

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

This interview was conducted via telephone on 14th September 2021 as part of the Live Art in Scotland research project at the University of Glasgow.

The following is an 'intelligent verbatim' transcript that is intended to be an accurate record which omits some small, repeated phrases or false starts (where someone has spoken and then rephrased themselves) for readability. Text presented in [square brackets] has been added during transcription to clarify meaning and/or to include details offered by the interviewee(s) during the review process.

For further details of this process and guidance on conditions of use, please visit the Live Art in Scotland project website: <https://liveartscotland.org/index.php/about-the-las-collection/>

Stephen Greer (SG): I know that you studied theatre at the University of Glasgow and I guess I wanted to ask you what kind of theatre and performance were you into at that stage, or before then? How did you get into studying theatre?

Jackie Wylie (JW): I think probably in all honesty it came out of being really lucky to have a school that had Higher Drama. There's a political element to that isn't there, which is the importance of arts education. Getting to do Higher Drama was the thing that introduced me to the phenomenon of storytelling and ways of seeing the world in new ways in real time with real people. Whenever I think about my time at Glasgow university, I think about the fact that studying theatre, and I studied theatre and film and television at the same time, was so much more than studying the art form. It was about where the art form related to the world and to society and identity. Getting into theatre and getting into film was more about than getting into these pieces of art or these texts, it was about a journey of understanding the power structures of the world and the way that identity is constructed for us and the way that society shapes us. There has always been an intertwined nature of viewing theatre and film and ways of unpacking views on the world. When I was little, we used to go to the panto. I think if you speak to most Scottish people, their first experiences are going to be panto. If I were to trace my journey through theatre practices, it would be starting with this strange and magnificent Scottish form of panto and then that meeting a

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

politicised lens at university and where I am now is how to do make really popular work that also changes your way of being in the world at the same time.

SG: Yes, so that question of how to make work that is popular and progressive, for want of a better word than progressive.

JW: Totally. It's hard to think of what that word is, if I could crack open what that word is. I think 'progressive' is really useful. The thing about the panto is it's often the one time that Scottish families go to the theatre and it's this extraordinary experience and that was formative, but the great challenge is how to make work that feels like it's bold and that challenges our feelings about who we are, that moves us on, and brings us together. Progressive is a good way of describing that. It's about how to bring those things together and it's a great challenge.

SG: What was your local theatre? I was just thinking I have half-memories of seeing *Mother Goose* somewhere in a civic town hall and then later on seeing a version of *Peter Pan* with Peter Duncan who used to present *Blue Peter* [laughs].

JW: Oh brilliant. Mine was the King's in Edinburgh. We were brought up in Tollcross, but we also went down to the Playhouse. When I was at university it was late nineties/early noughties and it was part of that, I don't know if this still has relevance, but it was called in-yer-face theatre.

SG: Yes.

JW: I got to see some of that work at the Traverse. You know Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill, and Anthony Neilson. There was one show.. it was such a brilliant question to ask what's your origin story.

SG: [Laughs].

JW: There was one show that I saw called *The Bogus Woman*, which was about a failed asylum seeker. There was one woman [performing] and it was by a London company called The Red Room. Somebody at NTS was part of that original production. There was some intersection there between feminist politics and the politics of the in-yer-face stuff which was having this visceral embodied experience in the theatre where you are really intensely feeling something that can only happen in that live moment. That was definitely a

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

profoundly shaping element of what's driven my curatorial practice or my producing practice throughout my whole time of making work. How do you make people feel really alive, how do you make people feel really present?

SG: I suppose we're talking about theatre which is consciously political in some respect and is also using form as part of that political quality.

JK: Exactly. It's a hard thing to articulate, but I think you're right, it's both. The form is trying to break down what's gone before in a way. In-yer-face was trying to challenge the preconceived notion of what theatre was. It was like wake up everybody! I think that was definitely a part of it. Then when I was at university, I don't know if it's still structured this way, we got choices of different practical elements and I remember that I directed a production of Sarah Kane's *Crave*, which was still a new play at that time. I think that was a very formative experience. Weirdly, my big brother was in it. Very strange [laughs]. He's now a software engineer. Anyway, things that can only happen at university. There was something about that moment where theatre was shouting about its liveness in a very particular way.

