

Global Drifts Report

global drifts: a streamed performative event devised by Sarah Rubidge in collaboration with Hellen Sky as part of *accented body*; Brisbane International Festival, Australia; Siobhan Davies Studios, London, New Media Gallery, Seoul.

global drifts was a streamed performative event that linked ideas of body and environment by connecting international urban architectures through the fluid systems of internet streaming networks. It was one of six performance and installation projects taking place within *accented body*, a distributed site-specific performative event conceived and directed by Dr Cheryl Stock (Queensland University of Technology [QUT], Brisbane) for the Brisbane International Festival 2006. (www.accentedbody.com) The six site-specific works were created for the project by five independent groups of artists and Cheryl Stock draw on the theme of the *accented body*.

Collaborative team

global drifts is a collaboration between 7 artists led by Sarah Rubidge (henceforth referred to using the first person pronoun). I was overall director of the project and was responsible for the development and choreographic shaping of the digital imagery that spreads across the Brisbane site and the digital image system in London; Hellen Sky of Company in Space (Melbourne) was responsible for the live choreography in Brisbane; HyoJung Seo (Samsung Art and Design Institute, Korea) was responsible for the installation and digital imagery in the *global drifts* site in *Seoul* and the interactive digital imagery in the *global drifts* performance event in Brisbane; Seunghye Kim (PhD Student University of Florida) was responsible for the interactive sound in the installation in *Seoul* and the interactive sound in the *global drifts* performance event in Brisbane; Stan Wijnans of the Netherlands (and University of Chichester) was responsible for the sound in London, and contributed, through streaming, to the *global drifts* sound environment in Brisbane. The project also involved two performer-choreographers, Liz Lea (London/Sydney) and Bridget Fiske (Brisbane).

Theme

The interpretation of the 'accented' body that underpins *global drifts* draws on the notion that exchange of ideas, sensibilities and knowledge between cultures transforms both physicalities and understandings. Our conceit was that originally this occurred through the ships that travelled the oceans of the world, through caravans travelling along trade routes such as the Silk Route, and more recently through train and air travel. We then proposed that in the 21st century it occurs more and more frequently through electronic networks. In order to accommodate these differing means of exchange into its thinking *global drifts* drew on both physical pathways generated by live performers and audiences and the virtual pathways of electronic imagery.

Role of *global drifts* in *accented body*

The role *global drifts* assumed in *accented body* was in part to serve as the connective network between the individual performance/installation sites at QUT, in part to extend the *accented body* event from the local to the global domain.

Using live and virtual means it connected the individual sites within the QUT Creative Industries Precinct to each other and the event itself to partner centres in London (Siobhan Davies Studios) and Seoul (Triad New Media Gallery). In *global drifts*, through collaboration with artists and organizations in London and Seoul a local and global streaming infrastructure was devised to facilitate the dynamic distribution of performers and digital media through live imagery, digital projections and sonic environments in the three international sites. Still and video images, collected from each geographical site and from internet sites such as NASA, were created for offline libraries. There were also live camera feeds in each venue. The latter were used both to generate imagery on-site and tracking data derived from the movement of viewers and/or performers. The data was used to modulate sonic and/or visual imagery in realtime. Sound systems were developed in each site which were connected to the internet. Through the internet the data derived from all these systems were combined and layered and then altered through the movement and presence of performers and/or audience using either Isadora, MaxMSP or Jitter. The interweaving of sound and imagery in space and time

occurred both locally and globally. These distributed 'virtual' environments interconnect and infiltrate the different physical locations which housed *global drifts*, sustaining the themes inherent within the notion of the 'accented' body not only in Brisbane but also in London, and Seoul. The three sites intermittently sent and received one stream of data, some visual, some aural, some motion tracking information.

Through the use of these strategies *global drifts* became a choreography of live and virtual media, occurring as a durational event across geographies, culture, time, and space. The public spaces in each of the *global drifts* sites became animated through audio-visual projections shimmering on the architectural skins of buildings. In this way the buildings became reflective windows to new perspectives of altered 21st century bodies, and to global presences and memories. *global drifts* exploited the invisible grids created by electronic devices and networking systems, as well as images of the trajectories of air traffic and the changing flows of climatic elements within its structures. These conduits for flows of information, knowledge, and ideas, became the system through which the broader themes of *global drifts* were articulated. We took the position that although electronic flows are invisible to the eye they are felt by both body and environment, with both virtual and physical architectures leaving accents and traces that fold and crease our experience of real and virtual states of perception. These constant exchanges, which we see as 21st Century global tides, continually distributed and redistributed locations of memory, transformations of society, history, languages, notions of distance, time and place altering and affecting our sense of being in the world, and extending these accents, and the personal body, beyond the confines of the physical world, into the virtual space of electronic networks. We took the position that as we experience these changes in memory, culture and information, our perceptions are transformed, our senses expanded. This leads to new understandings of a once familiar world.

