

**Dance Theatre: An Anti -Discursive Illustration of an Embodied Existence**

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This article draws together two traditionally polarised and hierarchised modes of theoretical enquiry: the representational, textual theories of traditional academics such as Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault and the phenomenological, somatic approach of the performance-based theorist and choreographer Jasmin Vardimon. The aim of this research is to ‘resist tendencies to dualism, which splits subjectivity into two mutually exclusive domains’ (Grosz 1994: x) by integrating practice and theory in a relationship of mutual dependence. A relationship that goes beyond acknowledging dance as an effective means of understanding page-based theory by which to recognise a reciprocal current of exchange demonstrating that the dancing body not only represents, interprets and reinforces discursive theory but also is capable ‘of generating ideas or theorising through practice’ (Morris 2001:58). It questions whether the amalgamation of practical and theoretical discourse makes dance theatre an effective paradigm that may transcend the traditional hierarchy between mind and body that pervades academic enquiry.

The Jasmin Vardimon Company has grown to be one of the most influential dance companies in the British dance theatre field. The following analysis of *7734* by the Company is conducted through the multiple lenses of Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theory of ‘habitus’, Michel Foucault’s post-structural concept of ‘the docile body’ and dance historian Susan Leigh Foster’s notion of ‘corporeal articulation’. It will examine Vardimon’s embodied, corporeal expression of the intersections between these theoretical camps.

Having grown up on a kibbutz, the Israeli-born choreographer Jasmin Vardimon joined the Kibbutz Dance Company before moving to Britain in 1997 at which time she established the Jasmin Vardimon Company. Through her intercultural dance practice, she has forged an impressive career in British dance theatre and has received various awards including The London Arts Board ‘New Choreographers’ Award (1998) and the Jerwood Choreography Award (2000). Her appointment in 2006 as an Associate Artist at Sadler’s Wells Theatre demonstrates the impact and prestige of her choreographic work (jasminvardimon: who/jasmine).

Vardimon's art has distinctly European dance theatre influences 'that can be traced back to Pina Bausch and the Tanztheatre tradition' (Spalding); however, the Company combines dance based movement with visual arts, mime, music, technology and text to create rich performance tapestries. The company's current repertoire of works, *Yesterday*, *Justitia* and *7734*, continues to be performed in the UK, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, and 2011 saw the company's debut performance in the United States. The international success of the Jasmin Vardimon Company is attributable to 'her acute observation of human behaviour, beautifully detailed movement, insightful humour and engaging drama' (jasminvardimon: about).

This critical examination of human behaviour is exploited in *7734*, a piece of dance theatre which is a 'reflection on genocide, man's universal capacity for cruelty and the horror of our continued and systematic violence' (Steiger 2010–11). The title *7734* is eerily reminiscent of the concentration camp numbers tattooed on to the forearms of survivors, and when written in digital numerals and read upside down actually spells *hell*. In an interview at Sadler's Wells Theatre in 2010, Vardimon maintained that *7734* 'was not dealing with the Holocaust' but went on to explain that 'that's my essence, my connection' (Vardimon 2010). The piece calls into question the relationship between the dark side of human nature and creativity and furthermore empirically investigates the notion of legacy in the context of shared diasporic memory and 'inherited pain' (Vardimon 2010-11). Whilst Vardimon may not have created this piece to be specifically about the atrocities committed by the Nazis during the Second World War, she seems to imply that these are her connection to the dark side of mankind and that the essence of man's cruelty to man will be different for each one of us, as audience members, dependent upon our own personal and/or inherited memories.

