

## **Performance *THE BODY* at ARCHA THEATER JUNE 2017,**

dirigée par Min Tanaka.

Echange par skype avec Grete Smitaitė, danseuse, en avril 2018.

Transcription Christine Quoiraud

La performance à Archa Theater à Prague fut annulée par Min Tanaka peu de temps avant la première. Grete, désolée de m'annoncer cette nouvelle accepta cet échange et me raconta le déroulement des répétitions.

J'ai collecté l'histoire telle qu'elle la raconta. Les notes de bas de page fonctionnent comme un dialogue avec mes souvenirs des répétitions avec Min Tanaka, en particulier celles pour le *Sacre du Printemps* 1990, qui fut donné à l'Opéra Comique à Paris.

Ayant réservé le voyage et l'entrée au théâtre, je suis très reconnaissante à Grete de nous donner un aperçu sur le travail de préparation du spectacle *The body*.

## **Biographie**

**Grėtė Šmitaitė** (LT/DE) - performer, choreographer creating and living in Lithuania and Berlin. In 2017 Šmitaitė finished a bachelor degree in 'Dance.Context.Choreography' in Hochschulübergreifendes Zentrum Tanz Berlin. She became danceWEB scholarship recipient. As a dancer Grėtė collaborates with choreographers Anna Aristarkhova ('Lust', 'Obnimashki', 'Zweites Stück', 'RinzeKette'), Doris Uhlich ('Habitat', 'Seismic Session', 'More than Naked'), Min Tanaka ('A body').

Grėtė is part of 'Suddenly' collective. Together with Hanna Kritten Tangsoo she co-choreographed 'Limitation Piece 2' for 'Suddenly' collective (premiere: 'Uferstudios', 'Tanzfabrik' Berlin, 2018). <https://vimeo.com/305743264>

2018-2019 Grėtė developed a solo *What do I cry for?* (premiere: 'Sõltumatu Tantsu Lava' Tallinn, 2019).

2016-2017 Šmitaitė presented her choreographic sketches in 'Théâtre au Fil de l'eau', Paris, 'Uferstudios', 'adaStudios' Berlin, 'Het Veem' Amsterdam. <https://vimeo.com/195266014>

Šmitaitė was doing internships with choreographer Ria Highler ('School for New Dance Development', Amsterdam, 2016) and cinema director Gela Kandelaki ('Budrugana Gagra', Tbilisi, 2015).

Christine : How did you work, how did it go to work with Min

Grete : It was super pleasant I have to say, it was really nice.

In the beginning we were always doing the manipulations. In the beginning, in the first rehearsals. Not the whole set of manipulations, but manipulating the body, the laying body<sup>1</sup>... mostly in general he asked not to dance from the muscles<sup>2</sup>. I think it was a kind of preparation for that in a way. We started focusing on joints and then he would add some more focuses. It was quite long at least half an hour per person. We were doing this in trios. And then sometimes the manipulated person would start moving and continue from there.

Then sometimes, he would give us some tasks, some inspiration to work with, I feel. A few times in this first week, we did this exercise of positioning, this position exercises, two people positioning one another in regards to another<sup>3</sup>, one does something then another does something, then the other would do something, changing position regarding the person, acknowledging the relation, the distance. In the beginning he did not explain this. Later he started to explain. In the second period of work he started to give personal tasks. I remember for me he told me about the difference between dancer and human. He said that dancer is able to come back to animal in terms of being a lot less vertical, using more sides of the body, like sensing more things with the back, the front and the sides which are much more sensitive than the vertical person. And because of that then he was suggesting to destroy the vertical body. He was saying that you could change by purely anatomically changing something and see what kind of feeling will arise or you can go from the thinking side to it. But we were always tracing, what kind of body that becomes, in terms of what kind of person it could be; not necessarily putting it like a profession, like a baker for example but more tracing it as something between body and mind which transforms. Sometimes starting from the body, sometimes from the mind.