global drifts used all of these notions as its starting points, and as the rationale for the distributed structures that it developed. Using live performance, interactive imagery and sound and streaming technologies it explored the reciprocal flows between technological arteries, alongside the conduits between the bodies, places, histories and cultures inherent within them, in particular addressing their effects on the notion of the accented body. Each member of the collaboration took responsibility for their own area of concern, and for the installations in each site. I was co-director (with Hellen Sky) of *global drifts* Brisbane, and director and creator of *global drifts* London. I was also overall director of *global drifts* as a multi-sited streamed event.

global drifts systems

With respect to my specific contribution to *global drifts*, the imagery developed for the piece was organised and programmed by me. It was drawn both from off-line libraries and from live video imagery captured and displayed in realtime during the performance/installation events. The offline library drew on video footage of: natural phenomena (e.g. clouds, water); pre-recorded video footage (filmed on-site) of the dancers from each country involved in the project; the creators of the project; the architecture of each site and audience members within it. Images of dancers and audience members were also captured live during the performances and installation events which made up *global drifts* and integrated into the digital imagery that emerged from the skins of the buildings as the installations/performance events were running. All video footage was radically processed in real-time in six *Isadora* systems, devised by me in such a way as to modulate the imagery using live video processing. Some of the processed natural imagery was highly abstract, often overlaid with hints of the body in motion. The latter emerged and disappeared through a background of, say, simulations of aeroplane flight paths and network maps, skies and galaxies, sea and water, the bodies of other dancers, architectures within the *global drifts* sites. Much of this imagery, when processed, referenced or hinted at notions of the accented body in one way or another.

global drifts Brisbane, London, Seoul

In London and Seoul the visual imagery, some of which was streamed from other sites was played through a round portal, a visual indication that it was being routed through conduits originating in other parts of the world. The imagery was projected onto walls, floors and/or

windows in each of these sites. In **London** the portals appeared on a wall and a small window in the foyer of Siobhan Davies Studios. I created a double portal for London, in which live imagery of people passing through and dancing in the foyer of Siobhan Davies Studios on the way to class, or during rehearsal periods, was captured, processed through Isadora and replayed in the portal, and at the same time overlaid with other video images, some streamed in live from Brisbane during the *accented body* performance event. The latter allowed people in London to dance 'with' both themselves and with people from Brisbane simultaneously. *global drifts, London* also has a non-linear sound environment, created in Max/MSP by Stan Wijnans. In **Seoul** Hyojung Seo and Seunghye Kim created an installation in which interactive *global drifts* portals appeared the floor of the Triad New Media Gallery displaying digital imagery created by Hyojung Seo, and in two windows to the gallery. The portals on the window could be seen both from inside the gallery and from the street below. The portals in London and Seoul shared imagery with the events in Brisbane and London.

In **Brisbane**, the distributed installation I created comprised nine *global drifts* portals and screens, run by five independent Isadora systems each with its own characteristics. These were distributed around the *accented body* site. The *global drifts* digital imagery appeared on two immense screens (some 10m x 7m) overlooking a main open site in QUT (The Parade Ground), and on a even larger screen that comprised the side wall of the Block (20m x 20m). It also appeared on 6 round portals, 5 on different walls and windows of the buildings that surround the Parade Ground. One, which we called a 'wormhole' was created from white sand, grey gravel and quartz on the floor in the centre of the Parade Ground. Each screen could display repetitions of a composite image, or could be used separately to display different flows of images (generated from the different Isadora systems). That imagery from two of the Isadora systems which was displayed in a rectangular frame was distributed intermittently to the five rectangular screens. The imagery from the other three Isadora systems, which were displayed in round frames, could be distributed to all nine screens/portals. Both the large screens and the round portals were choreographed as a totality, aleatorically alternating 'unison' imagery on some or all screens with independent imagery on each screen. The whole (composite) 'system' was composed to flow together as a whole, and become incorporated into the flow of the large-scale live and digital choreography of images that permeated the *accented body* site.

