

HUNGRY GHOSTS

c. Zsuzsanna Soboslay , August 2003; bodyecology@webone.com.au

PROLOGUE:

I start this story--this story of what I am asking you to perceive--by asking you to think of who I might be. This is because one of the things I fear most is being seen. And as this is, for the most part, an article about being seen, about perceiving both the invisible and the visible colours of our identities, I thought I should ask you to mirror back what I appear to be, in the hope that the person behind these words might be forced to accommodate the Self that keeps unfolding as she writes. For, in not looking at myself, I might also not be looking at the unspoken in what I speak; I may not be calling forth what rests in the shadows, bleating, hungry for a feed. So, I begin, hoping that in this offering, you might also breathe through your muscle-memories, re-member and recognise as you read.

I might tell you I have dark, but greying, hair, the eyes of a gypsy. I might tell you that for ten years I danced, for twelve before that played piano, and in the years since have given birth to two girls. I might tell you that I grew up unable to digest my mother's cooking--my belly complained for twenty years--and that coming to know my own body and its changing needs was a long and hard road. I might tell you that I only began to look for "home" after the age of thirty, despite my ancestry being very clearly from somewhere other than here. I only began to travel after I came to co-own a modest home; a shed, really, a deep-blue haven by the shore, plywood on wobbly bricks, nothing too permanent. When our offer was accepted, I burst into tears. I realised I had been living my parents' exile. The irony is that, in order to feel free to travel, I needed a sense of groundedness and presence that a more permanent home [and sense of being-at-home in myself] had given me.

This sense of contradiction, of oppositions; of being anchored, and hence mobile; of being myself, distinct, and yet threaded through to so many others and their histories, is a condition I am coming to understand as more and more the reality I am given to live with in my daily life. I love being a mother, but am frustrated by a child grabbing my legs, impeding completion of both complex and simple goals [writing; walking across the room]. I am aware of excitement and depression in approaching a major writing project--a will to fruition, and a fear of being condemned. Perhaps you too feel some of these things. These conditions of liberation and restriction, freedom and not, goodwill and holding back, are what I think of now as the motions of life.

I used to think differently: Perhaps because I grew up in a goal-oriented, hierarchical environment, I imagined that there was an ideal that was its opposite. I used to feel that life could be one of endless opening--if only one were liberated enough, flexible enough, had encouragement enough. [This, despite the evidence my own body gave me otherwise.] But now I think that holding contradictions, riding them, as one surfs a

wave, is both more true to experience, more helpful and more hopeful, indeed, more compassionate, and perhaps more politic as well.

My first introduction to the hum of contradictions, the contiguous yoke of seeming oppositions, occurred when I was quite young, and acting on stage. There was something about performing that seemed both articulate and inchoate: a combination of becoming another character [or movement], almost any other character, and yet retaining an overriding consciousness that one is in fact not possessed by this character, but making choices about the manner and sequence of how this character moves-in-the-world. Whilst carrying a feeling that approaches one of all the possibilities of the world opening their doors, one is also, of necessity, in a position to have to choose one gesture at a time, and within the framework of the overall structure of the play. Because of this, there are certain imperatives one must follow, despite the sense of freedom that acting brings. And sometimes, quite poignantly, one becomes aware, in a deeply physical sense, of all the other possible doorways having closed as a result of the one that has been chosen.

Yet in spite of these poignancies and restrictions, one nonetheless experiences an expanded awareness and ability beyond the everyday, sometimes even approaching, with surprise and delight, sometimes horror, the previously unimaginable. I learnt this first when I, a young Zsuzsanna, who couldn't do a backbend if I was paid for it, suddenly found myself able to tumble and trapeze, because I was playing someone else. Clearly, my sense of capability was more restricted by concept than ability: I seemed to have been ruled by a distorted dictum: I think [such and such], therefore I cannot. Performance was teaching me other: I can, therefore possibly I am. This fascinating, unnerving and provocative realisation sent me off on a trajectory to examine what it is I am and could be, outside of my conceptions of self, conceptions learnt, rewarded, and sculpted by the previous circumstances of my life. Significantly, I set about to discover what it was that gave me permission to be so different, so transformed in capability, in one context as opposed to another. This search has led me through performance, to working as a healer with others looking for ways to release themselves into physical and mental change. The processes I engage with as a healer I detail a little further on, but initially, I would like to focus on performance to set the groundwork for the concepts I wish to outline.

There is a term in acting for stopping an action dead in its tracks: the word is "blocking". Interestingly, when this happens, it is palpable and observable, even to an uneducated audience. One can hear a sigh of disappointment when an actor "freezes" or refuses to "take the baton"--that is, take up the offer given by another actor, or by the circumstance, and run with it. The process for the actor--a kind of game, an additive process of saying "yes, and...." in their inner mind-- is a complex interaction of an overarching purpose or goal [what Stanislavski called a "superobjective", rather like the objective a surfer might have to ride the whole of a wave] and an openness and adjustment to the changing dynamics of moment-by-moment circumstance [rather like the adjustments a board rider would have to make, allowing for currents and seaswell, breaks and peaks in the wave. If one thinks of a spider in its web, its legs twitching in

response to messages passed along the web by the arrival of a fly, one might get the idea of what kind of sensitivity and responsiveness we're talking about.]

I think this complex interaction, this response-ability, holds true for all kinds of performance, whether it be making music or theatre, dance or art. And I tend to think that this process is "art" because it amplifies something of our very natures--how our bodies work, how our bodies and minds interact in the world. And just as some works of art/performances can be fuller, more satisfying, more involving, moving, or provocative experiences, so too can the daily workings of our bodies and our thinking be more, or less, satisfying, invigorating, productive, integrated, optimally effective.

The concerns of my work with actors and dancers for the past twenty years have been to find ways to allow performers to respond and perform more fully, more imaginatively, more completely, and to the greater satisfaction of themselves and to those watching, by devising a training process that allows them to tune more accurately to the information that hovers in, and around, their bodies as they work. The objective is to make the process and result more physically easeful and richer in emotion and imaginative scope. It is also to see and make seen what has not been perceived before. These qualities are what I will call latent, in that they exist, but have not been active or activated; they have remained unacknowledged or un/under/utilised. I tend to be of the camp that suspects everything already exists, and that there is "nothing new under the sun", but I don't feel cynical or defeated about this: rather, for me, this means that there are thousands of unperceived patterns and knowledges just dying to be tickled into action, show their splendour [or their hideousness], their colours and their gorgeous sequences, dance their steps. They may not have come to fruition before. This I think is why we keep performing, looking, hoping... ; there are many things to hope for. Let's party on.