The strong thematic motifs and the profound, horrific images that are etched through and across the active bodies of the performers in *7734* make this piece of work an exemplification of practice-based theorising. The performance of *7734* begins with a formally dressed, male maestro conducting a Wagner overture against the setting of a satin draped landscape, a landscape that rises and falls with the movement of the performers beneath to the melody of the music.<sup>1</sup> As the overture reaches its climax, the performers beneath the silky draped fabric

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<sup>1</sup> The use of Richard Wagner's *Tannhauser* opera in *7734* is incredibly evocative in itself; Hitler was a fan of Wagner and is reported to have seen his operas as an embodiment of his vision for the German nation. Wagner's compositions became 'national music' in Germany during the World War Two and were regularly played to inmates at the Dachau camp as part of a 're-education' programme. However, the inclusion of Wagner's music created problems when *7734* was due to be performed in Tel Aviv at the end of May 2012: Vardimon was obliged to yield to the demands of the Israeli Opera Director General Hannah Munitz, and remove the Wagner

roll away, taking the luxurious veneer with them and exposing piles of discarded clothes and rags in front of a foreboding watch tower. A solitary performer is left standing on stage, head forward, hair hanging down, feet shoulder-width apart and slightly turned in, arms drawn into her sides, hands tense, shoulders hunched, her body racked with shivers. The performer falls to her knees; the maestro turns and bows; the audience applauds. This opening scene in *7734* plunges the audience headlong into the inter-textual and multi-layered levels of theory, theme and form that inform the entire piece. The impeccably dressed conductor, the classical music and the rich undulating fabric read in the context of Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital, that is 'the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts [...] corresponds [to] a social hierarchy of the consumers' (Bourdieu 1984: 1), clearly place the conductor in a position of power.<sup>2</sup>

The individual 'habitus' of each audience member informs a thought process that occurs beneath the level of consciousness.<sup>3</sup> 'Habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification of these practices' (Bourdieu 1984:170); we therefore distinguish our own place within the hierarchical frame work in relation to the culturally rich conductor via this thought process. 'Nothing more clearly affirms one's "class", nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music' (Bourdieu 1984: 18); the conductor is in possession of all competence and understanding in this field in which the audience finds themselves, and we therefore arrange ourselves accordingly beneath him; he is 'the dominant fraction of the dominant class' (Bourdieu 1984: 176).<sup>4</sup> This hierarchical framework is also mapped out in the relationship between the conductor and the other performers on stage, as the maestro is actually conducting the movement of the performers beneath the draped fabric as opposed to an orchestra of musicians. At the climax of the music as the performers roll away the thin fabric veneer of luxury at the gestural direction of the conductor to reveal the dark and desolate environment beneath and we see the lone, desperate,

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overture from the piece for the performances in Israel. As Smorzik explains: 'Wagner's music has been boycotted in Israel for decades because of the nineteenth-century German composer's anti-Semitic worldview and his descendants' ties to the Nazi party' (Smorzik, 2012). 'After I was invited to perform in Israel I was told that I wouldn't be able to include the Wagner piece,' Vardimon told *Haaretz*, in a telephone interview from London, adding that her eventual decision to comply with the Israeli Opera's request wasn't easy. 'I debated the issue for a long time, and consulted many people whose opinions I appreciate. I've decided to do it out of respect for the Israeli audience' (Smorzik, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> The author has drawn on her recollections of a performance of *7734* given at The Hawth, Crawley, Surrey, 27 April 2011 for the description of this and other scenes.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'habitus' in this context refers to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions'. (Bourdieu, 1984: 170).

<sup>4</sup> The term 'field' in this context refers to social constructs that are defined by their own sets of standards, rules and social practises and have their own hierarchical frameworks. Economics, politics, literature all constitute legitimate fields in modern society, 'they are characterised by their own distinctive properties, by distinctive forms of capital, profit, etc.' (Thompson, J. 1991: 15).

tortured figure left behind, the conductor becomes a figure of cruelty. Yet this does not alter his position of power; indeed, he bows, and as an audience we affirm his status and implicitly condone his actions by applauding.