SG: I'm guessing it was through student theatre that you first came into contact with The Arches as a space. Or were you just going to see shows there as a student?

JK: The Arches story is quite funny. Someone I was at university with, Megan Barker, it was during that time in the late nineties where the thing that you did was start up a theatre company even if you didn't have funding which doesn't happen so much anymore. It's an interesting phenomenon that what happens now is that people are solo practitioners sometimes working in singular form as writers or directors or performers and they build a portfolio career around the different skills that they have. I think that's because there is less optimism about being able to form a company. Twenty years ago, you called yourself a theatre company and then you just were, which is sort of brilliant [laughs]. We got the Alasdair Cameron scholarship to make a show when we finished. Andy Arnold came to see us do that show and off the back of that we were invited to do a show at The Arches on a box office split kind of thing. We were just invited into the space. I remember we were sharing our dressing room with Doves; do you remember they were a sort of rave band? It was brilliant, it was so rock and roll.

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

SG: [Laughs].

JW: That was my introduction to The Arches. At that time, it was a big deal for an artistic director of a theatre to come and see your student show and then invite us in to do a show off the back of that. The Arches theatre company at that time was really Andy's directing work. The evolution of The Arches was into more live art, contemporary performance practices from there. It's funny to think about those times now, it feels so long ago.

SG: [Laughs]. I'm also thinking that when you went to work for The Arches, it wasn't immediately. You were working in film and tv production, weren't you? You were doing location stuff, is that right?

JW: I did locations. I suppose I was really in love with cinema and theatre at the same time. One of the things that has been brilliant about this covid moment is combining those forces. We're now in this moment where the art forms are hybridising in an exciting way that I'm loving and being challenged by as a theatre company. I think we set up the theatre company and got invited into The Arches and then I think I went and did some stuff in film and tv. At that time there was an amazing training programme that Scottish Screen ran. It was called New Entrants. It was supporting people to enter the film and tv industry in a very careful, cared for way. I did locations for a few years and then I found my way back. I think something about the liveness of theatre or the immediacy of it drew me back into that world. A job came up at The Arches and Andy [Arnold] had remembered that we'd made theatre shows in the building before. Film and tv was an amazing experience, but it's a different sort of structure for making work. It's much more hierarchical and unless you're at the top of the pyramid, you're quite removed from the actual art making. Whereas in theatre, you are much closer to the act of storytelling, and everybody involved is closer to the audience and the moment where the story meets the audience, so it was a kind of richer, more satisfying world for me to be in at that time. The Arches was a subcultural space that is so enticing and intoxicating because it was a space that was for everybody and where there wasn't the same kind of rules around art making in a wider sense. To be honest, at that point, everybody wanted to be part of The Arches. Why wouldn't you want to be part of something that was so vibrant and exciting at that time.

SG: The two big festivals at The Arches that I personally closely associate with your work there, and this is maybe even before you became artistic director, were Arches Live and

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

Behaviour. You created Behaviour when you took over that job, but I feel like the evolution of Arches Live was very much to do with that period of your being there. I don't know if you can talk a little bit about those two festivals, one very much focused on emerging artists or emerging work and the other being the big, international festival with high-profile artists as well as people who had come through Arches Live.

JW: Totally, that's it [laughs] in summary.

SG: [Laughs].

JW: Sometimes when I think about those festivals and I think about the context in which those festivals were coming together and the resources that we had to make them, I think they're miraculous. Those festivals came together with LJ Findlay-Walsh, we were co-collaborators, co-creators of those festivals. LJ is now doing Take Me Somewhere. The funny thing about Take Me Somewhere is it feels like a natural evolution of both of those platforms but with its own life and space. When I took over as artistic director, I took the resource that we had, which was the resource that had previously gone into Andy's Arches theatre company work and repositioned that around this notion that bringing in international companies has a really positive influence on the local theatre-making culture, which is a really interesting thing to be thinking about now in the context of NTS where the local, the national, and the international exist in a really different way for me now. The purpose of Behaviour was to bring international companies over for audiences, but also for artists. The thing about The Arches that seems extraordinary to me now was the way that we completely took for granted that the audience was eighteen to thirty-five-year-olds coming to see that work. To have a guaranteed youthful audience for your artform is an incredible thing in and of itself. It's one of the hardest things to do, I think. The idea was to bring international companies and put them on alongside the local companies so that the local artists could experience the new perspectives, but also to be given the status and the place of positioning themselves as international companies within their local environment. If you put Kieran Hurley alongside The TEAM or Milo Rau, they become that, they're given that positioning in a way. It was an exciting cross-pollination of ideas and makers. It was good. Then Arches Live was much more DIY. Looking back on the optics of that, I feel a bit differently about some of that now because Arches Live was of its time. The artists were given space and the building, but not everybody was paid properly for the time that they