The objectives when I work with clients in therapy in a one-on-one basis are similar, except that the framework is different, the idea of what is being served by the process has changed. Rather than a play, there are daily interactions to enrich or clarify, greater ease or perspicacity to gain, more progressive and respectful relationships to have. People come with various kinds of illnesses, confusions of body and mind, usually with a quest of some sort: to feel better, function better, understand what is going on in or around them, how can they better cope with circumstance. Always, I experience there is something latent which can help them through the circumstance: some larger wit, or muted knowledge already hovering about them, but needing to come into relationship with them, wanting to become vibrant, threaded in with their lived experience. These aspects broaden the perspective, give counterbalance, open a window, so that what is known and unknown can look at each other, live in concurrence, begin a dialogue.

What this dialogue serves, however, is something that has to be addressed. To some extent, performance is protected by the fact that its end goal is a performance: one can shield the question of the ethics of transformation, and of working with vulnerability, behind a play, a playwright, the director's intentions. When it comes to healing work, however, there is something different to assess. To what is a therapist helping the client

open? What are the boundaries of the work? How far can one [client or therapist] go-- and what does "far" mean?

At this point, I would like to detail three dreams I had in a sequence over the last month. These dreams all seem to me to be about issues of what is served in the processes that people agree to. In each, it seems that I am standing outside of traditions that want to continue themselves; institutions that want others to learn how they see, rather than seeing the complexity of what is presenting in the individual before them who is asking to be healed.

THE FIRST DREAM

I am in a kingdom which may be somewhere like Suva. The King is a despot and autocrat, and people are very unhappy. There is a feast we all have to attend. I look down from a rooftop, and a long cavalcade is approaching.

The clothes everyone wears are dull and shabby. The fabrics are not bright and the fit of people's clothing is poor. My sarong in particular is too short and too small to wrap around my body. I am continually having to wrap and re-wrap and re-tie this ill-fitting sarong around my waist. At the banquet table [meal table], the food tastes dull. The king lifts his eyes and stares right into mine. With his eyes he is coercing me to be his successor, to continue as he has done. I feel this dreadful sense of wrong: the whole world as he runs it is not right, and he thinks by awarding me this role, I will have to comply. It is clear to me I cannot. I feel empty and hollow and burdened by the enormous weight of the task.

A young man massages my back from behind, somewhere just below and between the shoulder blades. It is a gentle touch: the touch has sympathy and understanding and support in it, almost as if this touch is intended to help me build up the strength to challenge the King and change his rule. I reach behind me to the young man's body: he guides my hand to touch his penis, which is neither erect, nor becoming erect; something in touching it is important; perhaps about a dependability, and about a masculinity that does not need to be dominant, assertive, argumentative or penetrative, but stable and 'on-side'.

THE SECOND DREAM

I am visiting a kind of spiritual group ghetto which seems specifically set up as a retreat centre for healers/healing work/teaching of healing process. They are running courses here. I observe that the people attending are all enthusiastic followers, but some things trouble me. They are all dressed in similar, dark greyish sack-cloth-type clothing; they seem to "self-herd" into queues and what I can only describe as "cages";

they seem to accept the hierarchies of learning that are part of the way knowledge as taught within the Centre.

There is a clear structure to the organisation, a cogency and following; yet in my deep knowing I am aware that "just one touch could change it," by which I mean I know that my fingers can issue one touch on a patient that would change the illness they have come to treatment for. [This "touch" has nothing to do with the structure of knowledge they are teaching at this centre.]

THE THIRD DREAM

I am working with a female patient, with another healer who seems to be a Qigong practitioner or similar. He is much older than I, seems to come from a stable knowledge base, squints as he works. The woman is, significantly, someone whom I know in real life and who did a lot of qigong practice herself before she and a number of others left her teacher because of the psychic abuse he issued whilst teaching, inculcating them under his power. [She has not been able to do any such practice since]. The qigong healer in the dream does a diagnosis, and is about to carry out a particular technique, but I stop him and say it is now my turn. Immediately the room and all the people are unsettled. The young woman seems fearful; there are a lot more people in the room; it is as if we are being tossed about, from point to point in the room, trying to feel comfortable, trying to find the ley lines of the room. I feel furious, and am almost sweeping the room with my arms in frustration as we relocate and relocate and relocate; I am saying "this is such a waste of time". Along with this is the pressure of working against "the system" or "the Knowledge" [authority] which I feel this other practitioner hoards within him.

The room seems terribly cramped with steps and furniture: couches full of people who have somehow arrived. They cramp the space and dilute the intention/pollute the focus. Finally and suddenly the woman and I settle into the two "hot points" I have obviously been looking for. As soon as we settle, it is as if a plumb line has dropped; the first task is very apparent, and it is to anchor her base alignment via extending an image of her spinal column into the floor. This seems to be stabilising and grounding. At that moment, I know exactly what to do/the scope of the work to follow, and that I was very right to stop the other practitioner before he went too far. The focus MUST be the client, not the practice, and I knew he would have been fulfilling his theory and not listening and acting appropriately to her condition.

In each dream, there is a community that is well-defined. a structure in place that helps to identify the group culture, the place, the era, in which people and their work are involved.

What is also apparent in each dream is that there is a sense that something is amiss: some detail, some information, something personalised is missing in the interaction, or

even objectives of the group. In one, the King is clearly presiding over a land impoverished of pleasures; and whilst he maintains his position, the kingdom and queendom--the flourishing of health and pleasure of each of those under him--cannot come to fruition. His power over others dis-empowers everyone else.

In the second, there is a consistency of identity to the group, and one might surmise that the goals of its members--to be healers--is commendable; and yet what is disturbing is that they behave like a herd; their clothes, too, are impoverished; there is a sense of excess in the process they are learning, in that they are doing too much that is not the point. [And one might think through to the consequences of this: for one, the cost of this excess, this inaccuracy; like doing lung surgery for a cough; not to mention that, whilst one is indulging this excess, what is being damaged or ignored in the process. [Indeed, one of the greatest things ignored is the subtlety and delicate balance of the body and its processes--an issue to which will return.] What is also missing is a sense of individualised, integrated interaction with the process being taught: these are "yes-men" getting into line. What is also disturbing is the quality of "ghetto" in the dream. Whilst a group is in a ghetto, they are ostracised from some aspect[s] of liveliness, or livelihood, of their own responsiveness.

