

**Pat HOFFIE: Been there and back again**

Author

Platz, Bill

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## PAT HOFFIE

Been there and back again

*William Platz*

**ABOVE AND OPPOSITE: Pat Hoffie (with Stefan Purcell) *Fugue For Salvaging Drowned Memories*, 2009–10, in *Utopia, Dystopia, Disturbia* for the Woodford Folk Festival. © Patricia Elizabeth Hoffie/Licensed by Viscopy, 2015**

Recently, Pat Hoffie and I were discussing her installation event *Fugue for Salvaging Drowned Memories* staged at the 2009–10 Woodford Folk Festival (Woodfordia, Jinibara Nation). The conversation meandered around issues of work, performativity, participation and documentation when she interrupted a thought to declare, quite conclusively, “You have to have been there.” This grammatically unwieldy but common colloquial phrase perfectly articulates a host of concerns over live performance, site-specific works, collaboration, participation, interactivity and performative immediacy. Although her work is overtly concerned with issues of labour, the subtext that leaks out from each of her performative installations is the tension between “having been there” and “having been elsewhere”.

Had you been there, you would have seen floating: a cello, two violins, horsehair bows, a chair and two upright pianos all moving and pumping at different rhythms in a shallow pond. After seven days, at the festival’s end, the mournful instruments were set alight to burn slowly while they continued to play. In 2014 Hoffie installed a functional skate ramp inside the Ipswich Art Gallery. Reiterating a recurrent motif in her work, the entire room was recreated to directly reference El Lissitzky’s 1923 Proun Room. Titled *Immaterial Labour (Skatebowl/Prounroom)*, the work invited local residents to bring their decks to the gallery and drop into the mini ramp while GoPro footage of the skaters was broadcast on video screens secreted within the black Russian Constructivist panels of the design. Although well documented, as all of her work is, Hoffie’s carefully curated still photographs and edited videos that often carry the same titles as the installations/events can hardly be confused for the first-order experience of the work. Local community requires local presence, and to not have been there is to remain alien to that experience.

I encountered Hoffie’s work for the first time – soon after arriving in Australia – at an elaborate event staged at Brisbane’s Fort Lytton titled *Troop Drill* (2009). In the late afternoon, a large crowd gathered to drink and chat, and at sunset, we formed a procession to walk through the darkness into the staging area at the rear of the fort. The imposing structure sunken into the berm, equestrian troop drills, projections, bagpipes, an electric guitar solo (a Fender doomed to be smashed against the stone mass of the fort) ... How does one begin to articulate the atmosphere and chaotic momentum? Having been there is a contingent phenomenon. The overwhelming experiences of such an event are immersion and mob, and neither can be felt in solitude or through the mobile screen.





**Pat HOFFIE** *Troop Drill*, 2009, for the arc Festival, Brisbane.  
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Yokohama, Teerk Roo Ra Island, Peel Island, Fort Lytton, Woodfordia ... the places that have been inhabited by HOFFIE's performative strategies require pursuit and initiation. It isn't necessary to rehash the ongoing terms of the debates in performance and participatory art between the live-ists and the archive-ists. The analyses and arguments of scholars such as Peggy Phelan, Claire Bishop, Anne Marsh and Philip Auslander are well-known and often cited. Marsh, in a 2008 article on the work of Jill Orr, frames the performance/documentation issue as the "having to have been there' argument". Can the work extend and penetrate beyond your having been there? Can you know its performative dimension in five-minute videos and handfuls of small, digital photographs? If you had been there, you may have encountered something ineffable – that thing that goes around corners and finds itself in the empty cages dangling in the forest or the shredded horsehair soaked by rain hanging like a dead thing's fur from the end of a bow. If you had been there, you may have moved in the uneasy space of collaboration, participation and performativity. You may have felt the quiet roughness when people interact in rough spaces with rough ideas of what is happening.

It is the impulse that drives throngs to the old museum to see a picture "in person", the same impulse that motivates a longing to participate and make something happen? The performative turn in contemporary practice, exemplified by this aspect of HOFFIE's body of work, necessitates an active, subjective role in the constitutive experience of the work. To be a passive commentator is anathema. This circumstance doesn't preclude second order experiences – the experiences of the derivative documents and artefacts that extend from the event. Although in no way equivalent to the live experience of the installation, neither is the live event equivalent to the experience of these discreet mediated forms. HOFFIE's elaborate video documents utilise effects such as superimposition, sophisticated montage techniques



**Pat HOFFIE** *BABELproJEKT, The Three Towers*, Woodford Folk Festival 2010–11.  
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and precise scoring. You would rather – to be sure – but you won't be stifled in your engagement with the work by an inflexible bias towards the performed experience. *BABELproJEKT* (2011) was a collaborative monument to the folly of towers written through Vladimir Tatlin's unrealised utopian ornament, the titular Biblical heresy and Gustave Eiffel's iron spire. A victim of horrendous flooding, the work manifests in an utterly alternate form as a video document titled *BABELproJEKT: The Three Towers (In Praise of Folly)*. A paean to the spirit of those that built in the rain and the mud, and then endured to participate and dismantle, the



documentary footage is layered over intertitles describing the event – images of folly, ruin and time, and a percussive electronic score. Would you rather have been there in the pouring rain, stranded and beset by the worst flooding in memory, while the waters tore away at so many things? Towers rise and fall, like the river – a plain thing that you don't have to be there to understand.

It is a simple and impressive matter to consider Hoffie's performative output: the commissioned works in Southeast Asia; the festivals, installations, and symposia; the site-specific works in galleries, parks and heritage institutions;

and the residencies and exchanges that have served as places of participation and becoming. To speak of an exclusive audience for these works is reductive and strange. Although, in some moments, she may believe that you have to have been there, when confronted, even now, with a truly performative work, there is no elsewhere.

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Pat Hoffie is a visual artist and Professor, Queensland College of Art, Director of SECAP (Sustainable Environment through Culture, Asia-Pacific) and UNESCO Orbicom Chair in Communications, Griffith University | [www.pathoffie.com.au](http://www.pathoffie.com.au)

William Platz is a visual artist, writer and lecturer in Drawing and Art Theory at the Queensland College of Art, Brisbane.