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

spent on their work. It was a DIY spirit. It feels important now to talk about the [complexity of the economics around it] but there was an energy and a community around it.

SG: Yes, it's interesting. As I've talked to a wide range of people, what comes up often is this tension around DIY spaces and this energy that you're talking about. People recognise this incredible energy and this sense of community and creative dynamism, and in the same breath there is a real reservation, if not anxiety, about the terms of labour in those spaces.

JW: Totally. That's a good conversation that's moved on because at the time we weren't having that conversation. In a way, The Arches was slightly different because we didn't have any money. Nobody had any resource. The energy and I come back to the word community in everything that has threaded through the work I've been involved in because there was a community around that work. At the time, the community was the thing that was compelling and that drove the energy around it. But you're right, the conditions of labour around it, there is a discomfort there in talking about that. This idea of community also feels so fragile and precious at the same time. It's difficult. I would give anything to be able to provide a community now in this particular moment when it feels so fragile and when people feel so alienated generally, and artists feel alienated specifically.

SG: It's also interesting to me that The Arches was also three or four or five overlapping communities, sometimes really close to each other and cohesive and sometimes [involving] quite different groups of people. There were groups of people who were just the live art people and there were folk who also went to gigs and then there was a big overlap with clubbing. There were people like me who went along to the live art and theatre stuff but never went clubbing.

JW: Completely. The thing that we were always trying to achieve were the moments where you could bring all of that together in a way. The really special moment was where those communities overlapped with each other. Do you remember when Adrian [Howells] did his restaurant takeovers?

SG: Yes.

JW: It seems so obvious now but having a café bar where people wanted to go [laughs] is a really massive achievement for a venue. It's huge. In that space in the café bar when Adrian did his restaurant takeovers all the communities mingled because you'd have the clubbers

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

that were drinking and then the theatre people were out for dinner. Those moments were beautiful. On the other extreme, I'd say something like Kieran's *Beats*, people were coming out of that show high and it was a meeting point of all those communities. Did you see *Beats*?

SG: No, I never saw the original production of it. I've seen it since but I wasn't in Glasgow at the time.

JW: Kieran had stopped working front of house but at one point he'd worked front of house at The Arches, so he knew the DJs and he was part of the artistic community but he was also part of the operational culture of the building, if you like. He was able to pull in loads of favours that any other playwright wouldn't have been able to do, so *Beats* was just this banging club show [laughs]. It was brilliant.

SG: [Laughs].

JW: It was highly political, all those things we were talking about earlier. It was a highly politicised journey through a particular period of time in Scotland and the impact of austerity measures and all of that. There's a word isn't there, an ecotone. I can't remember who told me about ecotones, it might have even been Dee [Heddon]. When you have two ecosystems and the place where you get the most exciting species is where the two ecosystems meet. When the river meets the riverbank, you get the most exciting species, or when the forest meets the clearing, you get the most interesting species. I think there's something in that and I think it's relevant to this moment now where a lot of live performance has been working with screen work. It's the same thing again, there's been a demolishment of worry about defining form and it's created a lot of really interesting, rich territory. I think that was where The Arches was strongest as well.

SG: It's interesting, in focusing on [the history of] live art, I go from this moment where people are really anxious about whether it's performance art or theatre and there being almost oppositional camps and I think that stuck around for quite a long time, and then when you get into the nineties, it feels like that [anxiety] drops away or is replaced by other, more important arguments.

