

THE FOLEY DIARIES

By Kareth Schaffer

As part of a two-month-long dance research residency in Düsseldorf called “Tanzrecherche #15, Unheard of: The Performative Possibilities of Foley Artist Labour”, I completed a one-week internship with George Hapig, foley artist extraordinaire, in September 2014. Before looking at foley as an interesting performative or physical practice, it was important to me to learn what constitutes proper foley from the point of view of an expert, and in this endeavour George proved to be a generous, if irascible, partner.



The 'außen' 'unten' mic and lady shoes

The Diaries are a series of emails I sent to my collaborator, Boglarka Börscsök, and contain the notes I made each day as I learned more and more about this little-known craft. As most anthropologists have experienced in the field, my notes became shorter as the week progressed: what was confusing or incomprehensible at the beginning of the week was common-sense knowledge by the end of it, and thus no longer drew my attention. Indeed, some of the information presented here is quite wrong—something I could only notice as I edited the emails at the end of the residency, when I myself had understood more about foley. As the Diaries don't intend to be a 'how-to' guide to foley, but rather a presentation of a certain period from our quite extensive research, I've left the factual mistakes uncorrected...not all of foley's secrets can or should be revealed in a text written by a choreographer with a whole different motivation.

Happy reading,

Kareth Schaffer

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From: **Kareth Schaffer** <[REDACTED]>
Date: Tue, Sep 30, 2014 at 1:12 AM
Subject: Foley Diary, Day One!
To: BOGLÁRKA BÖRCSÖK <[REDACTED]>

Hey dear,

I am writing this to you so that maybe, maybe I will be able to write something a bit more coherent than if I were only noting stuff down for myself. It is now 00.35 and I have been thinking about foley for the last 10 hours.

Important thing to note no. 1: Foley artists are workaholics.

I arrive at the Foley Lounge at 14.00. George Hapig is just about to start his work on episode 5, season 6 of the BBC 3 series *Some Girls*. He is doing the foley in the foley pit for the rest of the day. His *Tonmeisterin* ('sound master'), Dina, is behind the mixer in the recording room and I am watching over her shoulder. We are watching George through a window to the foley pit. Dina and George communicate over PA. (We are using the recording room for television, the recording room for film is in the basement; in that case George and his recordist cannot see each other and communicate solely over PA, and by watching the same video material.)

Today we are doing footsteps. Foley is done in batches, usually in a specific order: first footsteps, then props, then 'body motion' (moving bodies are always foleyed, regardless of whether they would make a sound or not IRL). For this particular episode, however, the prop sounds are already done. Neither Dina nor one of the other regular recordists were available to do the recordings, so George had to do it with his friend, Stephan the mechanic, in the recording room, and for whatever reason it was more expedient to do the props sounds first.¹ So now we do footsteps. According to George, Dina does *Raum* ('space') like no other, and she is indeed a demon on the mixer. In the foley pit itself, George has one 'static' microphone and three *Raum* (spatial) microphones, and Dina's ability to do *Raum* refers to her imitation of near and far sounds, inside and outside sounds, by mixing the emphasis on the different microphones.

The 'outside' microphone is *furz trocken* ('fart dry'), that is to say, with no echo. The amount of echo for an inside sound is decided by the recordist. The foley artist stays in one place for doing the footsteps, and if, for example, the walker on the screen is moving from background to foreground, or from inside to outside, the sound of this will be controlled by the recordist behind the mixer: the person doing foley stays in one place, doing one sound.

Making footsteps is done with one leg; also because it is then easier to do two people at once. George has about thirty pairs of shoes at his disposal, most 20+ years old, all sorted into *Männer* ('men') and *Weiber* ('dames') containers (if they are not strewn about the studio floor). The women's shoes don't look like women's shoes, they are men's shoes. George has many different floors at his disposal: parquet floor or attic or sand or gravel or carpet or thicker gravel or brick or linoleum or concrete (for outside scenes). One interesting thing is that in Britain there are fewer basements than in Germany: this is reflected in how he must record the sounds: for British productions he must have a hollow sound, so the surfaces must be above air, for German productions he just puts the floor covering on the floor of the studio and walks on that.

We do every footstep. Every main character has her own signature step, every location (the school corridor, the football pitch, the café) has its own special *Raum* sound, determined by the mixer *and* the ground on which is being tread. Lawn, for example, is done with a welcome mat under a mat of fake grass under a fleece sweater. People in the background/foreground, the extras of the film, are referred to as 'pass-bys', and except in very crowded scenes are still basically done individually--I am told even more so in films than for a television show like *Some Girls*.

