [historical] people, and with their investment in the show, they own it with us. They *absolutely* own it with us. Which is why the production isn't by anybody: it is by everybody. But they really own it and they are serious about that. By the end of it, they ferociously protect and interrogate the work. {*David*: Yes.} They don't ever feel like they are serving a piece of work. That's the difference. …

David: Yes. It felt like when we were discussing the cast, it felt like it was important to at least start the process with a performance that we knew quite well, that the artists that we worked with had that experience, and knew we would be in it together.

…But everyone that we partnered together had only met for the first time that day, which is really interesting, when you put that together and with the subject matter. It is a hard space to be in.

Louise: And with no introductions! …I left our first week of development for *These Rooms* together thrilled – this is going to be really special.

David: I don't know if you want to give this away or not, but the last moment in the workshop was really nice for everyone. It was the wish. Do you want to talk about that?

Louise: Have I told you about 'That's a great idea!' before?

Karen: No.

Louise: At the end of a workshop or a process, or the end of the week, we give everyone loads of post-it notes. After a week of development, the scene work was shaping up. The performers and artists make hundreds of 'great ideas' and they write them up in post-it from. It can be wild. It can be about money and project development. Whatever they want to see in the show. Whatever they want. It could be anything. They write them down and we collect them all. There's hundreds of them usually by the end. In the Abbey space, there were over 2,000 post-it notes.

…Then we place each idea on the wall and we all talk about it, and say 'That's a great idea!' But the rule is that everybody has to say 'That's a great idea', even if it is the worst idea! [laughter] And you have to argue for it – the whole group has to argue for why it's the best idea you've ever heard. You have to argue for why that's a great idea, and say 'Really?' and then suddenly it unlocks something in you that can propel you in a different way.

Louise: What we noticed was that the 'great ideas' frequently overlap. And they could be obscure. For this project, I don't know if we can do it, but four people put on the idea board that it would it be a great idea if we were to have a 1960's jazz band. …A 1960's jazz band!

David: It was so particular!

Louise: You also start to see these really abstract ideas overlap, and then they might form into something. We did it for ANGEL MEADOW (2014, Manchester, UK)[10]. One of the artists said, 'I'd like to see the basement full of pigs, squealing pigs running around.' We could never do that, but what Owen did was to manufacture these massive carcasses, that were hanging, with the sound of pigs squealing on top of it. So sometimes what they suggest, we can never achieve it, but it was a brilliant idea…

David: The pigs were a great idea, but not practical.

Louise: You can have actors and dancers and performers, thinking in a completely different way that surprises themselves. in terms of design, in terms of space, in terms of rooms…

David/Owen: Yes.

Louise: Another post-it exercise that I'll do with them later on is that when we find the spaces [for the performance of THESE ROOMS], they have to put memories on them. You have to fill the room with memories, put false memories on the rooms. 'That's my bedroom.' 'That's where you kissed me.' 'That's where something happened.' Suddenly the room is covered with memories. In terms of knowing the space, it's always a great idea. The walls are covered with post-it notes, and everyone is doing it. The point that they build to a room full of post-it notes, a room full of great ideas. It's brilliantly fun.

Owen: After a couple of days, there's a flow to things, you're coming to the end of a process, but you don't want them to finish. So you want to end with a springboard, to have them thinking while they're away.

10. ANGEL MEADOW, in association with HOMEmcr theatre, was staged in a disused pub in Manchester and nominated for Best Production, Best Design and Best Ensemble (Manchester Theatre Awards, 2014),. Louise Lowe was also nominated for Best Director by the UK National Theatre awards.

Owen: There are no limitations.

Louise: 'What would you like to see in the show if there's nothing in the way?' Not what would you like to make in the show, but what would you like to see in the show? What would happen? …It's been dreamt up. It's like collective dreaming. It's about the shared ownership again isn't it?

Karen: In addition to the performance, what are the other facets of THESE ROOMS*?*

Louise: What we are always trying to do is find the space between these three forms: in the context of a visual artist, a filmmaker, a dancer/choreographer, a maker/director, what lies in between them is interesting. So, in addition to the performance, we want to create a film [FALLING OUT OF STANDING] as another interrogation.[11]

The third part is CoisCéim's BROADREACH.[12] CoisCéim has a very established outreach programme. How do we use this project to enhance and enrich our own work? How do we unfold it out to others in a different kind of way?

For the outreach, what we want to achieve is to somehow enhance the experience of what we are making, to find sophisticated mechanisms in which to present it outward. Or for the out[side] to come into the space.

Louise (cont'd): A simple example: with PALS [2015][13] we had song lectures from Francis Devine about World War One, that took place in the space. Or it could be more interpretive. Transition year students came in and after they watched the show, we brought in an artifact or other material not in the show, and allowed them to respond physically in the space in smaller groups with the actors. The students who presented their performances back to the school. David does this all the time [through BROADREACH]. You make a response to the piece. You use the site as a site of inquiry for a response to take place in.

So I suppose these are the three distinct strands of what we are trying to consider.

Karen: At this stage of the project, what are the challenges you are facing?

Louise: One of the key things we are talking about is 'Where do we set this?' because we don't know that yet. …We have been walking around and looking at warehouses and warehouse spaces, different spaces.

Karen: Do you want it to be in the same general part of town?

Louise: We'd like to, but that depends upon what will be available to us.

Louise (cont'd): There are places that are available now to rent, but we need space for the production to begin in September [seven months from now].

David: And we want it for five weeks!