JW: Totally. I remember Judith Knight from Artsadmin saying the argument about how you define the art form is distracting. It's about whether or not something has the power to

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

move you and change you, and it doesn't really matter what form. If something feels exciting, you know in your body that it's exciting and the form doesn't matter. I think the economics are the challenging thing more than the definition of the form. At National Theatre of Scotland, we're making something which is hybrid between film and theatre. It's a *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and the lead artist is Hope Dickson Leach who is an extraordinary filmmaker and it's working out what it means to be the National Theatre. One of our projects is being led by a filmmaker and it's being okay about that and excited about that. The audience are going to experience a film being made live and then we're also livestreaming the same experience that the live audience are having, but we're not livestreaming a theatre show, we're livestreaming a film being made live. The things I'm asking myself about NTS are around what it is that NTS can do that no one else can do at the moment and I'm using that as a way of remembering what you've just talked about, which is making space for different forms and different voices. On the one hand, something that NTS can do that others can't do are these huge number one touring shows that go to the biggest venues, but it's also the shows that can go to rural touring and tiny spaces. The economic model of theatre making at the moment means that those are really difficult things to do, those kind of extremes that involve the most financial risk.

There's another thing that NTS can do at the moment which is about future proofing the art form. I was talking to this brilliant woman last week from the audience agency and we were just talking about the average age of, I know we're talking about live art but as we've said, it's all crossover and I'd be interested in what you think the age of live art audiences is, but anyway, the relevance of that is that the theatre audience is aging. Ten years ago, the average age of a theatre audience was in the forties and now it's in its fifties and soon it'll be in its sixties if we don't bring younger audiences in to the theatre. Younger audiences go to visual art, they go to gigs, they go to the cinema, they have incredible screen culture that exists now at home and anywhere you want, but younger audiences don't go and see traditional theatre. I wonder if one of the jobs we've got now is actually future proofing theatre by making space for theatre being made in different ways, whether or not that is work that's co-created by different artists or communities, but also bringing in voices that have not been heard before or making space for stories that haven't been told. That feels like a live art practice in a way, or that has synergies with performance practice.

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

SG: Yes, I think I do know what you mean. That's certainly the way the Live Art Development Agency has tended to talk about live art in terms of a body of practice which is interested in expanding the range of human experience through art and that has been particularly aligned with previously marginalised or excluded artists and their experiences. I'm just thinking about the question of the economics and knowing that National Theatre of Scotland as an institution has got to speak to a dozen or more different stakeholders or communities of practice. I remember standing in the audience at one programme launch and realising that you were pulling off this conjuring trick of speaking to a dozen different interest groups at once with an authentic voice and thinking that if Jackie runs for office somewhere [then] I'm probably going to have to vote for her [laughs].

JW: [Laughs]. Thanks for saying that, that means a lot. That is also the thing that is so hard. Holding on to the space which is about making work for everyone. Theatre For Everyone is part of our vision and mission.

SG: Which is a pretty high bar isn't it? [laughs]

JW: Yes. Also, my question is - how do you do that job of work which is making sure that you are including the widest possible set of audiences and artists across Scotland and trusting your instincts to make really bold, radical choices about the art making? There's something about this post-covid moment where I think we're all thinking what is our core purpose, but the answer isn't a straightforward one if you're NTS because the answer is to bring in the biggest possible audience across Scotland. When I say biggest, I mean the largest audience, but also those that haven't been included in theatre-making before and there are also questions of geography, identity, and belonging inherent in all of that, in the most complex and intersectional way. It can be quite head spinning.

SG: Yes.

JW: [Laughs]. I know the thing you're talking about in the presentation of that programme. In a way, it felt like a much simpler time and even then, it was complex.

SG: Yes. Just thinking about the economies that we've been talking about, I'm thinking about Adrian's work and how some of the shows that he made were live art works, but they could be packaged as conventional touring shows and they could sell a decent number of tickets, such as the *Audience with Adrienne*. There was a huge body of work, maybe for

which he was better known, where it was financially not very viable because it was all one-to-one work and there was a real limit [to the size of the audience].