The third dream is one which to me seems the clearest: by following the lineage of his practice, the doctor is risking damage to his patient. The patient is presenting as an individual, idiosyncratic [as each individual is] in both symptoms and configuration. In actorly terms, the physician is "blocking" the information in front of him. The "sigh" in this dream is palpable: the result could be dangerous. [It's significant that actors, when they "block", can actually be in physical danger, because if their actions are self-conscious and unintegrated, they can risk injury. Usually, actors report that they have been thinking one way and their bodies doing another, that they "doubted," pulled back on, or otherwise inhibited their response]. There is a dullness to the dream, a heaviness; the patient is not released into herself.

Significantly, this "patient" is someone I recognise in real life as a woman who had been abused by a martial arts teacher, who via his possessive kind of teaching, took psychic possession of her body as a knowledge for his control. Although the practitioner in my dream is not setting out to have control over her body, he is, nonetheless, restricting her body's capability to connect with itself, and thus consolidate [get behind] its own healing.

Significant to me is that the patient remains vulnerable, and in a weakened psychic state; because something crucial in her [body and/or psyche] is not addressed, her "healing" leaves her stitched up on the surface, but still wary, and "full of holes." She is not consolidated, more self-possessed, more fully what Spinoza calls *acquiescentia in se ipso*, at ease in herself, and comfortably active in the world, and thus not able to be in joy.

Spinoza--whose philosophy of being-in-the-world includes concepts of joy and sorrow which contribute to or detract from our quality of engagement in the world-- outlines two types of joy which are useful for our discussion here. One type is partial, and the

other is more of an overarching condition which has the potential to lead to creative fulfilment, purpose, and an ability to act in the world. *Titillatio* [pleasurable excitement] is only in partial relationship to the organism as a whole. Affecting only a "sub-group of parts of the body," its interaction is incomplete, and thus deserves cautious attention, because, like the figures in my dream, it listens to partial signals, not fully-encompassing ones; it is inattentive to broader details, to other factors in the contexts of its fulfilment. It lacks reference-points outside of itself, and hence, can "blow the budget", "drain the resources", "exhaust the crop". [These terms could apply both to the individual, and to the social context in which the individual functions.] Spinoza mentions love of money, sexual fulfilment, and ambition in this category.

The condition of *hilaritas*, or cheerfulness, however, reflects on the idea of a body as an ecology, both unto itself, and in relation to others. This "joy" is one which calls on the body or self as a whole, affecting "not only a subgroup of functions of the organism, but each and every one," and therefore its totality. [Arne Naess, 1973; p.252.] This has the potential to be complete in its integration of our knowledge-of-the-world. It is a condition to which one can aspire [approaching what he calls "perfection"] which makes for the circumstances of fulfilment of action, of complex thought, and of making decisions which can be in fuller relationship with more of the world, and with the possibility of a better-functioning world as a result.

Hilaritas is thus a condition that includes a kind of expansion and progression of sensibility and relationship, because it can accommodate more information: there is always something more to know, incorporate or acknowledge. This, for Spinoza, brings forth an improvement of condition. But one might ask, where does this "more," this improvement, open out from?

Quite a long time ago, whilst pondering the nature of acting, I was also pondering the theory of relativity, and came to the realisation that if $e=mc^2$, then the relation of matter to energy, of inside the body to outside of it, is one of relative densities. Logically, then, one should be able to access all molecular activity as information, whether it has consolidated into matter or not. Music is a good analogy to use here, as music, although "abstract," is an event with a physical correlate [finger in contact with string], with an instrument's vibration effecting a result in the realm of "non-matter" to produce a result that is audible, if not visible. This idea of the inherent substantiality of movement and sound is crucial to the explanations that follow.

When I think about how I work, with an actor, dancer, or a client, I often think of music. I like to think of a well-functioning body as a great *organon* of sounds and rhythms taking care of themselves. I believe our bodies are very complex symphonies: a thousand instruments working in consort to responsively take care of themselves, in a complex, intricately syncopated, polyrhythmic music, some of which we will never hear. This is a crucial part of my discussion, as it calls on us to allow for some things to be unnameable, invisible, inaudible--and yet, essential to hold as a concept, an actuality to give respect to, essential to the function of the organism. Although this seems to verge on "mystery", this is not the case. I am going to argue for the place of the latent,

the invisible and yet present, to be considered as substantial, and given due consideration in theories of health, healing, performance, and ontology.

"When does time begin?"-- surely a question resident in our flesh: I listen now, but when does now begin? If I sing, does the now start when a note leaves my lips, or in my breath preparing to sing? As I listen to you, is this your heart beating, the memory of it, or the anticipation that I hear? It is all these things...

The passage above comes from a review of a music theatre work I wrote whilst at an Adelaide Festival in 2000. I would like to include more of this review, as I believe it is revealing, and may give more of a handle to what follows:

Even as a child I used to be aware of movement as a kind of humming. I'd watch molecules dance as children rode rocking horses, or the stars turned. I don't know why I used to see this, except that it seemed reality was showing itself, and that the surfaces of my eyes, my skin were like that of timpani, the beat of the world amplified within, and the rub of my kinaesthetic responses underneath lumping the surface into gestures and words outside. It helps if there's a good deal of external quiet--no one hard machinic rhythm hammering its insistence against my skin. The other things that help are 1) sleeping under stars, 2) listening to an Indian rag, or 3) hearing the minimalist music of Steve Reich. Reich's music is composed of cells that repeat in subtle variation; this can give it, like Indian music, a hypnotic hold. The music utilises complex polyrhythms, and a technique called *fasing*--i.e., x number of notes in a unit, played by y number of instruments, one of which subtly increases its speed, creating a kind of crunching, scratching, or itching, quite pleasant in itself, like a simultaneous eating of hard and soft fruits. Soon, it turns over into synch again, but one note ahead, as if it's turned a wheel. In this, there is created a kind of winding out that still somehow remains within. This is teasing, surprising, and somehow comforting, creating a translucency that my body can open into, alongside which it can perceive its own mechanics--a mirror in music to its complexity.

[*Real Time*, Adelaide Festival edition, 2000.]

I have a strange condition no doctor can describe. If I sit in proximity to someone's body, I can hear their organs chugging, their lungs respiring, veins bubbling, stomachs twisting, skin composing, decomposing, all in different rhythms, and at the same time. It is quite exquisite, like hearing a microcosmic music of the spheres.