Some of the imagery on the screens in *Brisbane* incorporated live elements as in London, some reflected the activities of one or other of the performances developed by other teams of artists, some combined the two. (The imagery devised for one portal which was related to the performance event developed by the 'Ether' team has subsequently been incorporated into a touring version of that piece.) The individual flows of imagery within each Isadora system, each of which incorporated imagery drawn from each of the individual *accented body* works, was structured in real-time into an integrated virtual choreography of time and space which was distributed across the *accented body* site. The portals therefore became both a means of creating a connectivity between the individual events that comprised *accented body*, and a digital choreography in its own right. The choreographed flow of digital imagery was additionally designed to interweave with a flow of live performative interventions which occurred throughout *accented body* (these were devised and developed by Hellen Sky as part of *global drifts* and by Cheryl Stock as part of *accented body*). The performers here were drawn from the individual events, appearing as the event progressed as residues and/or harbingers of the multitude of events that formed up *accented body*.

Finally, *global drifts* in *Brisbane* incorporated a discrete 10 minute interactive performance event developed by Hyojung Seo (interactive digital imagery), Seunghye Kim (interactive sound) and Hellen Sky (choreography). Performed by Liz Lea and Bridget Fiske digital imagery (created in Jitter) was processed in realtime using the movement of the dancers as the factors that modulate the imagery and sound. The resulting imagery was distributed to the Block and Parade Ground screens and to some of the round portals. The sound was also processed in realtime. This was both localised in the performance area and distributed around the Parade Ground site, where the audience gathered to watch the *global drifts* performance. [Hyojung Seo and Seunghye Kim became interested in interactive performance after attending the Performance and Technology Workshops I ran in Seoul 2002-5. It was as a result of this that they became involved in *global drifts*.]

At the same time as the *global drifts* imagery was being distributed in Brisbane, the non-linear *global drifts* sound environment created for London by Stan Wijnans was streamed into the *accented body* site direct from London. When received in Brisbane it was integrated into the non-linear network of sound devised for *accented body* by Tim Humphries and Madelaine Flynn (the sound artists from the 'Ether' team). Wijnan's sound imagery had first been processed in London in realtime using live motion tracking data derived from the movement of Korean audience members at *global drifts, Seoul*, was streamed in from the Seoul site). The sound from London became a tenth *global drifts* 'portal' in the *accented body* site. However, in a similar fashion to the *global drifts* digital imagery and choreographic pathways and interventions, the sound developed by Humphries and Flynn was also distributed around the *accented body* site to create connections between the six individual performance/installation events that made up the *accented body* event.

Like the visual imagery the sound from the different events in *accented body* became part of a distributed sound event linked by other locally and globally streamed sonic events. These were co-ordinated by Tim Humphries. The *global drifts, London* sound environment thus became part of the *accented body* soundscape.

Global drifts as a Deleuzian rhizome

Global drifts then, was more than a single piece, more even than a distributed piece. Rather, it comprised networks of different scales nested within one another, which connected and disconnected with each other in a non-linear fashion, always interweaving with other networks in a Deleuzian Rhizome. Sarah Rubidge oversaw the interweaving of these networks within networks, which comprised several different media (still and moving images, live performance, sound, visual design), devising an overarching (conceptual) system that accommodated the networks at all scales, enabling this complex network to interweave at both global and local levels into a single event. The artistic starting points and nuances of the artistic content of the projections, choreographic imagery and sonic environment lay at the heart of the piece, however. These drove the specificities of the development of the various systems that made *global drifts* possible, and generated the need for new systems (technological and compositional) to be designed to fulfil its purposes. All this constituted a central part of the research undertaken during *global drifts*.

Another (hidden) aspect of the project, which allowed the rhizomatic structure to evolve, and constituted a *contribution to knowledge* in the field, concerns the technology used to distribute the sound and digital imagery around the site. The Creative Industries Precinct at QUT was designed to have this potential from the start, the skeleton of the technology (e.g. connecting points, AMX system, etc. which enabled the distribution of imagery from 5 Isadora patches across 9 screens at any time) having been in place when the cabling system was built. However prior to *global drifts* the technology had only been used to distribute imagery from one or two digital sources across the three main screens (Block and Parade Ground). During the development of *global drifts*, the production manager Daniel Maddison worked with me on extending the potential of the distribution of imagery by responding directly to my desires for the imagery to be distributed to multiple locations across the site in a free-flowing, non-linear manner. He designed and developed a complex system of connections between projectors and computers which linked 9 outputs (9 projectors) to 5 inputs (5 computers). This technological matrix allowed imagery from one computer input to be distributed at the press of a button (under my control) to any one of the outputs suitable to that imagery (e.g. square imagery to square screens, round imagery to both square and round screens). This collaboration pushed the skeleton of the Matrix at QUT far beyond previously imagined uses, and given Maddison not only ideas and visions for other systems that could be developed in the future, but also the technological capability of doing so through the 1.3 kilometres of cabling purchased for this project. Maddison's non-linear system of input/output was for him a personal research project, and was made possible by the vision that drove *global drifts* and the collaboration between artist and production manager we established.

Sarah Rubidge 2006