7743: THE CONDUCTOR  
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The Wagner overture is replaced by indefinable industrial, war-like sounds as the ensemble of performers roll on to the stage one by one to join the solitary woman from the previous scene. The stage is filled with piles of discarded rags and clothing, overshadowed by the presence of the ominous watch tower to the rear of stage left. The conductor remains down stage left, a serene look upon his face, his hands gently performing the traditional gestures of a music conductor. The performers behind are on their knees, heads bent forward, hair hanging down; they perform a series of movements comprising four rapid arm movements that cross the body, creating the impression of their desperately searching through the discarded clothing. Their movement quickly increases in urgency, and the motif grows and develops to include standing, falling and rapid circling beating arm movements. The performers literally fling their bodies between movements, pitching from side to side. The tortuous impression this creates is accentuated by way in which their heads whip back and

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<sup>5</sup> This and the other image in this article were taken by Tristram Kenton at a performance of *7743* given at the Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London in July 2010.

forth and their long hair slashes through the air. Simultaneously the conductor continues to conduct, his subtle gentle hand gestures perfectly synchronised with the crashing bodies of the performers; as they repeatedly jump up and launch their bodies to the ground, his hands rise and fall; as they flail their heads frantically from side to side, his hand glides in a gentle left to right gesture. His dictation of their movement is clear.

If we consider 7734, as many critics have done including Laura Thompson writing for the *Telegraph*, to be ‘about the greatest hell of all — the Holocaust’ (Thompson, L. 2010), then Vardimon’s appropriation of a conductor/orchestra metaphor for dictatorships, when appreciated in conjunction with Bourdieu’s theories of class distinction, is not only incredibly apt and poignant but also brutally visceral.<sup>6</sup> As the conductor gently moves his hands back and forth to produce the torment in the bodies of the ensemble behind, we are plunged into an explicit comparison between Hitler’s orchestrations of the physical atrocities perpetrated against the victims held in concentration camps during the Second World War. The conductor’s status as a ‘dominant fraction of a dominant class’ (Bourdieu 1984: 176) establishes his position within the bourgeoisie and inclines him towards hedonistic aesthetics and ‘revolutions conducted in the name of purity and purification’ (Bourdieu 1984: 176) a sentiment sickeningly reminiscent of Hitler’s campaign to annihilate the Jews because they were ‘contaminating European nations with their bad blood’ (Konner 2009: 94). The persecution of the Jews, during the Second World War, was based on a profound anti-Semitic somatophobia.<sup>7</sup> This establishes dance as an ideal vehicle not only for representing this physical torture but also for ‘generating conversations in a field of flesh, fully sensory, embodied processes of interrogation, critique and dialogue’ (Meskimmon 2011: 8).

In the Wagner overture scene, Vardimon also utilises Foucault’s notion of a passive unfinished body, defined and created through regimes of power, to explore man’s inhumanity to man; implicitly, Nazi regimes of punishment, discipline and power over the Jews. The control executed over the performers by the conductor signifies Vardimon’s commentary on

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<sup>6</sup> Wagner’s anti-Semitic affiliations add another layer of meaning to this metaphor.

<sup>7</sup> The length constraints of this article prevent an in-depth investigation of this anti-Semitic somatophobia. Whilst this note may seem simplistic, its brevity is not to be seen as a trivialisation of the atrocities committed by the Nazis. The following list of the ways in which their anti-Semitism was based on the Jewish soma is not comprehensive. According to Nazi propaganda the threat posed by the Jews was physical; Jews were not only classified as diseased but more importantly they were a disease, not only infecting Germans with bacteria and illness but also infiltrating the Aryan race at a genetic level by intermarriage and reproduction between races. Children in German schools were taught how to identify a Jew with precise anatomical knowledge; ‘they often have a low slanting forehead [...] big ears like cup handles and dark curly hair’ (Konner, 2009: 97). But most importantly, the persecution of the Jews was unimaginably physical; ‘filthy and stinking from being condemned to human squalor, fevered and skeletal from the deliberately inflicted typhus and starvation, gums gushing blood [...] hands and feet shredded and bleeding from forced marches and slave labor’ (Konner, 2009: 116).