I can take this information in also through my hands and eyes. The single point of my client's body that I touch is interlinked with many other points. [You might think of an acupuncture needle which works along energy meridians in the body to affect other body parts. In this instance, my finger functions, as it were, as the needle]. The cells seem to talk to me, in language that interlinks the senses, one with another. This is a comprehensible language --a synaesthetic response--which, when I translate it into spoken words back to the client, issues a response where his head may nod in

acquiescence, his muscles relax, his tension levels and breathing change. A transformation begins.

What tradition does this healing belong to? None that I know of. There are similarities I have traced to various lineages, practices with ancient roots; and I have seen accuracy of naming and ease of transformation happen in classes working with mask and buffoon; but my daily task, as therapist, as listener and witness to a client, is not to thread back through these traditions, but to respond to the body in front of me: to attend to its messages, to fully hear its music, its composition and structure, assess its damages, listen to its poetry remaking the world. These bodies speak, and are both dying to be talked to and be heard. Often, they weep, these body-souls to which I am paying heed, relieved at the heeding, the secrets at last telling themselves; very often, too, they laugh, share the joke. Being perceived is a very complex thing.

Fundamentally, I believe that the process is one of sitting with this symphony, some of which will always remain invisible to me, and yet there is a sensing of the interrelation of visible and invisible parts, and a principle that if I tune what is visible, the unperceived will tune also. This is rather like the idea of harmonics, whereby one can tune a string and play a single note, but what is sounded, when this note is accurately tuned, are the harmonics above and below what is played. I like working with this analogy, because for one, it gives a sense of what exists, even though one doesn't touch it. That there is an invisible architecture that one is working with. Two, it illustrates that if one is both listening for the note, and for the harmonics, the tuning is better, larger, more accurate than what you touch. And three, it's like the idea that you "take care of the pennies and the pounds take care of themselves": you are attentive to the visible, and the invisible is aligned. From my experiences with working with people's bodies for twenty years, what I feel happens is that, if you work with respect of the organism's experience and knowledge of itself, you can remind [re-mind] its parts to reconnect with the other parts you can't see [and in a way that gives respect to the body's inherent subtleties]

Some therapies do not even use words, but make adjustments of breath patterns to issue lasting organismic change. Some just use sound: a potent and often immediate tool, as sounds are able to shatter glass and ease muscles and elicit sundry responses in between. I make use of these modalities of breath and sound as well as words and touch. The primary objective is not necessarily to find the body's narrative, but to hear how it wants help to change out of the pattern that holds it guarded, and away from the matrix of its possibilities.

In 1995 I went to Japan to train in a shamanic contemporary dance form called Butoh. I had been enthralled by the work since seeing the main exponent of one of its lineages transform from young girl to old crone to peacock to dust, and what seemed a thousand other things--animal, vegetable and mineral--in one half-hour. Not only did the teacher, Yoko Ashikawa, dance an extraordinary range of mythical or totemic figures [such as the daemonic, "jealous wife" *Hanya*; or the benevolent Buddha with light streaming

from his open hands], but a slowly strutting peacock whose long tail swished dust behind and besides whom a mountain rose, far above its head. One could smell the dust as she transformed. She also became crackling paper in the wind, a water reed, a baby sated with milkglow, and almost instantaneously. She taught with a rather sharp stick that she would poke into the body of her *protegee* and students as we danced. This poking was an effective means of placing images in correlation to distinct parts of the body, locating the images with which we were fed, to ensure that the taking on of ideas did not just happen via the mind.

Rather than a training in physical skills, the work entailed training the body to give over to certain sensory images, be moved and remoulded by them, to the extent that the taste of milk in the mouth and a single pearl of glowing white rice visualised in the forehead was enough to make a tucked-under body shuffle forward in a "walk" physically impossible to achieve otherwise. This was not walking, nor dance: the volition of the images propelled the body through space. Other images we embodied included a sheaf of paper, lifted down the street in a wind; a body being eaten to a hollow carcass by insects; trees growing in water [and, distinctly, different kinds of trees growing in mud, or grass]. And even, to become so transparent that one could change the speed of one's molecules and walk through walls. Always, one had to maintain one's measure [keep knees bent; holding one's height level, much as one does in practising tai chi] and move with feet parallel along imaginary tram lines along the floor. Sometimes, we had to imagine a fish swimming forward from the navel, which helped with the forward "slide." Working from images rather than choreographed gesture allowed for a true resonance to find its way through each practitioner's body: the quality of one person's tree was acknowledged as different [in shape and timbre] as indeed it must because of the intersection of the general with the particular. This distinctness was appreciated within the form, much as one can differentiate quality of tone between one violin and another. I am coming to think that it is mistaken to think that a piece of architecture [or an institution, or an installation] works because of its structure, shape and size. Rather, it is the calibre of relationship that is allowed for between these markers--the negative space-- that is what makes meaning of the experience. Like a good conversation between friends at an amicable dinner party, the conditions of release between pillars--where life exercises itself-- are what come to matter. Thus, the low ceilings and squat proportions of a 1950's Canberra architecture reveal an attitude towards the human [and how it needs to be contained], allowing for some functions and aspirations of the organism, and disallowing [many] others.

Space is active, and of substance. There is a term in the Japanese language which reflects on that culture's understanding of this. The word *MA* relates to the distance--even, one might say, the shape of the distance-- between objects and people, but also includes the quality and calibre of relationship between elements. It also includes [implies] a calibre of spiritual relationship between elements.

In Butoh training, the interrelationship of sensations and images, and how the body is given to move and re-shape itself via these--relies on a sense of *MA*, of a kind of mutual respect between elements of space and substance, concept and matter. To dance is to

effect thought, to be still effects both history and the present; to shift one's plane of action is to involve the rest of the universe.

The training process rests in a philosophy that is, I believe, quite in line with deep ecology processes as fostered by Joanna Macy and John Seed. The interrelationship of our organism with all precedent time and beings [a molecular knowing] is one of the main premises to argue why we should care for and be caring of our planet and other beings. In Butoh, the dancer's body is not just present, but moving in deep time [there are slices of you behind and in front that one slides into as one moves]; the body along the tram track moves forward and back as if "stretching before and after" [cf. TS Eliot's Four Quartets]. The body does not leap from the floor to dance--not aspiring towards anything; but keeps low to the ground, knees bent, maintaining a level height. One is asked to become rock, water, peacock, by a process of accommodating acutely observed imagery, with embodied precision; one is penetrated by the image, incorporating it so completely that the whole is transformed by it into another shape or form. In effect, it is an extreme exercise in letting the body "approach the condition of music": where a vibratory pattern [that is, the pattern at the root of the image, which is captured or held within the image] changes the physical structure of the container, much as sand shows the wave form of the sound played on a string stretched above it. It is as if the whole body, inside and out, listens, tastes, perceives, touches, can dance: every pore in heightened receptivity. Like the elements in a periodic table, one substance differentiated from another by virtue of a variation in its geometry or mathematics.