We did this exercise and we did this exercise from Simone Forti, positioning from object. One person has three objects and there is a clear space<sup>4</sup> which is a performance space. In groups of three people, one by one, people are moving their objects as if actor could be a performer. You can play with here, the space so that to gain distance, the ability to see the action from aside: so you would do it with an object, and, later, dancing, it gives also clarity of possibilities, of how the body can be placed differently in space in regards to what else is in this space.

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1 Le *Bag of bones*, ou manipulations à plusieurs.

2 Danser sans les muscles ? Danser avec la sensibilité, les perceptions, danser avec un corps recomposé par la détente , investi d'un vocabulaire illimité? Ou juste se poser la question qu'est ce qui fait bouger mon corps d'habitude ? Comment aller à contresens ?

3 Exercice pratiqué en 1985 au studio de Hachioji.

4 Exercice également pratiqué en 1985 au studio de Hachioji. Simone Forti de passage à Tokyo donna un court atelier durant le stage intensif Maï-Juku 5.

These exercises are always combined; these were like short exercises and there were these kind of tasks he would give us in solos, duos or trios. He would give us some kind of images. For example, there was solo working on an image of going from the light to the dark, while crossing the room in ten minutes. We worked each separately and, then, we would always do the solos each one by one and see the material of others. Sometime two people at the same time. Little by little he also started commenting.

Ch : you say he was starting commenting or not commenting ?

G : commenting. In the beginning, no. And later, yes. Not always. I think he was commenting but he felt we could be busy enough by ourselves and if we were not aware or attentive enough then he would give comments. Or if there was a struggle in terms of keeping some kind of habits and not be able to drop them, then, he would name the habit. People in this project were coming from very different backgrounds, so we had these tasks and, then, he would see, how we work and try to help us understand what is not necessary for the task and what could help us.

There was this duet with a stick. Taking a stick and using it in as many ways as we can. He suggested to create up to seven images and turn these images together and always encouraged discussions between the partners to figure out what the role of the stick is in each image. He was also encouraging to steal ideas from other people and try them and in general challenge the habits of any kind. He would say this for example: “ if you always step with the right leg, why not step with the left.” Another task was going to the light from the dark and going to the dark from the light, this kind of difference, inspired more concrete images we were making ourselves and from them producing movement.

Maybe for half an hour on such tasks we would work by ourselves, sometime longer. And then we would show and he would give some comments. In the morning we would do manipulations. In the beginning it was like this. There was one more solo: of disappearing. Trying to stand present and from there to fully disappear. Min gave the comment on the way of using speed. Responsibility of taking decisions. Feeling of being alone on stage. There were some specific comments to each dancer. He would say that if there is no image we are holding on within the movement, then, it's not dance. That's what he was looking for. So images were important but I feel the way he described images, it's a lot about atmosphere.

I feel image is one way of naming what he looks for. And a big attention about awareness. Awareness of the situation of performance.

Basically he was never cutting us, I thought he would say no by giving some limits where he would say “ no, don't do this ”. He was never doing it. Always having in mind audience for which we would perform the material. He was giving us precise comments why it doesn't work. Things like what we do with timing. Like where to make a pause. How to be doing something so that you give your audience enough time to understand what you do. Acknowledging the activity

of awareness. If you dance you can always stop, look at the audience. ‘ Hey you see ’ and, then, drop into the dance again. Always checking the situation.