dictatorships, and yet the control she has exercised as a choreographer over the performers in this scene embeds this theme into the very action of the performance. The control of the conductor and the subservience of the other performers is signified by the explicit connection between the conductor's gestures and the movements of the ensemble: he controls their 'movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity; an infinitesimal power over the active body' (Foucault 1977: 137). Through this connection we define the relationship between conductor and ensemble on various levels: obviously primarily as conductor/orchestra and secondly, yet still overtly, as dictator/oppressed. Furthermore, the audience is complicit in the action of the conductor; this was inferred by the applause he received only minutes before as we subconsciously recognised and accepted him as an agent of hierarchical importance. As a result the audience members become unwittingly submerged in the 'carceral continuum' (Foucault 1977: 297), and the audience becomes complicit in the surveillance and control of the performers. Vardimon's choreographic decision to invoke the 'docility' of the performers' bodies at this stage implicitly reinforces her attack on despotism. The surface level theme of the performance is internalised and strengthened by its presence in the actual composition of the dance. As the scene progresses and the conductor begins to speak, he refers to the orchestra (and by default oppressed societies and perhaps namely the Jews) as a machine; the synchronicity and comportment of the dancers on stage thus further embodies the concept of 'coercion [...] at the level of machine itself' (Foucault 1977: 137).

The theories of Susan Leigh Foster, the dance historian, are a reaction to the highly discursive (post)-structuralist models of thought which have continually displaced the materiality of the body, such as those posited by Foucault.<sup>8</sup> She states that 'the possibility of a body that is written upon but that also writes moves critical studies of the body in new directions' (Foster 1995: 15). In this way she attempts to promote bodily analyses into a new era within which the existence of the body 'as a tangible and substantial category' (Foster 1996: xi) is no longer 'permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse' (Shilling 1993: 80). She uses dance as a primary subject of investigation and as a metaphorical framework through which she explores the intersections between culture, feminism, anthropology and politics and as such 'dance-making [...] becomes a form of theorising' (Foster 1995: 15). By applying Foster's concept of corporeality I would contend

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<sup>8</sup> Foster, writing on theorists such as Michel Foucault, observes: 'These writings seldom address the body I know; instead they move quickly past arms, legs, torso and head on their way to a theoretical agenda that requires something unknowable or unknown as an initial premise' (Foster (1992: 480) quoted in Morris (2001: 52)).

that Vardimon's invocation of Foucauldian passivity endows the dancers' bodies with agency; as opposed to silencing the active body of the performer's, the synchronised virtuosic display of technique manifested in the ensemble motif shows 'how the crafting of moving bodies into a dance reflects a theoretical stance towards identity' (Foster 1996: xiii). The gestures of the conductor are subtle, understated and graceful, the full horror, torment and cruelty of his control is manifested in the thrashing, violent movement of the other performers. Vardimon allows the theme of oppression to be executed to, through and across the moving bodies of the performers; she invokes the articulability of the active body. Her work can be understood as both consciously and corporeally theorised and articulated, promoting a fundamental unity between interiority and exteriority, mind and body.

For Bourdieu the most basic of corporeal actions is charged with social meaning. The way we stand or walk may feel like natural behaviour but it is, in fact, a learned habitual disposition, a paradigm of historical, social entrenchment personified through the active body, it is a 'state of the body, a state of being' (Thompson, J. 1991: 13). Bourdieu's body, then, is inextricably linked to social practice; his theory implies that the body has a generative intelligence since the workings of field and habitus occur beneath the level of consciousness. The power of René Descartes' proclamation 'I think therefore I am' is reduced, as 'there is a way of understanding which is altogether particular, and often forgotten in theories of intelligence; that which consists of understanding with one's body' (Bourdieu 1990a: 166 quoted in Morris (2001: 57)).