What interests me is that in this process, not only do we seem to be breaking the laws of the material body [by changing speed, changing physical outline, walking through walls], but that these changes are exacted by the power of suggestion [much as the suggestion made by the 'face' of the mask must be accepted and assumed]. In this butoh work, it is a very complex suggestiveness. In my years of observing and taking part in the work, never once was my body instructed to do anything so direct as to "bend its knee," "walk this way," or "Copy me" [indeed, when one Western student of the form did instruct this way, I felt there was a great violation and dishonouring taking place] Rather, what my body was asked to do was take on the colour and flavour of an image: taste the milk, the grain, work with the heat of an idea; allow a sensation to penetrate, and work its way through the particularity of my body via its very distinct body parts. As was the instruction, "If you understand the condition, you can dance properly." What one needs is the right information in the right place to perceive and thence assume the condition. What happens with these images is that a vibratory change, a quality associated with the image, much as colours and sounds elicit emotional responses, takes place; the physical transformation follows.

This work astonished me for the degree to which the body could be transparent to the process. I also found it affirming of an understanding I had long before come to that language can, with accuracy, both shape and reflect the body's condition. And what I found particularly useful was that the process understands that the body understands itself poetically. On the one hand one could say that the body is moved by the momentum of the image: the image carries the limbs much as a vibration "carries" sound through space. Another analogy might be taken from the bootstrap theory of

modern physics: that all facets of consciousness, and consciousness and matter, are in interpenetrating relationship, to the extent that a change in the condition of one "pulls through" a change in all other facets. Fritjof Capra says that the bootstrap theory approximates the Buddhist understanding of the interpenetration of all things, with no thing having a "fundamental" quality or property, other than that designated by the mind. [Capra, 1975, pp 316 ff.] This notion that a transformation is "pulled through" the body's existent state is an image I would like to follow-through with a little further.

The post-modern philosopher Jacques Derrida takes up Hegel's term *aufhebung* when speaking of things coming into articulation through signs:

Aufhebung is a relation between two terms where the second at once annuls the first and lifts it into a higher sphere of existence.

[*Writing and Difference*, p.281]

I would like to work through this phrasing, and apply it to the idea of a body-in-performance [the "signing" body] pulling through a different signification or "term" as it progresses on stage, constantly changing its condition. I like the way Derrida uses the word "annuls," as it acknowledges the presence and validity of the initial condition which then undergoes change. That is, there has been a "marriage" [of body and its significance] precedent to this incident. The body-as-body [say, Ashikawa as peacock] has been in a particular pattern, leading it to function and self-identify in a particular way. The new circumstance, the new incidence, elicits a change that passes through the body, the organism, pulling through a different correlation, a different pattern of functions, motions, sounds/language and responses. In some ways, Derrida's phrase indicates there's still a ghost of the past there somewhere: I like this sense, as indeed, transformation does not annihilate one's history, or one's body-as-it-has-been, rather, there is a realignment, a different functioning that has come into being, perhaps more optimal, perhaps more integrated, more at ease in itself, perhaps more dynamic. At the very least, it is in a condition that is perhaps necessarily "more" dynamic because it has responded to time: its condition at point A has to adjust to the changed circumstance of B [even if A and B are only seconds apart, as in Ashikawa's dance]. This "annulling" of a marriage accounts for the glorious awareness one has, in watching Ashikawa, that her body has become peacock, and yet is still human [as it was before, but in a different relationship to mind]. Most of the dance positions in this lineage of Butoh make a case in point of this: one is asked to walk, or at least, move in an upright position: the becoming-animal or -vegetable is not reliant on imitative posture or mimickry of its outer form.

Even though one is clearly still human [whilst also becoming-animal, and so on], in the transformation from condition-to-condition one is quite clearly

putting into question the system in which the preceding reduction [of signification] functioned: first and foremost, the opposition between the sensible and intelligible...

[Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, p.281]

What is questioned is not the validity, but the substance, and presumed closure of the substance, of the previous condition, the position of "being-human" from which one has begun [much as my stage ability to tumble and trapeze questioned the concept of my quotidien self].

A condition of endless becoming.....

I would like to call in another musical analogy. In the performance of an Indian rag, the instruments of the consort--usually, a sitar or tambour with drum and drone--play an elaborate improvisation in dialogue between what one could call three pillars-- the mode [or key] of the piece; the history of how it has been played, both by these musicians and by others; and the qualities of the instruments themselves--with the variables, which include the time of day and year; the place and environmental conditions around performance; the mood and presence of the audience; and the mood and presence of the instrumentalists on the day. The performance --often several hours long--is an elaborate, responsive interplay between features in the present, facts in the past, and anticipation of the future, that which is about to come. What I find extremely pleasurable is the responsiveness of the form to the time of day, and place of performance; this makes me feel jaded whenever I come to a black-box Western theatre and, in their first great act of pretence, dim the lights.

What I also enjoy about being in the audience of such a performance, is the bodily acknowledgment [rather than its denial] on the part of the performers. They talk to each other, comment, smile with pleasure; shift their bodies, burp, cough, clear their throats. If the instruments need tuning, they do not stop to do so, but tune within the performance itself: the strings, for example, are played and tuned whilst the drone continues and even, often, whilst the other strings of the same instrument are still being played. This is logical, as the tuning is in interrelation to the drone and other strings; it is in fact imperative to continually tune, for, as we discussed above, accurate tuning calls in the harmonics. One could say that in Indian *rag* the fullest "meaning" of the piece is only possible via maintaining accurate tuning. A whole architecture of emotive responses is built by this music in the space between instrument and listener; without accurate tuning, the architecture does not form.

Again, we are mindful that this kind of performance is in constant, intricately adjusted interrelationship between all parts [both intrinsic to the sub-group of performers, and extrinsic to them--ie, the rag scale, time of day, place of performance]; that there is *hilaritas* in this process; that there is collusion and responsiveness, and adaptability whilst maintaining the overriding 'superobjective' of playing the *rag* as established in, or in dialogue with, its tradition, and within the imperatives of completing the performance.

