

Declaration of love to my body



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Photo: Benny Ulmer

My body is mine. It is my possession. Wonderful created by God. Looking in the mirror I can not get enough. But what will I now do with it? Just sit there and enjoy it? What can my body do? What is it capable of? I want to find out. But how? I have physical limitations. In medical terms spastic diplegia with athetosis. All the same, I would like to explore my body. How can I keep it fit. Where are my limits?

There are so many possibilities, many therapies, many training options.

What can I do despite of my disability? What is right for me?

Again and again I was rejected because of my disability. After five years of desperate search I finally found something that full fills me, performance.

I met the dancer Lisa Oe and asked her if she could imagine to work with me?

A few days later she visited me. We chatted over coffee and cake and realized that we could work together. An intensive and confiding mail correspondence followed.

At last the first rehearsal. I was exited. What would happen? In the forefront I had arranged with Lisa Oe for the assistant to leave during rehearsal. Somehow it might irritate. On arrival Lisa Oe welcomed me .The assistant helped me with my jacket and left.

We tried out what was possible on the floor. The young woman put me on the floor and we began moving .Wow! I was surprised about myself

The perception of my body changed. Wow, I felt new muscles. Week after week we tried new things. I was amazed no end.

The people at the workshops had been right. There was more in me. But to develop in an optimal way I needed individual coaching. So far that had not been possible in group coaching with other disabled people. "Try to move me from A to B ", Lisa Oe suggested. Unbelievable! It worked.

I registered a change in my body and hardly recognized myself anymore. My

metabolism was stimulated I ate more. What happened to you? You look so well, people asked.

I noticed other muscles. Muscle ache after every training. But it was a wonderful feeling. I was proud of myself and grateful for this opportunity. After a few weeks I noticed how my spasm became less. Unbelievable I was loose and had become more mobile. Aches and tensions disappeared by themselves. Wow I had never known that before. In addition the physical contact to Lisa Oe produced certain hormones which resulted in feeling much better. So I decided that performance was for me the ideal possibility to keep fit in body and mind. Ultimately performances help me to enjoy and develop my creative ideas.

Lisa Oe has laid an important milestone in my development as a performer. For this time I am very grateful. Unfortunately this work was then finished.

My world collapsed. What now? Back to able to dance? Due to the many disabled people they could not offer me what I needed. The situation took its toll on me and left me ill and listless. My spastic tensions immediately increased.

Like a maniac I searched for a substitute for Lisa Oe. But there where only refusals. Should that be the end?

Crabwise I met Yuko. A very experienced choreographer. After the second trial rehearsal she said : “ I would like to work with you “. I was happy. I had already noticed that Yuko was different to Lisa Oe. Yuko went deeper into the matter and practiced much longer. I had to get used to that. After a few rehearsals I picked up courage and told her that I also needed breaks. Yuko understood and we worked well together. During the rehearsals I often had to think of Lisa Oe. Without her work I could not have lived up to Yuko`s expectations. Yuko demanded more and more of me and pushed me to the limitations of my body.” You can do better, try deeper and more exact. “Those were her words. I was grateful that she crossed my bounds.

After a few weeks I did not mind the long training sessions any more and I even noticed my inner organs in a different way. I sensed what a complicated being my beautiful body was. At the same time my confidence grew enormously. I experienced in the art world something I had not known before. My disability lost importance and was perceived as a human being. That was something wonderful. At the same time I also quickly noticed performances are project orientated. If you want to continue on the same level you have to approach new people and lose your inhibitions with them.

Soon I realized that people find it interesting to work at times with disabled bodies. My body is because of my cerebral palsy under constant tension .

A normal person needs energy to do something. I, on the other hand find it very hard for my body to relax and exactly that sounds interesting how different bodies react to and with each other.

Meanwhile I had many performances on offer so that there was a rehearsal almost every day. That again was too much. I needed to find a balance between activity and rest. Some performances were a setback in my development. I was much further.

On the other hand it was an interesting experience to test myself creatively.

So far I had only done performances with women.

The other day I had the chance to perform with a man. I wondered what might be different, but realized there was no difference to a woman. The idea counts and the touching of bodies, and when the chemistry between two people is right the sex does not matter.

At the same time I had two performances where I could work in a group. It was a new experience as I was not the leading character any more. I had to adjust again to not being the centre of interest. The experience to be just part of a group was very successful. In one performance my integration worked really

well. Unfortunately in the other performance the audience perceived me as the central point and everything circled around me.

It shows that it is not easy to do a performance where the disabled person is integrated and not the centre of interest.

I took to female friends to a workshop about performance and inclusion. We had been worried that this seminar might be too much for us. However we had to find out that our work was much advanced to what they offered. On the one hand we were deeply disappointed about the workshop on the other hand it was a confirmation of our good work.

At the seminar a wheelchair user performed with the help of his assistants. Interesting for me, but not imaginable for me. I need assistance in my daily life, but in a performance? In a group performance we tried it out, for me totally unfamiliar. I had a problem with it at first. The problem was that again I had to ask for things.

On the other hand I discovered the advantage of performing at different levels. An idea not quite perfected. On the subject "contact" I need to reflect a bit.