JW: The best example of the value of art beyond transaction. I think Adrian's one-on-one work is some of the best lived examples of why that kind of art making needs to be publicly subsidised. Yes, the economics of it don't work, but how can you place a value on the transformative power of Adrian's practice? Not just on the individual, but on this act of believing that art can somehow have this healing peace-making quality to it. It's so incredible really to think about it. If I find myself going too far towards trying to second-guess what an audience might want, that's the worst thing that anyone can do and programme on that basis, you have to be led by the extraordinary ideas of artists. The value of Adrian's work is just so beyond the economic model that it was based around.

SG: As you might know, when Dee [Heddon] and Dominic [Johnson] were putting the book together on Adrian's work, I wrote a little thing for that and as part of it I worked with some of his contracts and one of the best lines that I ever came across — if I can find an image of it that I can share, I'll email it to you — he'd been under pressure from a festival, I think, to put on more performances and he'd been really strict in saying no, I can't physically do any more and there's no way you're paying me enough anyway. He was like 'if you're going to insist on this economic model, then I'm going to push back and say the value of it is even greater than you think it is'. The really gorgeous thing is he'd hand-written an amendment to the contract because they'd wanted to do lots of filming and photographs, it was *Footwashing For The Sole*, to promote it as part of the festival publicity. And he said 'well if this must happen, it has to be a member of the production team and they have to give consent because it can't be a member of the public because it's too important an intimate moment to be used in this way'. It's there in block capitals on the side [of the page].

JW: So nice, isn't it? We started talking about Behaviour and Arches Live and there's something about the power of festivals. The thing about Adrian's work is when you place work in a festival, festivals kind of amplify the impact of the work. Festivals are greater than the sum of their parts. There was something about when you put Adrian's work into a festival it kind of echoed around the communities and audience and cities in which it was being presented. There is something so gorgeous about that. After The Arches closed, I think that's how we got to a place of doing Take Me Somewhere. I don't know how much

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

I've talked to you about the bit after The Arches and the Take Me Somewhere moment, but the thing that happened after The Arches closing was Creative Scotland gave me a grant to do this R and D into what should happen. A way of unlocking more resource really was to do a feasibility study, it was an engagement with The Arches community to work out what should happen now that The Arches had closed, specifically with the artistic programme. The thing that came out really clearly from all the artists was a festival because a festival allows that sense of community, and it allows the amplification of ideas and it allows the artists to feel like they're greater than the sum of their own individual parts. After The Arches closed there was an understanding that the artistic work had to carry on somehow. I wonder where that fits now in the context of post-covid and these economic models that we're talking about which are slightly broken. Interesting.

SG: I have this half-formed argument in my head that festivals have had a really outsized significance, not just for live art in Scotland but I think for Scotland's theatre and performance culture more generally, [and] not just because of the size of the Fringe but because that's been the framework which has brought international artists into Glasgow or Scotland. And that's fed the local ecosystem and it's been the way that artists have made connections and then taken their work outside of Scotland. I guess it's like a permission structure, is that the phrase?

JW: It is, it really is, definitely.

SG: I think it's maybe because of the size of Scotland, it's a small country, that those festivals are perhaps particularly significant because they are supercharged or condensed sites of action whereas otherwise that activity is a bit more dispersed. As I say, it's a half worked-out argument in my head.

JW: It's good, that permission structure is really fascinating. Using that as a lens going back over some of my work at NTS, when I wanted to bring in lots of international companies, we did this Future Proof festival and it was all of the international big hitters of co-created, socially engaged practice [like Back to Back Theatre from Australia, Rimini Protokoll, Mammalian Diving Reflex].. Ten artists worked in ten different communities across Scotland. We talked about festivalising and I think the festivalising was something about the permission to do something like that across Scotland. What is interesting about all of those phenomenal festivals like Behaviour, National Review of Live Art, BUZZCUT, I wonder if you

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

think there's a natural lifecycle to these things or if there is negligence in the fact that they don't exist anymore. I think there is a lot of sorrow at the moment around loss.

SG: I think that's exactly it, that question about the fragility of those events, those festivals, those venues and the circumstances [of their ending]. It's such a good question, whether there is negligence or whether there is a natural lifecycle to them. There is this sort of discourse that is more pronounced in Arts Council England's work where they talk about resilience as having a natural life cycle in it and that there is lots that institutions can do to futureproof their existence. But part of that is an acceptance that everything has a natural lifecycle to it and [that] things will come to an end.