Alongside the acknowledgment of the bodies and presence of the performers--talking, tuning, burping, adjusting their position--the audience, too, traditionally, would talk, eat, slip into meditation or sleep. Children would walk, play, or run around; what is included in this performance is highly significant, and a reflection of the constant and contiguous interrelationship of art to life in this musical culture. This seems to me a compassionate

practice [although it is a ferociously exacting one as well]; I can't help but imagine how appalled the same Duke who thought Mozart used "too many notes" would have been to be present to something this encompassing. As with Butoh dance, receptivity to all contextual information is a key to sustaining the performance. There are no [few?] monsters here behind closed doors.

Of Cabbages and Kings...

I remember when I first trained in theatre mask work. To hold the Mask in front of oneself is to hold a being whose habits, words and possibilities are about to intersect with yours. One has to "breathe in" the pattern of the mask, almost as if you are asking the rest of your body to take in a blueprint marked in the other's face. Usually, the mask is pulled on facing away from others in the room, rather quickly, like swallowing a pill.

What follows is an extraordinary experience of living within another's skin. One's body and psyche have to listen attentively to the imperatives, the machinery, driving this other life. Of course, it is your voice that speaks, your hands that move: but one has absorbed tendencies and flavours of behaviour that belong to the mask, almost as if one is subsumed by another perfume.

What I experienced in donning that first Mask was that my performance opened to a matrix of possibilities that seemed aligned with the mask. Certain tendencies, or markers, seemed consistent, no matter who wore the mask. For example, one of the questions usually asked of a masker is, "What is your name?" I have been told that certain masks always pull out a response of similar structure, such as this one: "My name is William, but people call me Bill. I hate Bill;" and from the same mask, with a different actor wearing it: "My name is Harold, but people call me Harry. I hate it. " Other consistencies might be in movement patterns exhibited by the performer in the mask; or the habits they reveal of themselves. There are almost endless variations around a consistency, a result of the combination of Mask and actor performing it, a collaborative interweaving of the mask's properties with its maskers.

I remember once, whilst playing a particular mask, that suddenly "the mask" seemed violently hungry when it spotted a mandarin in the room. From within the mask, I grabbed the fruit and jammed it into its/my maw. I felt the urge to spit the seeds and pulp far across the room, in rude challenge to the audience. I balked; unable to continue in role, I stripped the mask from my face in revulsion. Something in me "blocked" the becoming-action of the mask; some judgment that my own personality made against its character. And, as with any kind of "blocking," the momentum collapsed; I had dropped the bundle and ended the instance of play. Immediately, I understood this as my limitation-- a lack of compassion, to sit back, aloof and in judgment of another's act, as if there were something monstrous that ought not to be here; and yet, had I fulfilled the action; who knows what realisation could have unfolded. As psychotherapy has made our culture aware, shadows in our psyche are important to befriend; in traditional, tribal, or shamanic cultures, such entities need to be acknowledge, appeased, or danced. [In shamanism, dancing a totem animal makes it welcome: human or social illness can arise if it is not allowed its dance.] Some thing which is hungry is going to scream; something which is not, will not. More often than

not, the hideous is transformed in the act of allowing it to dance; fear is the greatest component that makes monsters of mice, violence of anger.

The interesting thing is that, once fulfilled, or, whilst being fulfilled, even the ugliest of actions can carry extreme beauty. Apart from the awkward beauties I see in my clinic room, there are many instances I've seen in performances and workshops which carry this out. I am thinking of an incident where I watched a hunchbacked buffoon [in a theatre workshop run by France's Phillippe Gaulier] singing the Bach/Gounod Ave Maria-- if not bringing the house down, then stunning it with the yoking of deformity with sanctity. The audience sat intrigued and touched at the serenity within this outwardly hideous thing. There was also a sense of wonder how through the voice one could reach in and contact a veracity and power that within a short while no longer contradicted the outer form. Our framework for seeing had changed. Beauty and ugliness lost their opposition to each other, shaking our complacencies. [What the zeugma of the *sopranino* buffoon did do was to break apart the string of associations that keep the buffoon ostracised: the performance almost became social commentary.] Seeing something allowed to fully exercise [exorcise?] itself is quite a wonderful thing. We seemed to go into a state of watching that came from a different, more detailed and complex world, where all our questions had changed.

I have indeed worked with clients who think they must have monsters in them. Or indeed, that they must be monsters themselves. What is more accurate a representation is that they have some force or power they so fear in themselves, that the force takes on the shape of a monster who must be kept blind, unfed, contained. The energy of the "undanced" monster becomes crippling, holding both passion and motion still. Anything without breath, without motion, is dead. Within our bodies, how many sundry dead parts are held?

Recalling Spinoza, there is no *hilaritas* in this condition, there is no scope to be in joy; or indeed, to be able to engage actively, fertile, perspicaciously, and productively in the world. We might recall that, in order to resonate in sympathy with a note--that is, recognise that it is sounding in the world-- a string must be free to resonate; it can't be held down with tacks or pins. This would be one of the major reasons that, in therapeutic situations, I work to free the body of its restrictions to resonate to itself--to know and hear itself better. Ipso facto it follows that this body will therefore be freer to resonate and re-sound, re-cognise, and be responsive to its surroundings. More and more I am thinking that this is the work: not to come to an analysis of what is malfunctioning, but to restore function, to free restriction, to allow the body to reconnect --not just visible to visible, but visible to invisible parts-- so that it can be responsive and response-able.

As the US continues to respond to what it conceives of as an "axis of evil" outside of itself, and keeps drawing its "allies" into a "borderless war", what are the prospects we have for a "borderless peace"? By working to increase response-ability, incorporation, dialogue with the monsters...I remain hopeful...

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Capra, Fritjof, 1973 [1985], *The Tao of Physics: an explanation of the parallels between modern physics and Eastern mysticism*. [London: Fontana]

Eliot, T.S., *Four Quartets*. In *Collected Poems, 1909-1962* [London: Faber, 1974]

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari [1988], "Becoming Animal, Becoming Human," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Transl. Brian Massumi [London: Athlone Press; pp 275-7].

Derrida, Jacques [1980], *Writing and Difference*, Transl. Alan Bass [University of Chicago Press].

Naess, Arne, 1973, "The Place of Joy in a World of Fact," in *Deep Ecology for the 21st Century*, edited by George Sessions [London: Shambala, 1995; pp 249-258].