Reading Vardimon's choreographic decisions, in this scene, in the context of Bourdieu's theories of bodily intelligence, one could argue that her amalgamation of traditional dualities, such as passive/active and body/mind, is intrinsically linked to her own habitus and is therefore an example of the social influencing the body and the body influencing the social (Morris 2001). Vardimon's experience of the Holocaust 'distinguishes itself from personal memory by generational distance and from history by a deep personal connection' (Goertz 1998: 33); her experiences of these atrocities are an example of what Marianne Hirsch calls 'post-memory' (Hirsch 2008). Foster describes the art of choreography as 'a theorisation of identity — corporeal, individual and social' (Foster 2011: 4) and in this context dance-making can be read as legitimate ground for subjective exploration. Vardimon's art is no doubt 'shaped by the attempt to represent the long-term effects of living in close proximity to the pain, depression, and dissociation of persons who have witnessed and survived massive historical trauma' (Hirsch 2008: 112). When discussing the themes in *7734* Nina Steiger,

dramaturg for the show, writes that ‘along with memories, our parents pass us their fears, phobias and prejudices and so one’s cultural inheritance is made up of these elements’ (Steiger 2010–11). We can view this through the lens of Bourdieu’s theory that ‘habitus tends to generate practices and perceptions, work and appreciations, which concur with the conditions of existence of which the habitus is itself the product’ (Thompson, J. 1991:13).

If we apply this to Jasmin Vardimon’s status as third generation Israeli, in relation to the Holocaust and the Second World War, then her diasporic identity signifies an inevitability regarding the techniques that she employs. ‘Living with the stories of those who survived the Second World War, [...] [Vardimon] is especially interested in the concepts of inheritance of memory and inheritance of pain’ (Vardimon 2010-11). Inevitably, the ‘loss of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world “bleed” from one generation to the next’ (Hirsch 2008) and have influenced *7734*.

These are concepts which are explicitly commented upon in *7734*, yet I would argue they permeate the piece on a significantly deeper level. Vardimon’s familial history and status as third generation to the Holocaust is inherently linked with habitus, the comprised dispositions that are acquired through inheritance and experience. Since ‘the body is the site of incorporated history’ (Bourdieu 1991:13), these inherited dispositions not only inform Vardimon’s theoretical approach to this piece but infiltrate the action by means of the ‘physical conversation that goes on between dancers and choreographers that moulds and shapes the corporeal identities seen on stage’ (Morris 2001: 57). In this respect Vardimon’s choreography and her direction of her dancers is an example of a narrative strategy ‘used by secondhand witnesses to articulate their relationship to an inherited, not personally lived past that has nevertheless become an integral part of their identity’ (Goertz 1998: 33).

The influence of Vardimon’s dispositional composition is evidenced in her choreography. Furthermore the dancing bodies, in *7734*, generate meaning filled movement, ‘the body’s movements become the source of interpretations and judgements’ (Foster 1996: xi). ‘Regimes of power’ (Foucault), cultural inscriptions and ‘inherited memories’ (Vardimon) are corporeally acknowledged and re-written by the body, through the ‘relations between history and memory, the aesthetic and the political, the social and the individual’ (Foster 1996: xv).

Vardimon describes *7734* ‘as somehow a personal look at collective memory or maybe inherited collective memory’ (Vardimon 2010) and in the piece she employs a physical motif that seems to embody the fragility, pain and endurance of ‘inherited memory’. In this scene all of the performers are lying down side by side in a row across the front of the stage, apart

from two male performers who are standing side by side at the end of the row, stage left. A conversation begins between the two standing performers; the first explains to the other that he would like to know about his grandfather's experiences during the war. Even though he is aware of the details, such as the fact that this grandfather had to hide in a box, he feels the needs to hear the intimate details of his suffering; he describes it as his 'inheritance'. As the first performer falls back into a lying position, a third performer simultaneously stands up and the story is passed along; this happens three more times. With each rendition the story changes slightly and becomes imbued with opinions and interpretations. Once the story reaches a fifth performer, the first stands again. The fifth performer remarks to the first (the original grandson):

Fifth Performer: There's this guy and he wants to suffer because he hasn't suffered like his grandfather did.

