2.3.1 Bodies in transit

In *Women's intercultural performance*, Julie Holledge and Joanne Hopkins propose a reading of the female body as a place of intercultural encounter, an encounter that occurs in the flesh. They define interculturalism as "the meeting at the time of performance of two or more cultural traditions, a temporary fusion of styles and/or techniques and/or cultures" (2000, p. 7). To give out this interpretation, they define three kinds of bodies in the performative situation: 1) the body of the performer, while "natural element" (a subjective body located in a historic time and a defined geographical space, incorporating an ethical and beliefs of a certain place); 2) the performative body as an "artificial or imposed term" in which we recognize a genre or performative tradition, which involves the coding of a body language and vocalization (acquired through the study and practice of specific techniques, usually involving rigor and discipline) and 3) the body of the audience, made of individuals (separate bodies), but which are a collective body that shares the same ethos momentarily (HOLLEDGE; HOPKINS, 2000).

This material serves us as an analytical instrument to consider the mode of production of Reinventing SITA performance (originally entitled only SITA), a co-production between two Mexican artists and a Singaporean one premiered in 2011. The performance originates from the Hindu character Sita (Rama's wife, from the famous epic *Ramayana*). Traditionally, Sita\(^1\) represents the ideal woman and wife who carries a predetermined "destination", but the ambiguities, the contrasts and hidden conflicts in its history served as a motto for the construction of this performance, which explores facets of women's experiences in the Mexican and Singaporean societies, transposing the original argument for current demands and issues of the feminine universe. The production takes as its starting point the cultural identity (how can two cultures come together in a contemporary setting?\(^2\)), experience in India and the training of the actresses

\(^1\) Here we find the echo of a feminist trend in contemporary artistic practice: the search, review and possible creation of archetypes and myths female reviewed in the scene (as the great archetypes of civilization are male).

\(^2\) ROZA, 2011, interview to Marisa Naspolini.
involved: Elizabeth de Roza\textsuperscript{3} (Singapore) is trained in Kalari Payatu\textsuperscript{4}, Eugenia Cano Puga\textsuperscript{5} (Mexico) is trained in Kathakali\textsuperscript{6} (the third member, Itzel Rodríguez Macías, who is a musician, just joined the cast at the end of the process).

The performance was conceived and prepared in five face meetings in different countries (Cuba, Denmark, Brazil, India and Mexico), as well as numerous virtual meetings. The actresses intended to develop a collaborative work through an encounter between two cultures seeking common ground (we can find a third culture present, Hindu, through the techniques inscribed in the body). From the issues raised by "being in transit", by the search for in-between (the state of in-betweness, according to Roza) as a space of creation and discovery, by the tensions between tangibility and intangibility of the creative process, the actresses searched for "similarities in difference" (ROZA 2011, interview to Marisa Naspolini).

The body language worked in this context as an intergestural and intercultural translation element. For Brook, the gesture would be the land of universal meeting between actors from different cultures. Thus, an intercultural practice necessarily implies a confrontation between gesturalities (BROOK apud PAVIS, 2008). The body would be, in this perspective, the site of intercultural encounter: the performative body of the actresses, cast based on their own training put in relation with the universe of the other.

The work was built from an undefined transit situation, found on trips, on journeys, in the space between the departure and the arrival, the origin and the destination, the beginning and the end. According to the actresses, a transitional space located in lounges, waiting rooms, hotel lobbies, in places where "you are not actually at home. You haven't arrived yet. You have left home but you still haven't arrived to a new home. So you are in-between."

\textsuperscript{3} Elizabeth de Roza is a performer and a director. At the moment she coordinates the undergraduate program in Theatre and Performance at LASALLE College of the Arts. In 2006, he participated in the Magdalena Singapore organization.

\textsuperscript{4} Kalari Payatu is an Indian martial art from Kerala, in southern India, considered a precursor of all martial arts developed in the region. Training includes punching, kicking, grappling and weapons techniques.