Then the second period of work we were starting with manipulations. We started to go to Archa theater. Up to then we were in a studio. He wanted to shoot a video. And try to go on stage. He proposed us a script, he wrote a script, a scenario. With 8 scenes very different. It was two duets . In front of the stage, a curtain. The beginning which I never got to see. Up the stage we would be lifted more high. On left and right there would be two chairs. On one chair there was a tray with cups and a spoon. On the other chair there was a cage for birds with no birds. In the beginning birds would be red socks binded to the cage. He talked to us on the first day of the second period of working about women’s relation to birds. Well, there were many versions what the piece was about. One of them was that it was about women. He said he observed that women relate very strangely to birds. And mostly how they don’t relate, they do not take care of birds. Usually it’s what men would do. We were all women except of him, Min. In the beginning of the piece he had a solo with the objects. I really don’t know what he was doing. It was his solo. He was somehow lifting one object. The tray and then the cage. Let’s say, he was dancing. And then he would go under the curtain and then would come two girls and they would do a duet with a cage which was quite similar of what I told you about the stick. It was like changing images. Not necessarily images but very different situations of what can be done with a cage. When we were creating, this was one happening and a bit later, me and another girl we would do a duet with a tray. And how we worked on this dance was really like, he said, there would be those two objects. We would choose the objects and four of us we would have those duets moments. We were choosing the objects, by couple. He suggested we should try out things and we discussed a lot. He was not giving so much input up to quiet late stage. When he gave input it was how to make it very precise, clean, very clean about timing. And these two duets were like the absurdity of the society. Like it needs to be really exaggerated, hyper, hyper acting. The duets were happening. Then it became quite comical I feel. I would say ironical what we were doing. At least what our couple was doing. A bit of irony. The other couple were on *dancy side*, like big movements. The other was more imagination. Ours was a bit more like on the acting side. Its hard to describe.

Then we would meet on the other side of the curtain. There, two people would open the curtain. We were in the middle of the stage which was lifted. Four bodies would fall as if they were dead. These dead bodies would stay around 15 minutes. In the beginning they were like dead. The dancers for this scene worked mostly on quality of the bones. They had to try to get out of the dead body. My friend and me we would walk slowly out of this darkness during 5 minutes. Then we would come from the darkness into the light with all images that we could collect. Min was having a flag, making wind. It looked like a flag but it was much bigger. He was kind of dancing with this object. And then he would take the tray and come to the women who were trying to get up. And propose them some tea. He didn’t tell us so much on this scene. Instead he told us that once he was dancing in a hospital, in a mental hospital. Some of the people there were drinking

tea and did not understand that he was dancing. They tried to give him tea but he did not really manage to approach them. So he went down on the ground and was like offering them some tea. Somehow it was uncomfortable. I don't know what happened with the situation but the persons went away. He had some clear memory of what a body went through a struggle which he created for himself because he was dancing. And then some men came and tried to propose to drink tea. He wanted us to know about this.

Vladimir, an actor from Prague was supposed to do that, though, it didn't work out because of the schedules. So Min decided to do it himself. After he proposed tea we would come from the dark towards the light. Bodies would just manage to stand up, come back working with images that we managed ourselves. It was literally entering the light. Like light calling us. Coming from the dark we would use the corridor where the light came from, we were starting with an arm. We would see the arm coming. And then the face would come out in the light.

Now let's go back to the script. There was this scene of meeting other person. The people who come from the dark would meet a person who was dying in the scene before. Actually all these people coming from the dark were wearing men's costumes. That did give another meaning as well. In the dark the people they would all wear dresses. So it was like men pushing the women. And then they would meet. And then there would be a moment of violence. All these things we kind of rehearsed.

The moments with violence were moments which never really worked great I must say. But it was moments of violence. The light would get smaller, designing a smaller space. We would get like panic moments. Min would walk around with a stick, and then lift the stick and show his power against women. Also to the women in men's clothes who, just before, played the men. He was like pretending hitting us and like raising the stick high up above his head.

All these things are clearly described. Now come the scene which was not clear. We did not know at all what he wanted from us. He just said "make a group". And then go back to the couple. He made couples with people who were rather different or who did not get to work together before. We had this moment of breath. Each figuring out what happen.

In the end there would be a dance of Rin with a girl who could not really walk (handicaped). Her leg would collapse. They had a kind of duet like she needs support for her leg in order for her to walk. They were slowly coming together and standing up slowly and showing that she is standing and being carried up and out. And there was another duet me and another girl walking and meeting and kind of a hug and before the hug. Another duet was very active jumping around. In the beginning it was like a modern dance. Like both dancers were from modern dance. And then Min asked these dancers to be much more free. In this duet the point is not to count the steps but to go from the feeling of what they want to do. And actually it got more interesting more

exciting. We could see changes. Then there were last duets of two girls coming together and jump one on other's back and then they would walk slowly. It was for me the least concrete scene. I cannot really say what it was this scene.

