Choreographies: Tracing the Materials of an Ephemeral Art Form; Jacky Lansley; Bristol/Chicago; intellect; 2017; 183pp.; 92 ill.; ISBN 978-1-78320-766-4; £28.50, $38

Reviewer: Freya Vass-Rhee (University of Kent)

Jacky Lansley’s archival memoir provides a lovingly curated and richly fleshed out view into the independent UK New Dance Movement and community from the 1970s through the current era. Lansley’s work as a choreographer extends across this period, from her earliest experimental works in 1972 while a member of Richard Alston’s company Strider, through her founding of Limited Dance Company in 1974 with Sally Potter, her 2002 establishment of the Dance Research Studio and shift to a slower production cycle, and up to the current day.

The volume’s central seven chapters, named after works Lansley created between 1977 and 2012, are bracketed by a brief survey of the emergence of minimalist dance in the UK and two closing chapters, one dedicated to other key choreographic contemporaries and the other a reflection on the work of choreography and its place in the world. Between these, Lansley lucidly describes the organisations that supported her and changes in both her modes of work and the field’s interests and focus. The author’s interviews and reminiscences with collaborators, including Sally Potter, Rosemary Lee, Tony Thatcher, Matthew Hawkins and Miranda Tufnell amplify the volume’s context and perspective, while images and written scripts of Lansley’s scores offer deeper insight into her influential practice. Reviews and commentary gathered from performers and audience members further illuminate the production and reception of her work, while also reflecting postmodern choreography’s emergence and reception in the UK over four decades.

Following chapters describing her early work with Limited Dance Company and as part of the influential X6 Dance Space collective, Chapter 3 finds Lansley moving through a “hybridisation” in the 1980s, as she shifts from experimental choreography to a more postmodern strategy. Here, the timeline makes a conceptually logical jump from Les Diables (1988-89) to Bird (2001), curiously eliding numerous collaborations between 1988 and 1997 as it does. In Chapter 4, a stylistic excursion into what Lansley terms “Writing Choreography,” Lansley uses “present time to describe and reflect on the visceral reality” of her 2004 work Holding Space. This chapter, like those that follow, also includes sections detailing her research and the performers, music, and locations in/for which the works were made, including the Cornwall coast (View from the Shore (2007)), cathedrals in York and Glasgow (Standing Stones (2008)), and The Hall in Cornwall (Guests (2010), Guest Suites (2012)). Each of the volume’s chapters concludes with extensive, largely biographical endnotes to facilitate understanding of the backgrounds and independent work of the collaborators and referents named. All in all, Choreographies is an intimate, generous portrait and history of this seminal artist and her community in its time and spaces that will engage and benefit readers interested in the emergence of experimental and postmodern dance in the UK.