APPENDIX 1:

ON AUTHORITY, MAKING MISTAKES, AND THE URGE-TO-WAR.

These dreams have arisen at a time when I have had to deeply re-assess the place of this healing work, amongst some opposition to the consciousness that feeds it, within a culture that degrades the arts and those working in it, and in a political climate that can presume that taking part in a "borderless" war is a way to secure one's international relations and "conquer" evil. There are few clues in international relations about how to process the Jungian-type shadows we sit on, the bogeys in our own hearts. Whilst I have no doubt that searching for these would change the climate of the times, I have no doubt that the hard task is also to apply this consciousness at home.

A propos this issue, I wish to re-visit a response I had written earlier to a provocation initiated by John Cameron in 2000 via the h-sers online network. John had asked, "How do we know if we are mistaken?," and this, then, was my reply:

POST SCRIPT

My three-year-old is wee-ing on every floor [and bed] of the house. We are hoping to move; I've steamrolled through cupboards and excess furnitures, cleaning and exit-ing and cupboarding the debris. I try to do this whilst she's at day care, but still she twigs. She senses my clearing of the ordinary difficulties and anxieties that appear like ghosts when one partner is away. She herself is missing my husband, who is working interstate, more than I can compensate for. So, in her pissing and releasing I presume a cat's anger, a wild pig's territorial marking, presuming a kind of consciousness under her skin that is working things through. I've roared at her at times.

It seems so intentional, her behaviour--her pushing me about, bossing, charging, clinging, tantruming, refusing, in between some of the most creative moments we have yet shared. She speaks a combination of sophisticated English intermixed with tree-babble, already flirts with boys, comes to her own summaries. Her knowing is enormous, her unknowing harder to remember. Her creativity pulls and pieces together new worlds, but equally she delights in her tearings-down.

In those wee-ing moments when I've roared, I am of course aware of all the theories, the kinds of ways I'd always like to think of myself responding, first, as loving parent, and then as so-called wiser adult towards children. Never raise your voice, says the inner censor. I certainly am aware she makes me know my own grief at my partner's long absence, of the strain of planning the next three months ahead this way, three weeks off, one weekend on. What she stirs is such a whirlpool of strong feeling that it seems my response is exactly matching the moment, my body-organism so clearly energised. But what is it that switches me out of this mode of responding to her wetting?

Some part of me knows this is not an accurate reading or believing of the situation. . Some part of me sets aside time in my exhaustion to read a miraculous parenting book I dip into every so often. Guided by instinct, I simply open the page where my fingers fall: these are ordinary behaviours to do with nappy-weaning for her age. Of course, yes--last Christmas she nearly did it all by herself; then, Melbourne's bloody weather freezes off her bum, and we're delayed for the next 9 months. So that, simply, is what is going on. Tide it through, observe, and don't be reactive.

And yet, the other things are going on. She tells me it's about to happen, tells me to avert my eyes. She is testing the calibre of the waters: what condition, what temperature, are we as a family in "this very now"[to paraphrase Shakespeare]?

The ordinariness of the wetting [simply something she hasn't yet mastered] combined with this testing, teasing, biting, pulling that I sense is going on--as well as my partner's long absence, there is her own ambivalent relationship to growing up/growing older ["I don't want to be a little girl" she awoke crying one night--and what a way to resist growing up!--at the same time as revelling in all her increasing skills]--these complexities are sensible: my responding feels incomplete, I have a note in my head to check up on this later; at night when I am calmer I search in the book. Perhaps instead I could have tripped over and sprained my foot, to shift me into a a larger realisation. It seemed to me that the narrowness of my knowing, sensing, betrayed the limitations of my perspective. I certainly know I lose the sense of the weave--the "great weave", if you like--of multiple correlations and histories, the "truth" of any burning emotion always streaked with other colours, other stories. Roaring anger has a weeping cat beneath its paws. So, I believe, and then believe again: my credo scans a weaving threaded with intersections.

The complexity of her own knowing is also astonishing: sometimes she will push and prod and agitate and upset herself to the extent that she breaks down; once, within a minute, unprompted, she said "sorry", then still crying turned to someone else to say,

"I'm sorry, it's mummy and daddy's healing." On that instance, she wouldn't stop until my temper blew. So is this the full-kit reality she is pushing towards? She seems to know and not know, be driven and yet perceive outside of the force of the drive; bring something to clashing-point and yet not remain in that point, even if in pain. As if she slips into another strand of perceiving [and then out again]. The inadvertent awareness and force of this is striking. So too is the fact that whilst still crying she speaks from this place.

If I think through to work, to study, to writing, I have also become aware of implicit realities I hold onto about writing: how together I have to be, or the idea has to be, to make it happen. What am I mistaken about here? The agitation, the one-on-one anxiety about knitting it all together, these are beliefs that hold me back and which my anxious body tells me is an incomplete and unsustaining picture of how to go on. I remember doing a workshop with a Melbourne playwright whose process anchored feelings in bodily imperatives. She encouraged us to trust to association, feeding various arbitrary images into the process as we worked. She asked us to trust to the interconnections that would make themselves as we continued writing. I became aware that my best writing happened when I felt half-asleep [or, obversely, when I felt most scared, but still held to the work in spite of the fear]. I share that with you for what it's worth.

In a shamanic embodiment workshop I ran last weekend, we found ourselves scanning the world through insect eyes and raising tentacles to touch another being, whilst staying in our human bones. This touch, this touching, had a different quality for me than the beliefs I have about my humanity touching another. The world was buzzing differently, its image pixillated, the touch less muscled than how I normally approach. This is remembering our evolution, and what it feels like to have once been this butterfly. This, like the sleepy writing, is perhaps also "very now".....

The questions one asks of reality, in this state, are quite different from what they are when out of it. Whilst in a state which is essentially running on partial knowledge, the parameters of experience conform to ideas of opposition, the demarcation of enemy lines, the helplessness of one's situation--the "traps". Once one's condition is more circumspect, there are so many reasons for the behaviours, that it seems inappropriate to be glued to one understanding--and hence, indeed, to bind oneself playing out a crippling role. As in performance, to be in a condition of sensing the "endless becoming" of one's body and its place in the world leads to a creativity of response, one where options are multiplied. Even when faced with illness, or ageing, or death, one's perspective on it, as one of the complex facets of life, can make an enormous difference. It might mean, however, that one starts "breaking camp" in what one chooses to do....

A new concept of "authority"...