First Performer: What happened to his grandfather?

Fifth Performer: I don't know, I don't remember that bit.

(Carter 7734)

Through this game of Chinese whispers Vardimon demonstrates how the opinions and dispositions of those recounting stories and disseminating memory shape the content of what is passed on. The fact that all the fifth performer has left to share at the end is the notion of suffering is a commentary upon the endurance of pain, a pain that 'reinforces the living connection between past and present, between the generation of witnesses and survivors and the generation after' (Hirsch 2008: 104).

The fifth performer falls back and joins the ensemble in a lying position, leaving the first performer standing alone. He has a small piece of white tissue paper which he unfolds, puts across his mouth and blows into the air. With short sharp bursts of breath, the performer repeatedly sends the paper up into the air and catches it across his mouth. The performer begins to use longer breaths and allows the paper to float lower and lower before catching it. As the motif progresses the performer blows the paper further and further away from himself, turning his back and executing rolls, spins and dives before turning and catching the paper just before it hits the ground.



7743: INHERITED MEMORY  
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Vardimon has asserted both in the interview for the performances of *7734* at Sadler's Wells Theatre referred to earlier and at a symposium held in February 2012 at the Jasmin Vardimon Centre in Ashford, Kent that audience readings of her pieces are an extension of the art itself and that audience interpretation is as valid as the original authorial intentions (Vardimon 2010 and Vardimon 2012). Personally, I read this scene as a physical interpretation of the concept of inherited memory; the thin piece of tissue paper representing the fragile and elusive quality of shared diasporic memory is never completely left to fall to the floor. The performer began the motif by only blowing the paper a short way into the air and re-catching it as soon as it began to descend and as the scene progressed, despite executing a variety of other physical actions in between blowing and catching the tissue paper, he is never able to turn his back completely and allow the paper to fall. This corporeally demonstrates the endurance of inherited memory. Vardimon seems to use the body and breath of this performer to embody humanity's inherent obsession with history, memory and the pain of our ancestors. The performer's frantic lunges and dives to save the paper signify an individual desperation to hold onto the events, experiences and emotions that are passed on to us; 'a personal/familial/generational sense of ownership and protectiveness' (Hirsch 2008: 104). Vardimon allows the performer to embody the historicity of memory physically; as the performer blows the tissue further away and executes longer action sequences between catching it, Vardimon demonstrates that, whilst we may not be consciously aware of the pain of inherited memory as individuals, we are inherently shaped by it. In the context of Bourdieu, these historical events endure through change and are continuously reconstituted through the production of habitus. Events of the past influence our dispositional make-up below the level of consciousness. The effects of the Second World War were felt in every 'field': politics, economics, literature, art, music, family life. These effects continue to filter through these fields and influence second and third generations 'since individuals are the products of particular histories which endure in the habitus' (Thompson, J. 1991: 17). In this scene the performer's body is always orientated towards catching the floating tissue paper, despite the bends, spins and slides that he executes, his body is placed to regain the tissue; his need to preserve his inherited memory is written into his body; the notion of 'habitus' is brought to bear through and across the, trained, active body of the performer. Vardimon approaches 'the body as capable of generating ideas, as a bodily writing' (Foster 1995: 15). She sets aside traditional aestheticised dance representations and imbues the body with agency. She demonstrates that the body is shaped by culture and

history, but furthermore she ‘cultivates a body that initiates as well as responds’ (Foster 1995: 15). The trained dancing bodies in 7734 are imbued with corporeal signifying potential, they ‘create new images, relationships, concepts and reflections’ (Foster 1995: 15).