Louise: …It will be one of those things that will have to wait until the production time is closer, by the nature of the budget and timeframe we have to make it. But yes, ultimately on our wish list would be geographically placing it somewhere that makes sense in terms of the production, but large enough that can hold a structure that can move or the mass mechanics of which can move during the show as well. That is something that we're playing with. Also, somewhere where we can host our audiences and for them to make reasonable sense of why it's there.

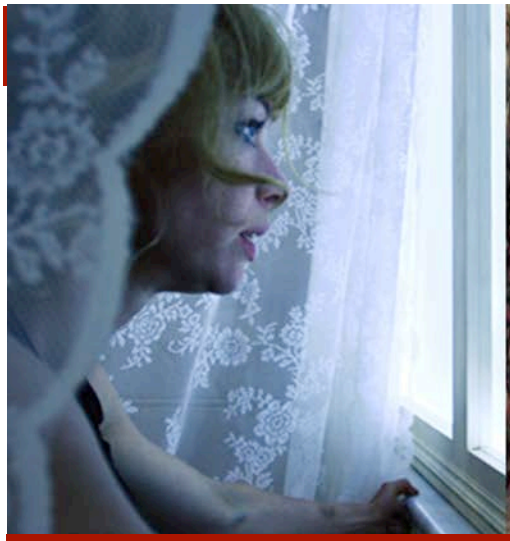
Karen: At what stage do you decide how many audience members you can have or how the audience works in the production?

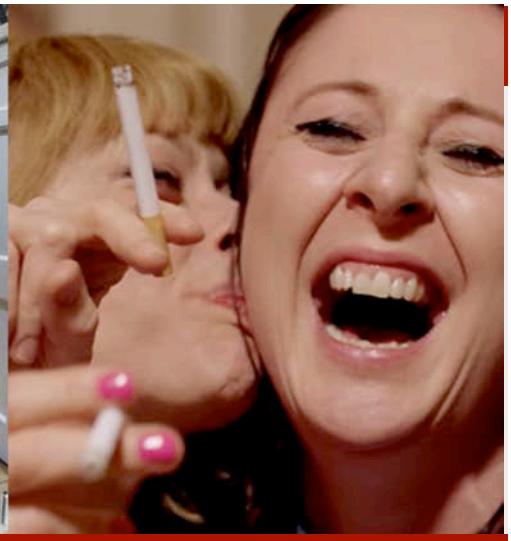
Louise: At the moment, off the top of my head we are thinking of about fifty audience members at a time. …But we're trying to break them up. So we're thinking about the number of houses and the number of people, and the experience they might have, and how that [experience] might sit with them. That's the big measure.

11. FALLING OUT OF STANDING, three filmic works by David Bolger, Owen Boss and Louise Lowe, inverted 'traditional concepts of exterior and interior', and sought to explore 'source material related to of the North King Street massacre and the subsequent live production of THESE ROOMS'. The films and installation ran from 4-23 April 2017 at the Dublin Theatre Festival exhibition space. . Viewers experienced the films in a new installation by Owen Boss that 'aims to contextualise how the past is propelled into the present and the impact of time on conflicted histories through the form of film'.

12. 38 WOMEN ran from 19 September through 4 December 2016. Led by Philippa Donnellan, this performance project for women aged 15-65+ took place at CoisCéim studio an at the Collins Barracks, and resulted in three performances (3-4 December 2016). CoisCéim BROADREACH "is founded on the principle that dance is a performing art. Its activities are pioneering, targeting all sections of the population in an exciting and innovative manner to create a genuine curiosity in dance. Every year, BROADREACH touches the lives of thousands of people, through classes, workshops, residencies and dance performance participation projects".

13. PALS: *The Irish at Gallipoli* was created by ANU Productions with support from the National Museum of Ireland, the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht, and in ssociation with the National Archives of Ireland. It was nominated for the Irish Times Theatre Awards (2015) for Best Production, Best Lighting Design and Audience Choice.





Karen: So do you know more or less what the density of people were there historically? Is that the physicality you are trying to create?

Louise: Exactly, and to try and occupy again. But that doesn't mean that's what we'll get. It will depend on the space that we find, but the rationale is the same in that we'd trying to replicate the feel of it – the amount of bodies in those houses. There were about twenty people, with other uninvited guests in the houses. But we're not necessarily moving the numbers upwards either, of about twenty in each house to make it feel that way, which is another challenge we're setting ourselves.

…At the moment, we're talking about – although this could absolutely change in the drop of a hat – we're talking about it being curated as a space so there's movement that is decided by the journey that they are on. There might watch it in different orders, but they will be on a journey.

David: Yes.

Owen: But this can all change.

Louise: If anyone was to ask us about any of our shows from this point in time, from this far away [seven to eight months before performing], we wouldn't be describing the same shows that were actually made! … The development ideas are so far removed from what actually happens, but this is where we are at today.

David: You have to commit to something in order to be able to run away from it, or go straight into it and find the next move forwards. It is like a draft of a script, or a draft of something, so it's anchored, but we are allowing ourselves to move.

THESE ROOMS ran from 29 September -16 October 2016 as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival, with an extended run through Project Arts Centre (25 Oct - 13 November 2016), at 85/85 Upper Dorsett Street, Dublin 1. As part of CoisCéim's BROADREACH public engagement programme, 38 WOMEN ran from 19 September - 4 December 2016, culminating in performances on 3-4 December 2016 at Collins Barracks National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. The films and installtion FALLING OUT OF STANDING ran from 4-23 April 2017 at the Dublin Theatre Festival exhibition space in Temple Bar, Dublin 2.

Stills from FALLING OUT OF STANDING (Bolger, Boss, Lowe, 2017).