There are three rhythms for doing footsteps for two people at once: synchronous (heel-to-toe both feet at the same time), syncopated, or a-synchronous. According to George, two normal people walking together will continuously go through these three patterns. One person is foleyed with

¹ Update: footsteps are more difficult to record because the recordist must create the illusion of movement on the mixing board; props, being (usually) stationary, are easier.

one foot, another with the other foot. Other foot sounds includes scuffing and sliding. You must be sitting in order to do two people at once.

Extremely irregular footsteps, resulting from a fight, drunks, etc, is referred to as *dadeln*.

Because this was a British production, an extremely long conversation was held about whether one would be able to hear the footsteps of people walking outside a building (but visible through the window of a scene)--the conclusion was that yes, we had to record those also, because in Britain they don't isolate as well as in Germany...

Lord, I have so much more to say, after finishing around 22.00 we went for a drink: George ordered 2 wheat beers with *Herrengedeck* (...vodka) and he told me how he came to be doing foley.

In phrases: He was front of house for Joe Cocker and others, started doing mastering for pornos through an actress friend, went mainstream with British and Dutch television series (but also Colombo), met Beryl Mortimer, grande dame of foley in the UK, because a project he was working on after Colombo thought they *didn't* have to do foley and he said, oh hell yes, and flew her in...(this was in Berlin, UFA studios)...he was recognized as a natural talent for foley, the rest is history....

....George doesn't do many German productions, he says that they don't appreciate (and won't pay for) real foley.

Some things--like the clacking of pans in the cafeteria, or running after a ball in soccer while the scene is focussing on the dialogue in the bleachers--are ambient noises, they are created by *Schleife legen*, taking the sound out of some other episode with similar conditions, or by going through the scene making noises that aren't synchronized with the movement, it's 'just noise'.

The process of making foley is: 1) foley, 2) editing, 3) mixing, that is to say, *after* foley has been done they have someone go over it in editing anyway, because no one can do foley synced to the frame, the editor goes frame by frame to synchronize it, sounds like a hellishly boring job.

I am tired. And super happy to have found myself here to be amongst very easygoing, generous, smart people. YAY!

....and I am going with George and Dina and the locals of the Flut-Graben Bar to Düsseldorf's Oktoberfest this weekend. Be afraid. Be VERY afraid..

MISS YOU!

xo
KS

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kareth Schaffer**

<[REDACTED]>

Date: Wed, Oct 1, 2014 at 12:17 AM

Subject: Foley Diaries, Day Two

To: BOGLÁRKA BÖRCSÖK

<[REDACTED]>

So dear, I have some amendments for yesterday:

Yesterday I gave my foley debut (for BBC3, nonetheless!) in a scene from *Some Girls* where they are eating popcorn. Because George is diabetic and because the only popcorn we could find was sweet, I had to eat it. One basically eats the popcorn as if one were Godzilla: open mouth, loud chewing, lipsmacking allowed. I eat like that all the time so no problem...:)

It does bring me to another point, though, which is that some sounds are of course

picked up in the original recording of the scene with the actors: some footsteps, some chewing noises. Kissing. However, foley is mixed into the so-called 'Music and Entertainment' track that is then sold to foreign countries with the visual material, allowing the dialogue to be dubbed, this is why ALL the sounds, regardless of whether you hear them or not, are re-recorded....which makes for odd listening, because then you have two sets of footsteps, i.e. the O-ton 'Originalton' and the foleyed ones. Or two chewings, etc. I still haven't figured how they get the O-ton sounds *out*, seeing as they are on the same track as the dialogue.

Anyways, today we continued with a new episode of *Some Girls*, this time doing things in the right order: footsteps first. George also explained to me the mic set-up in the foley pit. He works with four microphones: one very sensitive 'inside' mic that is quite near the objects, and two other 'inside' mics: one about four metres away and above where he makes most noises, pointed towards his station (this is for sound in small, cramped rooms), and one pointing *away* from his pit, towards the opposite end of the tall long room: this is the mic for 'big' spaces. These two mics basically pick up the 'Hall' (the echo/reverb), which creates an idea of space in the recordings. Then he has two mics he uses for 'outside': The outside 'under' (as in: literally pointed towards the floor, towards his feet) mic, a very INsensitive microphone (for 'dry' footsteps with no echo or 'space'), and an outside 'above' mic at waist height with which he can record props: this mic has a *Schallisolierung* around it.