Through and across her body and through and across the bodies of others, via the process of corporeal performance making, Vardimon empirically and tangibly theorises; she embarks upon an anti-discursive form of scholarly meditation. The piece engages in an ‘evolving theoretical discussion about the workings of trauma, memory [...] a discussion actively taking place in numerous important’ (Hirsch 2008: 104) academic contexts. Her choreography can be interpreted as a drawing together of theory and practice in a relationship of mutual dependence and as a result her work is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Scholars who strive to exceed the limitations placed on the body by traditional dualisms must embrace the relationship of interdependence between practice and theory. To accept practice based theoretical conjectures without a discursive theoretical contextualisation is to disregard the warning made by Cynthia Novack, ‘maintaining the dichotomy between mind and body by emphasising the body alone’ (Novack 1990: 7). However, to attempt to define or analyse the body via academic discourse alone is to colonise the body through discursive practice, to deny the empirical truth of the body rendering it ephemeral and illusive. Neither practice nor theory in isolation can present a theory of unified subjectivism.

Dance, in isolation, as a means of embodied research is flawed. A dualistic approach to dance as a medium is embedded within the profession, for example, in ‘the traditional notion that dancers are in some way the malleable material of choreographers and that their job is to do their bidding; with the notion that dancers somehow subjugate their bodies to the service of their art’ (Rowell 2009: 136). Furthermore, there are factors that invalidate dance works, when these are viewed in isolation, as legitimate academic contentions to Cartesianism, in so far as they maintain the dichotomy between body and mind: the rigorously trained bodies of dancers, the rendering of expert technique, ‘the dedication to artisanal perfection’ (Foster 1996: 2) and the specific dance lexis of individual styles which has had a tendency to locate dance as a product of the ‘highly censored language of the bourgeois’ (Bourdieu 1984: 176). Dance, as a performance style as opposed to a hobby or pastime, is logocentrically bound by its own definition, it is ‘replete with the same logocentric values that have informed general scholarship on the body’ (Foster 1995: 15). The attendant audience at a Jasmin Vardimon Company dance theatre performance, or any other professional dance presentation, expects to witness strength and stamina, the physical discipline of the performers etched across and

through their dancing bodies. Whilst they may not expect the images produced by these performing bodies to be aesthetically beautiful, an audience will undoubtedly expect to witness a virtuosic display of technique.

Equally, text based corporeal theory is ‘inevitably bound up with that which it questions’ (Fortier 2002: 62), for example when referring to symbiosis of the mind and body as a counter argument to the theory of dualism the constraints of language still necessitate using the words mind and body, enforcing the very premise in contention. Vardimon’s choreography does not ‘privilege the thrill of the vanished performance over the enduring impact of choreographic intent’ (Foster 1995: 15). By drawing together practice and theory, Vardimon’s *7734* is a paradigm for an embodied exploration of embodiment; this dance theatre piece transcends the logocentricism inherent within each dimension in isolation.

In *7734* Vardimon moves beyond the disciplinary boundaries of dance and critical theory and invokes an integrated collaboration between the radically different schools. This is facilitated by the phenomenological property of dance appreciation. The themes and theories of the piece are not only expressed corporeally via the performers, they are understood corporeally by the audience. As we watch the lone female performer on stage in the first scene, head forward, feet apart, knees together, arms drawn in, hands tensed not only do we acknowledge her desperation and pain, we understand her movements and therefore her feelings via our own bodies, there is a ‘fundamental connection between dancer and viewer’ (Foster 2011: 1). In his considerations of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Phenomenology of Perception*, Jack Reynolds asserts that:

our body should be conceived of as our means of communication with the world, rather than merely as an object of the world that our transcendental mind orders to perform varying functions. (Reynolds 2004: 11)

Vardimon transcribes this phenomenological premise into a tangible corporeal theory. Her inter-methodical employment of both dance practice and sociological theory promotes the articulability of the performing bodies but also mobilises the receptivity and perceptivity of the spectating body:

When we see a human body moving, we see movement which is potentially produced by any human body, by our own [...] through kinaesthetic sympathy we actually reproduce it vicariously in our present muscular experience and awaken such associational connotations as might have been ours if the original movement had been of our own making. (Martin 1936: 117 quoted in Foster (2011: 7))

Vardimon moves beyond operationalising cognitive theories through her choreography; she does more than breathe life into static discursive theorisations. By kinaesthetic transference of

theme, form and theory she invokes a relationship between the body and the mind of each spectator; a relationship of interdependence based on equal reception, perception and consideration.