JW: Don't you think there's power inherent in that because you don't say that? That's really interesting isn't it, because do you say that? You only say that about certain parts of the cultural ecology.

SG: Oh absolutely, yes. That's what I find problematic about it because it sort of naturalises all kinds of economic and social circumstances which force stuff to close, it kind of turns it into the weather so it makes it harder to recognise where meaningful choices have been made. I think about Nikki Millican making the choice to stop doing the National Review of Live Art after thirty years, [and to refocus on] Performance Art. The attitude of 'we're going to do a new thing and see how that works out'. Maybe that is the question, how do you, how does anyone sustain these spaces of possibility for things like live art? It's interesting thinking about National Theatre of Scotland's role in that work and particularly the work that the Engine Room is doing, which from an outside eye, looks like it has shifted from its original model right back at the founding of NTS to being relatively closed in terms of bespoke identification of individual artists to being something that's aiming to be far more expansive. I wonder if that is part of the conversation that you have, [that] part of the role of the Engine Room has to be more expansive if it's going to protect or develop the health of whatever the sector looks like?

JW: The other interesting thing about that is that I think we're constantly evolving or thinking on that because in this ongoing covid moment we're actually shifting the model of that again where we're going to provide deeper, longer, more resourced opportunities for artists to really push at this idea of the journey onto the main stage. The moment of Engine Room previously was really about developing the sector in the broader sense. The good

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

thing about Engine Room is our artist development programme, we're also trying to think of a different word that is not artist development because it feels so paternalistic. What is it we're doing? It's not development because we're learning from the artists as much as the artists are getting development, it's maybe just an artist creation space. We are really thinking.. you can't just say we want to make exciting, bold, innovative, as you said, progressive work and think that that's going to be easy. You actually have to think about the journey from artists who maybe haven't been included in, for want of a better word, the mainstream discourse of making.

SG: Yes. Maybe this is why there is such a sense of loss around the National Review of Live Art and then The Arches because it felt like there was an intermediary step which had been taken away or had been lost.

JW: Completely. I wonder if Take Me Somewhere is occupying some of that territory. I think it is successfully occupying a space. The thing I think LJ has done brilliantly in the direction she is taking the programme and has carved out space for artists that might not have felt included in a different type of performance-making practice.

SG: I guess it's interesting how their collaboration with BUZZCUT over the last few years has served that goal maybe.

JW: At the time The Arches closed, there wasn't a model available to keep the building open and at that point, it felt like the only option was to airlift the programme out, to try and sustain that sense of community around the artists that were making work and move that over into the Tramway. As the years go on, what I think gives me, I think we used the word sorrow before, is the building as a site for community. It's also a non-traditional theatre building that had live performance within it. I don't know about you, but I feel like that is such a precious, special thing because the codes around who is allowed in and who is not allowed in didn't exist. You probably will think, because you're a deep thinker compared to me, there were codes! Maybe there were just different codes to mainstream theatre buildings. It's so sad that doesn't exist in Glasgow anymore.

SG: Yes. I have a feeling that other venues in the city which have tried - in really great ways - to step up and support the community after The Arches closed have sometimes struggled for that reason. Regardless of what the CCA or Tramway does, there is a perception of what

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

those institutions are and who is welcome there. Maybe finding ways of bringing audiences in is always part of the job of running those buildings, of course it is. I feel like it's unfair but it's the reality of some people still, decades after the Third Eye closed, bouncing off the CCA in the perception that it's not for them. That's not to single out the CCA, I think a lot of other institutions have the same challenges. When it comes to The Arches and the uniqueness of the space as a non-traditional theatre venue, as you say, I was thinking about the relationship between the Arches and other similar spaces many of which were [also in] non-traditional spaces. I was thinking about the Greenroom, also [located] in railway arches [laughs].

JW: Oh my god, the Greenroom. God, I hadn't thought about the Greenroom for a long time. Yes, absolutely.

SG: I'm really interested in how the Scottish ecology for performance, live art, and experimental performance is connected nationally and internationally. I know that The Arches programme was very closely tied in with or involved partnerships with different places like the Battersea Arts Centre.

JW: Battersea was our soulmate.