I spent the first part of the day with Dina behind the mixer, then went into the foley pit with George. Sitting in the pit actually gave me a good idea of what it is Dina really does: watching



Dina watching George in the foley pit

George doing the footstep from three metres away, you kind of notice that nothing really changes in their sound: obviously, he's standing in place. The illusion of movement through space is done on the mixer. (I knew this in theory, but this is very subtle on an audio level!)

Dina gave me a list of short cuts to use when mixing in Pro tools. Now to only get a Mac and...Pro Tools.

Finally we moved on to props. There are 'claps' (people touching themselves or others, on bare skin or not), 'taps' (people touching objects, like putting their elbows on the table, opening doors), lots of getting up or sitting down on couches and beds, lots of jangling with bags, and then on occasion something exciting like someone breaking a finger (at least in *Some Girls*). It is pretty literal: i.e. if people are scuffing with a chair on screen then George scuffs with a chair in the studio. It still seems what George calls 'bigger than life' and what I would call 'realer-than-real': he makes sounds for *everything*, even the things you wouldn't believe have a sound in real life. This gives him 'depth' in the recording. He does have some extra-squeaky chairs and stools to use so that when people shift position, you HEAR it. I don't know how obvious this is in the final product. There's also a lot of work on what I'd call 'implied' sounds: the sound of a door shutting, even though you only saw it opening in the shot before. Or someone dropping their bookbag on the floor after they've sat down (but the sound happens in the off, i.e. not on screen)

Tomorrow we will do the most 'exciting' props of this episode: a coconut shell being thrown at wall, and someone breaking their finger. We finished at around 23.30, too tired to go on.

Like me now...I even skipped out on the wheat beer! (Also: sitting in the foley pit is pretty stressful cuz you can really even shift positions while they're recording....)

xo
KS

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kareth Schaffer** <[REDACTED]>
Date: Wed, Oct 1, 2014 at 10:45 AM
Subject: Foley Diaries, Day Two (amended)
To: BOGLÁRKA BÖRCsök <[REDACTED]>

Good morning,

I am sure you are getting the impression that this is getting obsessive, but I have some more notes from yesterday. Once I figure out how to load photos onto my computer you'll be completely inundated...

I wanted to say something about the working relationship between Dina and George, because they are very well *ingespielt* with each other, having worked together for almost four years. Dina sits at the mixers (and at the recording station, which is a computer with 2 screens and some other gadgets). She lays the new track, giving it the name of the character or prop that the sound will be for, and then she yells to George over the transmitter something like '*Oké läuft*' and presses the play button, He does the sounds, sometimes doing all the footsteps of one character in a scene (up to three minutes). If he messes up, he groans and yells '*nochmal, von vor der Pause*',

she clicks back to wherever he wants and does it again. They are super fast. Sometime she will make him redo it if she doesn't like the sound, sometimes they both immediately say '*nochmal*' and I feel like a hero if I actually know why. When she takes out the mics Dina says '*ausgeschrieben*' (I think) and then we can move. If Dina rolls the film too far in advance of the sound George wants to make, either he or she will yell 'Holland!' (as in: 'I could walk to Holland and back in the time it will take to get to the point where it is necessary to start recording'. Really.

All right, out for a run and then on to day three! Hope you are having good days!

xo
KS

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From: **Kareth Schaffer** <[REDACTED]>
Date: Thu, Oct 2, 2014 at 9:56 AM
Subject: Foley diaries, day three
To: BOGLÁRKA BÖRCsök <[REDACTED]>

Hey dear,

If I ever start writing action novels, one of the first will be about a foley artist who gets involved in some kind of hostage situation and who saves the day when he realizes the guns the hostage-takers are using *are not real guns* based on the sounds they make. There are a lot of guns lying around the Foley Lounge, large mean guns, definitely breaking some kind of safety regulations even if they are only loaded with blanks, and George says that they are there because the sound that they make (not when being fired, but when being loaded) is so specific, there is simply no alternative. Indeed, when you load one and pull back the part on the top you are supposed to pull back, it has an icy fucking sound that sounds like...sounds cold. Metallic. Dangerous. I know how to load a gun now. And so he has all these guns so that sound and/or gun nerds in the audience won't post about it on the Internet if he foleys a movie and uses the wrong gun. (Apparently, this also happens a lot with cars, which are not usually a foley issue. But someone uses the wrong engine sound for the editing and then gets roasted for it online. This feels like a very masculine activity).