\textsuperscript{5} Eugenia Cano Puga is a founding actress of Kalipatos Theatre group, active in the city of Guanajuato. Her background includes Corporeal Mime studies in Canada and Kathakali in India. In 2011, she participated in the organization of Siete Caminos / The Magdalena Project, first Magdalena meeting held in Mexico.

\textsuperscript{6} Kathakali is a classical form of dance theater, from Kerala, in southern India, whose elements are structured in an extremely codified form, implying a broadly stylized acting of the actor.
(ABRAMOVIC apud PHELAN, 2004, p. 21). At its premiere, the work was still carrying a mismatch between the proposal and the actual realization of a corporeality located in "a threshold, a field of intersection of material and symbolic forces; it is a surface where multiple codes of power and knowledge are inscribed" (BRAIDOTTI, 1991 apud THOMPKINS, 2000, p. 110).

Roza recounts the various stages of the creative process and says it was not "the work itself" which led to impasses, but the negotiation processes that reveal the difficulties and interfaces of transculturality, which took place at several levels: in the creative process in transit; in the search for a common psychophysical language and for a feminine representation that would make sense both in Mexico and in Singapore; in rehearsals and research conducted in other countries; in the difficulties with the language (initially neither mastered the language of the other) and the distance, beyond the technical issues, such as defining technical team (of which country would be the set designer and videomaker?, among other questions) and the need to get permission for a nude scene with local authorities, since it was the first time in the Singapore theater a woman stood naked on stage.

Reinventing SITA was performed in a circular space with the audience in the middle while the performers circulate, occupying niches without fixity. The spatial configuration also formed by several projection screens, impacts and is provocative, but in the course of the show proved a bit inefficient because it prevented the viewer's vision, hampering the transformation of the audience in a cohesive "collective body". The intense exchange of e-mails that marked the process of creation and the rehearsals is presented as part of the corpus of the performance through projections on the screen, setting a dialogic logic in the sense that Bakhtin gives to the term. Dialogism as a principle of otherness that guides the discursive activities, through the continuing influence of the word of the other in the construction of statements: a negotiation between othernesses which results in a polyphonic discourse, here understood as a fundamentally bodily statement, which is revealed in the scene (BAKHTIN, 1997, p. 318).

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7 I watched the performance's premiere, during Siete Caminos Congress / Magdalena Mexico Festival, in Guanajuato, in July 2011. After that, the work made new submissions, made changes in the title and in the scene and tried new scenic settings, which may have resulted in alteration of some aspects I'm stressing here.
The construction of the performance through distance demanded the development of a number of strategies relating to aspects of creation and production. The three artists exchanged tasks among themselves, ranging from the launch of questions and answers related to thematic aspects to the definition of images that would be recorded in locations in both countries. Braidotti refers to transit spaces which constituted part of the work (lounges, trains, buses, areas of check-in) as interstitial zones where "the bonds are suspended and the time is stretched as a kind of continuous present". "Oasis of nonbelonging, spaces of detachment. No-(wo)man’s lands." (BRAIDOTTI, 1994, p. 19). Privileged spaces for the creation of the contemporary artist, who also finds in the virtual space an area for performance, challenging conventional notions of presence and absence.
The two performance works described above problematize, in very different ways, theater's relations with distances and virtuality through scenic proposals that hold the inter/transcultural meeting through remote collaboration between geographically distant individuals. In the first case, we see female performative bodies beyond national borders seeking for a place in the "beyond" as an intervention space in the here and now (BHABHA, 1998, p. 27). In the second case, a female body that interacts with technology, proposing other media for the theatrical creation. In this context it is possible to think about the notion of cultural translation as "an ongoing process that helps while constitutes the co-habitation of people who can not even occupy the same space, let alone delineate the common space in its own, different ways." The act of translation, which in theater goes through the bodies of the performers and the spectators' senses, makes its partners to emerge from this meeting different from who they were before, since they were transformed by the experience (BAUMAN, 2012, p. 74).