

## Choreographies – Tracing the Materials of an Ephemeral Art Form Jacky Lansley

After more than four decades of continuous and pioneering practice in contemporary dance, Jacky Lansley has written a book which considers at length and in detail the nature of the elusive activity to which she has devoted her professional life - “choreography”. And not just choreography – dance itself. She does this by considering the development of her own work over time, place and, most of all, through collaboration with others – the dancers, artists, musicians and practitioners of all kinds who have joined her on her journey into the essence of what dance is, and continually, what it could be.

This enquiry is something that has engaged Lansley as a performer, thinker and writer since 1971, when she left the Royal Ballet and began to study at the London School of Contemporary Dance. In doing so, she transported herself from an institution in which the dancer’s body had to be disciplined into what she vividly terms “a stunning product”, into an environment in which the body of the dancer might be considered not just as a fleshly object, to be relentlessly honed in the service of a traditional canon of exemplary works, but rather as a complex entity shaped and reshaped as much by personal and political forces as by the purely physical. At a time when the boundaries between art forms such as dance, theatre and the visual arts were breaking down, Lansley entered the space which became known as “performance”, where she could move between worlds and, crucially, examine her own.

And she has continued to occupy a place of enquiry ever since, a self-defined sphere of operation she now refers to as “the choreographic space”. Meanwhile, the physical environments in which she has worked have shifted from the site-specific projects of the seventies, through the X6 and Chisenhale dance spaces of which she was a founder to the long-term projects she is now able to develop from the Dance Research Studio, her London base for some fifteen years. In her book, Lansley describes and reflects upon successive works in detail and includes dialogues, interviews with and detailed notes on the performers and collaborators who have worked with her. In doing so, she has created a rich, accessible and engaging panorama of a creative process through which she continues to interrogate and expand just what it is that choreography, “the making of art that disappears” has been for her and could become for us all.

Lynn MacRitchie

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