Then there was next scene with children. For ten minutes. We worked on this scene from the very beginning of rehearsals. From the beginning Min said it would be the most challenging scene of the script. And he was really asking the naivety of the child. Mind of the child. And also how to show the body of the child. He showed us like a chimpanzee, like a baby chimpanzee going down the water. We all worked on it and all got comments. For me it was super interesting work. I think he tried a lot, "trying to enter the child's body". In the beginning we each made a solo. He gave remarks to each of us. We tried again. In the child's scene we should leave the so-called skills, all the things we would usually grasp on, to try to be really transparent with this. To have this experience of the child on stage. "Show it now". It was really a solo work out and he gave precise feedback.

And we started to work together as a group, eight children at the same time. And then we decided to fix the choreography in space.

Some people were more fixed on a spot and some were traveling more through space. He asked for this constant awareness when it is time to cross the stage. While moving he was asking to move the space when we crossed the space. And then we were seven people. He asked to see how can we each be by ourselves (separated from partner). At some point the people from the duo were lonely. There was one couple who actually met. It was the girl who could not walk because of her legs. And she got lifted up. And then she would laugh.

And then, after this scene, came another scene with Rin and another dancer, Vera from Prague, around 40, 50 years old, a professional dancer. They would run away change their costumes. But before, there was a scene of synchrone. It was a short phrase that Min created. He said he does it for the first time of his life, to choreograph movements<sup>5</sup>. He showed these movements to us. It was very symbolic like pushing a wall, raising fist up, hugging the lover and kissing taking the lover down to the floor. Or showing anger, holding one's head, or stepping loudly sixteen times on the floor with anger. He explained us each detail we had to do as he showed the gesture. It was actually very interesting. As we did the same movements he asked us to do as if we were clouds together. "You see that the clouds are moving together but you never notice they all did the same." In my interpretation it's like listening to one's own body and taking decisions independently from others but in the same time listening to others. It was like we were in constant negotiation. And also to pay attention when to finish one gesture and go to another gesture. He was asking to reach, to really feel when the gesture ends. If I lift my fist up and I feel, "here there is power" and it says something, there is a moment when it stops saying anything. This is a moment when I shift for the hand to go down.

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5 Min dit que c'est la première fois de sa vie qu'il chorégraphie une séquence de mouvements. C'est fort probable. A l'époque du Maï-Juku je ne me souviens pas qu'il ait jamais chorégraphié au sens habituel du terme.

He called this scene “ manifestation ”. He asked yes it’s really a body which manifests. It’s empty of expression in the face but it is the body with a very clear suggestive gestures which manifests something.

After this scene there was a scene coming quite near the end. The end came in the quite last days of the period of work. He was planning to write the script before we start the last period but then his friend was dying. And he went to the hospital and spent all his time with him. He did not write the script and then he thought of this last scene in the very very end. Five days before the premiere we started this. Maybe a bit more.

It was a scene where the women were going away, they went changing the costumes to become soldiers. And there was this soldier duet. Actually I did not see how they created this duet. Maybe one morning they met and they did it. Actually it was super beautiful. It was very decisive with some pain inside, also some wild gestures.

Rin had to dance some quality of falling and catching herself. And Vera, she was really dancing these movements but it was still really contemporary dance movements. She is coming from that background. I was seeing that something was appearing. Hard to name it. I was really seeing “ oh this movement or that movement is not what is expected ”, even though she did really well. It’s even hard to describe. Anyway, they had this duet.

It also had this dramatic music. I’ll tell you about the music later because they also composed the music especially for that. They were two composers.

When they would finish this scene, at the end of this scene Min was upstairs and he would raise one child. He would have light on himself because in *Archa Theatre* there is this tribune up for the audience to see. In the middle there are staircase to go up. He was on that staircase in the upper stage of it. To raise a girl on his shoulders. He had a boy in his arm. They were around five years old. And then we would start shouting “ Ahoï ha hey ” as if shouting for these children. And we were in the very back stage. It would be kind of full connection between the very ends of the theater space, between the stage and the far away space. They were in the very upper part and we were in the lower part at the end of the stage. This stage was kind of complex, I can tell you after.