I will be continuing to develop something in this discussion along the lines of a concept I utilise. This concept, "**vulnerable authority**", refers both to the sensitivity and openness to receive from the world, and to the kind of authority that this might give in one's interactions in this world. Whilst "vulnerability" seems initially to belong to a

paradigm that conforms to ideas of weakness and defence [the warrior model], the idea of being penetrable, or rather inter-penetrable, and without loss to the organism, is central to the argument. I am toying with terms here which might include porousness and receptivity rather than terms the dictionary seems to align to the word ["able to be penetrated or pierced"] although there is a long and reputable mystic tradition which, for example, takes the notion of being pierced with the love of God as positive and desirable. What one has to do is break away from the association of "the vulnerable" with a puncture or wound needing defence or repair. I have found great pleasure in being able to work with vulnerability, which I take to be a sensitivity and an ability to listen, and be embraced within an enlarged field of reference in which all information is more or less of equivalent value [although some pressing features might call one to act with stronger and more immediate imperatives.] This does however require an attitude to Self that places Self in equivalence to [neither above, nor as lesser than] other organisms operating in the Present.

The authority one expresses from this place is thus one in reference to a multivalent condition, perhaps in sensation tending towards what Deleuze and Guattari gesture to in their concept of the "Body Without Organs" in *Mille Plateaux*.

Cf also footnote on Buddhism and the "undetermined" on p.15 above

APPENDIX 2:

Adelaide Festival 2000 [review]

PASSION, AND SMALL THINGS

My Viscious Angel. Vitalstatistix Theatre Company; March 12

Iets Op Bach Les Ballets C de la B; Festival Theatre March 11

Les Lieux De La. Mathilde Monnier. Union Hall March 11

To arrive: an event in itself. Night in roadside Motel Hitchcock, Baygon and brick, restless child turning circles into sharp walls. As if a Festival doesn't leave you raw enough. We come to the party already raw, unrested in madcap rooms. And always, for the baby's sake, on the lookout for swings. The clasp of her hand on my neck at midnight, dark hours; her needs for risk and certainty, new and old, in equal measure. Falling, running, recovering; being held. The intimacy of looking after: care, anew. A backwards progression.

Milk, menses, ink, stigmata, tears: this festival seems to play with what we let walk beside us, speak through us, what we shunt into discrete quadrants of our lives, until the raw-oil geyser of experience spurts, breaking/worrying/shaking the ground.

Falling, being held. My Viscious Angel: a play about a trapeze artist, fallen, paralysed.

Two sisters replay their childhood, do a re-take on a mis-scripted youth of rivalry and dissatisfaction. Father disappears into the sea; neurotic mother fails miserably to knit together the bones of broken relationships. Aren't women, mothers, meant to knit things together for their families?

Her bones are broken; her lifeline is frayed. This spine is snapped, though memory still charges her to move...

This play is quite poignant, in the end, in its re-scripting of a tale gone wrong. And yet, for all the splayed-out and spitting passions, its fine architecture and sometimes accurate words, it is too literal for me. *A* fails *b*, creates *c*: like the set, we climb ladders to memory and back again. There are layers in the swing of things where you don't know what's been broken, where the ground has gone. As they leave, I see in people's eyes an appreciation of how well the actors play children, parents, nightmares, but we haven't met our own complex crippings, questioned our own ground.

Tumbling, juggling: there's a toddler--a real one--in **lets Op Bach** tricycling the stage amidst roastings, lechery, lynchings, wildfire. Her constancy touches me as I touch soil under crisis: her ribboned presence a **continuo** beneath the carryings-on. I weep, often, wet and long, throughout this work: when the man leers at the fully-dressed pubescent dancing amongst half-naked women, as if she, what is beneath this plaited, long-sleeved she, is an easy hamburger for the taking. Smell her youth and its juices. She balances a fold-up chair against her legs, almost dutifully, this small responsible being. She is also nearly strangled by the Ones With a Cause for chanting "I [still] love everyone in the world". The alto sings "*Slumber all ye care and sorrow/Til the morrow,/Like a child from worry free**" [BWV 197], a poignant counterpoint to this disharmony.

There is no answer here. A macabre circus: poetry gets knocked over as it stretches a limb, a xylophone burns, the aircon duct throttles a full stop. **And the child keeps cycling**. Like a Breughel painting come to life, a chaos of little integrities. This is molecular, not psychoanalytic, knowing.

This raucous bloodied work makes me glad to be alive to see this mirror back on myself. I recognise where I fear life, what contradictions, imperfections I don't like to see. They're up there dancing, baby. Sometimes from such places of grief we can come to looking.

Minding, caring. *Les lieux de la*. A dance of vagrants, is it, an almost autistic shuffling [insular, though still in motion, rhythm-ing the sidewalk]. We might just step over his body later when he sleeps. A masked man, the centre link in a human chain, trying to find a way to move, progress. Who is he? In this quite even-toned work, do we even care?

As I watch, I wonder how we are chained to each other--as lovers, friends, strangers; to space, to walls, to music and silence; as molecules. The dancers become moving mounds of blankets, get heads stuck in walls. One dancer is held by two men, another

held suspended by a wall. We see two sets of legs at the same angle in space. What is it really holds us? Does a pair of hands make a difference, or none?

I love you, but need to give you into another's arms.....Our childminding falls through. We do a shuffle, cope. We lay her to bed at night in different unfamiliar beds. *And surely what we should wish is a world where the vulnerability of the beholder is equal to or greater than the vulnerability of the person beheld.* [Elaine Scarry, **On Beauty, and Being Just**]. Patting her hair, we look into the orb of her skull, into a future that will always be as full of doubt and contradictions.

[published by *Real Time*, Adelaide, 2000]

1from Indian Philosophy: Buddhism [Encyclopaedia of Philosophy entry]

The line between religious and philosophical doctrines is...harder to draw in Buddhism than elsewhere in the Indian tradition. This is true partly because the Buddha himself seems to have showed great philosophical acumen in his teachings. For instance, certain questions were ruled by him to be "undetermined." Thus, the questions of whether one who has attained nirvana in this life [and hence will not be reborn again] persists after death could not be answered by saying "He does," "He does not," "He both does and does not," or "He neither does nor does not." This fourfold negation was used by the Buddha to indicate that the question is wrongly put: he compared it to the question "Where does a flame go [north, or some other direction?] when it goes out?"--which is likewise meaningless or unanswerable. Similar undermined questions were whether the self is or is not identical with the body, and whether the cosmos is or is not infinite as to space and time.

©. Zsuzsanna Soboslay, August 2003.