In November 2011, a research seminar entitled *On Embodiment* was held at the Central School of Speech and Drama. This seminar brought together John Rothwell, a Professor of Human Neurophysiology at the Institute of Neurology, Dick McCaw, a senior lecturer in Theatre at Royal Holloway University of London and a Feldenkrais practitioner, and Steffi Sachsenmaier, a lecturer in Theatre Arts at Middlesex University and a qualified Tai Chi Instructor; the intention was to discuss movement as a common interest. During the plenary a member of the audience challenged the three speakers by suggesting that the language they had used was essentially dichotomous. He attacked the term *embodiment*, asserting that the prefix suggested a process by which body and mind had been drawn together. This allusion to embodiment as a process as opposed to a fundamental state of existence, by default, emphasised the very dichotomy that the seminary discussion had been attempting to admonish. The same audience member suggested the term ‘bodied’ as opposed to ‘embodied’.<sup>1</sup> However, in my opinion, this term is yet more reductive as it seems to negate any reference to the mind. It seems that even as we attempt to coin phrases that seek to express the unification of body and mind, logocentrically these can always be deconstructed.

Rather than attempting to ‘transcend dichotomies’ (Thomas 2006), academics and scholars should strive to overcome reductions and posit a theory of equality in regard to subjectivism. Distinctions between body and mind may never be surpassed and yet that does not necessitate a separation and hierarchisation; mind and body need to be accepted together in a relationship of interdependence to constitute the subjective. The constitution of a new form of enquiry is paramount to a non–reductive understanding of subjectivity; the hybridising of theory and practice, as evidenced in the dance theatre of Vardimon, is ‘a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure’ (Victor Turner (1990: 12) quoted in Maxwell (2008: 59)); a somatic, intellectual mode of enquiry. Dance theatre offers the opportunity to found meditations on ‘empirical facts that help us identify the salient features that a [...] theory should not efface or ignore’ (Nussbaum 2000: 11).

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<sup>1</sup> *On Embodiment*, research seminar organised by and held at the Central School of Speech and Drama on 8 November 2011.

Some theatre reviewers have been critical of Vardimon's interdisciplinary approach in 7734. Luke Jennings, writing for the *Observer*, accused Vardimon of mistaking the theatre for the lecture hall and suggested that she should 'drop the theorists off at the next layby' (Jennings 2010). However, a post-graduate conference that addressed the 'Future of Arts Research', hosted by Royal Holloway University London and held at the British Library in November 2011, was beset by the concept of interdisciplinarity as the future of arts.<sup>2</sup> So whilst this work may not adhere to a traditional aesthetic dance spectacle and may seem unappealing to conventional critics who strive to ascertain the immediate superficial value of art, it could be argued that it is at the cutting edge of research. Vardimon's choreography supersedes conventional compartmentalisation by eroding codified barriers. This choreographer defiantly contests binaries by translating them into a relationship of mutual equality. She transcends the traditional reification between disciplines to offer a new reading of the relationship between practice and theory. Her work constitutes 'a radical transvaluation of corporeality' (Broadhurst 1999: 17), presenting body and mind as mutually obligated parameters of subjectivity.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Future of Arts Research*, conference organised by Royal Holloway, University of London and held at the British Library, 18 November 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Citations in the text to this website are referenced as 'jasminvardimon:' followed by the relevant webpage: e.g. jasminvardimon: who/jasmin'

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