SG: It's a little bit of a cliché to say touring in the UK died in the eighties and nineties, but there clearly is still a network of those venues working with each other. I'm interested in your sense of that, but maybe it's quite distant from your current role.

JW: It's so interesting. When I think about touring now, it's in such a different way. The Arches had relationships with Battersea and Bristol, there was definitely a network there, but in a way it was like an exchange of artists. I do feel a bit separate from that, only because my lens, the touring challenge is that the touring of theatre in Scotland has really collapsed quite badly. My focus now is how to get work around Scotland. The act of touring any work is so hard. You cannot underestimate the challenge of touring work and bringing audiences in. It's huge. The thing about NTS, it's like a constant, year-round, nationwide festival. We don't have a building, but we have the desire to create community in the way that a festival does. Our mechanism for that is touring, so it's like a constantly shapeshifting, touring festival that doesn't have the same pattern every year. If you do a festival, you know what time you're doing it and you put your energy into it, but in a way, the programme for

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

NTS is different every single year. There are almost infinite possibilities. It's a festival where the boundaries and the possibilities are infinite. I might need to go and lie down, even just saying out loud [laughs].

SG: [Laughs]. I mean that's maybe exactly the double bind of it, the potential of that as a space of possibility and trying to wrap your head around the scale of that and as you say, keeping it going and sustaining it as a year-round project. It's interesting you hear you say that part of the conversation at NTS is about thinking about what NTS can do because of its unique status. There is an implied function there because NTS can do things in a sustained manner, or can do things in a resilient way that other organisations can't at the moment.

JW: Yes. We want to make sure there's a way that doesn't cut any corners and that everybody is paid properly, that the work is resourced. This is a whole other conversation. The thing about NTS is [that] I think people look at it and think it has this infinite resource but that culture of making the impossible happen or making the most of what you have and squeezing the art out of the resource that you have also exists in NTS. That also intersects with making sure that we're absolutely behaving in an exemplary fashion when it comes to the working conditions and partnership-making and co-producing relationships so it's the balance of getting as much art out to meet audiences as possible while being sustainable around how the work is made, and being nimble and flexible. That's related to live art and contemporary practice. It is quite tricky.

SG: [Laughs]. That sounds like an understatement, Jackie.

JW: [Laughs].

SG: The thing that keeps spouting around in my head which is really counterintuitive is part of that sustainability - and part of that squeezing every last bit of art out - is sometimes about saying 'well, we're actually going to do less'.

JW: Totally. That is a conversation that is coming down the road for everybody. The crisis in the freelance sector, oh god, it's just so unbelievably complex. If we're accepting that there isn't going to be additional public resource [and] the freelancers rightly are calling for better working conditions and practices, so the money for that has got to come from somewhere. If you are an institution that can put your hand on your heart and say 'there is not any excess resource, we're not wasting any money, our overhead is appropriate to the amount

Live Art in Scotland: Jackie Wylie

of work that we're making' so the money isn't coming from there, as long as you can say that, then you're making less work, but people have better working conditions. [But] if you're making less work, then people have fewer opportunities. You see what I mean.

SG: Yes.

JW: As long as institutions are lean and dynamic and flexible and they can say the money is going on the art, then doing less work is a way to pay the freelancers more appropriately for their labour but then there will be fewer opportunities for employment because there is less work being made.

SG: It changes the economy. When LADA was advertising for their new artistic directors who are now in post, somewhere in the job description text or the commentary about the future vision they said one of the possible futures of LADA is doing less but doing it better. I've been thinking about that and its implications, the balance between we're going to do less because we want to emphasise care and justice, but then exactly as you say, that means fewer commissions and almost certainly fewer groups of artists or practitioners getting paid.

JW: Completely. Going back to that thing and NTS's core purpose being to do what others can't do, that's a big set of priorities. Next year we're doing *Orphans* and that's an enormous show opening at the Armadillo and touring to the big venues, but we're also remounting Nic Green's *Like Flying*.

SG: Oh gorgeous.

JW: It's a heavily subsidised work which is really important because it has a profound effect on the young people that encounter it. The reason we're doing both of those things is because we are the only organisation that can do those things at the moment. It's not like we can go we're going to do less, there isn't a priority that we're meeting that we can suddenly stop.