At the age of 48 I had never touched a naked woman. Why not try it out? But how? Should I dare to go into a brothel? Why not? I am not married, have never touched a naked woman, why not go to a brothel. I did not want to go to any brothel so I asked for advice. It helped, I learned what to look out for. We looked for a woman who suited me. I got in touch via email. At last the day came. Exiting, but this woman was very pleasant and suitable for me. Both of us naked skin on skin. It was a wonderful experience to touch a naked woman. I was totally green. I had never touched a naked woman. After the first time it was enjoyable to feel your body in a different way.

Quickly I made another appointment with her and this time I took charge and was pleasantly surprised. On my third visit I thought: Now you have tried it and

now you do not need it any more. However, never say never. Two years later I went to another brothel and was deeply disappointed. I was treated as a passive disabled person. Okay I thought lets try another one. Again I was disillusioned. At the same time I had many emails from handicapped women and men who were disappointed brothels. It made me think and I started to deal with the subject intensively. What do I want? What do the others expect? I came to the conclusion that it is not about sex, but touching bodies. Surely one can not generalize, all the same many people have confirmed this perception. And if that is so then the brothel is the wrong address. Would then not performance be a good alternative? In a performance one has movement, body contact, music, creativity. Could performance training be a good method for the well-being of a person? It is worth thinking about.

To this subject I discovered on facebook a workshop "performance and sexuality". Interesting I thought, but will I be welcome as a disabled person? I contacted the choreographer and explained my situation. David quickly answered: "Just come we will find a way." So I went. As expected half of the day everybody felt inhibited because of me. I felt stupid. In the evening the ice was broken and on the second day it all run smoothly. We moved and touched dressed and partly naked. It was a good feeling for body and soul. To rediscover your body, but also other human beings. Fantastic .And what has stuck in my mind, you may ask the others everything as long as you accept a no without explanation. May I hug you, kiss you, stroke you etc.

On this workshop I met Federica. She is a natural healer and offers sexual monitoring. I talked to her about my findings regarding body contact etc. She found it interesting and asked me to come round on Friday and see if I liked what I saw. I went. It was great. Let`s see how it goes.

At the same time the performance with Nicki was for me a super experience. We put paper on the floor and tried to paint to music. Following the motto : retain the movement. Many aspects are active at the same time. Body movement, touching the other body, last not least creativity. This all together are the requirements for the well-being of a person.

In connection to this I remember my work as a youth leader in the nineties. Part of my job was also to say good-bye to elderly people on their retirement. I arranged fare well parties and asked various questions. What was the funniest incident? Etc. To the question, what could have been better? 95% answered:” I would have wished for a hug from time to time. This example shows how important body contact is.

Body contact I also had at a big performance with 25 dancers from all over the world. Yuko had invited me to this workshop. As always there were inhibitions of the dancers. But Yuko casually managed to show the dancers how to integrate me in the group. The ice was broken and I was a “normal” member of the workshop. Even on the first evening a female dancer, on saying good bye, came towards me, hugged me and said :” Nice to have you with us.” During rehearsals exactly this woman became my dance partner in this performance. In the following days all other participants lost their inhibitions.

This example shows me clearly that art is a good way to reduce inhibitions between so called disabled people and able bodied people. During that week it crossed my mind. I could take part in any performance and workshop if I had an assistant. The assistant can not be compared to a carer. A carer

does not know about performances. During the week I changed my mind. It is enough if the choreographer or seminar leader motivates the participants to integrate people with disability. An other alternative would be a member pre-

sent who knows me. He could motivate the members to deal with me uninhibited .

All in all it was a good performance. It managed to include a person with disability without putting focus on that person.

Looking back on five years performances I realize my body , my mind, and my soul have totally changed. I have become more open, more relaxed and more confident. I am more aware of other bodies.

Last not least I was lucky enough to meet Lisa G Working with her is wonderful. When chemistry and trust are in accordance you can do things which come very close. For example the performance "What you see, it moves you.

Lying on stage I look into a spotlight, in front of it sits a human figure. I can not recognize it. I am dazzled. What does this figure want of me? It copies my movements. What is that supposed to mean? Nobody can understand my disabled body never mind copy it. But the figure does not give up. Slowly it feels eerie. The figure comes closer and I recognize a naked woman. Why should a woman be interested in a disabled body? It is uninteresting. Full stop. But the woman comes closer and closer. It becomes clear she is really interested in my body. Unbelievable!

Slowly I get the feeling I am taken serious. She cares for me.

Suddenly she is standing in front of me. I am shocked. A woman shows me her naked body. Just like that. Unconditionally. I feel honored and want to enjoy this moment. I can not see enough I want to catch many details. How do I manage that. Slowly I grasp a piece of charcoal and try to draw her. I soon realize that I am not able to draw her in all her beauty. I look at her again and again. She is a fantastic woman.

She goes behind me to discover more about my body. Again and again I tell her that she will not understand my body. What do you want from me? Go away .

She does not give up and lies next to me. We settle down and look into each others eyes. A loving glance that tells the other: “ You are wonderful.” I understand, I am precious. And the nudity of our bodies confirmed this statement. It is not about something on my body it is about the pure body. An important aspect I can not tell myself. And the nudity of both bodies confirms this for me.

We get together and dress each other respectfully.

With the realization: I can not understand your body completely, but I accept you as you are.

Because of my disability I have to let other people dress and undress me daily.

From this aspect it is a special experience for me to dress a woman. I am allowed to meet her on a par.

A declaration of love to my body is an important foundation of my well-being. Most importantly it is about finding space for movement and encounter. We must get away from the pressure to present ourselves on stage. Let us allow space.