I forgot to tell. In the children’s scene, the stage would come, be moved on the same level<sup>6</sup>. Whole the time before the middle of the stage was lifted. Before that Min at some point, would start walking toward the darkness. Then the stage would start going down and the curtain would drop. So the scene with children and then would come two workers, real workers. They pick up the curtain, they would go away. That’s when we would start being the children. At first we

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6 Dans le *Sacre du Printemps* 90 Richard Serra installa une scène mobile dont l’angle et la hauteur variaient selon les besoins ; cf Fonds Christine Quiraud, médiathèque Cnd

would follow their action, and gradually we would become ourselves the young girls. And after the curtain we would look to the ground until the sound would suggest we can start to look up, one by one.

Ok so I come back where I stopped with the shouting to the children.

Min with the children would come down and we would start walking in a kind of circle. He told us this story: he was on an island (I don't remember which one) where people had decided to live, like thousands years before our time, wearing no clothes. They said they knew about the outside world from where they are living. They said they are kind of "observing this world". They are not into going there. On this island, Min observed their dance. They danced super primitively. They stepped towards the ground and they go in a circle and then they go a bit faster and then they clap hands and talking all together and like meeting in the middle and going outside. Then he suggested that would be our choreography, walking and feeling the ground. This is the moment when women joined us, plus the two soldiers and the children. We would go in a circle. The basic directive he gave us is the joy of living. He would say it as something really nice.

So we would do the circle for 7 or 8 circles. Then he would live the circle and it would be a sign of the last circle. We would stop, come to a normal position and start walking backwards. The children would be walking not really slow but not in a hurry, would walk around us and they would come and shake our arms. And we would only look downwards like if we were dying. And then we would stop and start collapsing. In about three steps we would fast collapse and merge out. The children would walk around trying to understand what's happening either looking to us or shake heads or hit us a bit. And they would do this for quite some while. And then we were all on the ground flat and they would still do it until Min would give them a sign that they would stand facing the audience for a while. And then Min and Nao would just close the curtain. And then the children would open the curtain. And that was that.

I forgot there was one scene which was happening before the soldiers, it was another circle dance choreographed like folkloric dance. Folkloric steps. In this circle another girl could not walk. He was really cautious how to make this group movement then taking a person who cannot do the movement cause of the legs. I found very interesting how to deal with that.

She really could not walk, she had this injury from the age of three years old. She was not capable of using her legs. In the second scene she was on the ground most of the scene and he gave some comments super powerful. As "never be faster" always "better take time" so that she would not look like leading the group. Because if we were fast she would not be aware of it and she could never been seen. In this scene she was in the middle and we were around like a happy glory dance around.

Let's talk about the music. It was created by two musicians one Japanese named Nao. He has been working for quite a while with Min. He was working as sound technician after he finished at university and Min took him to a trip to China. He asked him to join. And they went to old festivals, like traditional dance festivals. He started playing lots of different things, different objects like also some primitive instruments also lots of stones, sticks. He just collects lots of this stuff and play with them. He is also very interesting. He said he never wanted to play an instrument and he was always curious of sounds. I think in Japan he is doing installations. Kind of visual artist and also working with sounds in his installation. Super cool.

There was another composer from Prague, Ian, working with electronics composing with style. He was a dj actually. They both recorded a lot of sounds from body. This is how they start composing. In the children scene Mow was together with us playing these sounds. I think it was very challenging for him.

Min was super gentle with us but with Nao he was quite harsh. The body expression when he addressed in Japanese changed so much. He asked him to be completely naïve and innocent when making these sounds and I think it was quite challenging for him. ...body sounds in the dead body scene, sometimes super loud sounds. Some people left at the premiere during the performance.

Ch : Thank you for giving the time to tell that story.