Soooo yesterday I spent in the editing room with George, watching him edit the footsteps, props, and finally 'body motion' of episode 5 of *Some Girls*. Like I think I described before, editing is a pretty painful process involving matching the *frame* in which the heel of the foot appears to hit the ground (or, if the foot is not in view, the point at which the shoulder is lowest--to imitate footsteps, foley artists often look at people's shoulders instead of at their feet) with the footsteps on the audio.

To do this you need to have attained a level of anal retentiveness I have up till now reserved for proofreaders...or people who can identify guns by sound!

George basically re-edited the footsteps, which had already been done by one of his freelancers, with periodic grumbles of dissatisfaction about 'young people today..' A good foley artist can make or break a budget: the more accurate they are, the less time it will cost the editor to edit, and the less expensive the foley is.

Once finished with props and footsteps, we worked on 'body motion', a mysterious thing. First we recorded it, with George sitting and watching the movie and making sounds with a hole-y red apron. The fun started during the editing (possibly because we started this around 23.00)--he would look at the track (which sounds like someone manipulating a cotton apron), then say 'and there! I missed that!' about something very mysterious on the screen. To put it in a nutshell, there needs to be a sound from the apron to correspond with *every movement by every character on the screen*, except for their eyes. Thus George also foleys character movements that would not make a sound in real life: someone turning their head, making a gesture with their hand, etc. He is basically responding to movement in general on the screen, and as he himself says that the level of attention required for this makes him simply react to any movement at all on the screen--he bodymotioned a car passing by or the camera shifting, which then had to be edited out. There is indeed something there, regarding the reactivity of the action, that is important for the idea of foley on the stage.

ALSO: the microphone is turned up so high for body motion, literally every sound that George makes is also recorded—breathing, digesting, and the O-ton he's listening to over headphones included. He edits this out as much as possible, but still: in every movie we watch, somewhere there's a track of some dude breathing heavily while manipulating a cloth apron. Isn't that a great thought.

Finally: the highlights of my day were identifying two missing noises (a potato chip being eaten and someone touching their ribcage) and foleying them. Olé.

MISS YOU!

xo
KS



In the pit: all these things make noises

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kareth Schaffer** <[REDACTED]>
Date: Fri, Oct 3, 2014 at 1:14 PM
Subject: Foley diaries, day four
To: BOGLÁRKA BÖRCSÖK <[REDACTED]>

Good afternoon,

...I'm beginning to feel like my training in anthropology hasn't been for naught, yesterday was another boring-ish day of editing (so no recording, no fun!), so while *Erkenntnisgewinn* from yesterday might not have been as profound as previous days, I went out to a bar afterwards with the objects of study and found out several important things.

This is what is known as 'participant observation'.

1) Foley-ing 17 minutes of film or 25 minutes for TV costs 1750 euros. George is slightly higher than the market price, which is one of the reasons he mainly works in England.

2) The sound of pulling the skin off of someone's body is made by pulling glue off of a carpet. I am sure you really wanted to know this.

3) The three most important foley films of recent years are a) Braveheart, b) Master and Commander, and c) (whoops, forgot c). Braveheart was my favourite movie when I was around 9 years old.

I also found out George was a parachutier (Fallschirmjäger) in the Bundeswehr before being headhunted by the British army, where he served for 8 years. He doesn't like uniforms or backpacks of any kind any more.

In terms of work, yesterday while George was editing props for episode 6, I was upstairs editing another episode of *Some Girls* that had already been sent off, episode 3. It took about 8 hours to do 16 minutes of it. We work with Pro Tools and it was pretty much as I described it before—painstaking, to say the least. I am not so bad at it, sez George.

Today we are recording again, I will be working the mics, (i.e. doing Dina's job). Olé!

xo
KS

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From: **Kareth Schaffer** <[REDACTED]>
Date: Fri, Oct 3, 2014 at 5:24 PM
Subject: Foley Diaries, day five
To: BOGLÁRKA BÖRCsök <[REDACTED]>

Dear Bogi,

so it is now actually day five and I do not have so much to do...we just recorded the last three minutes of *Some Girls* (the props) with me at the recording station. It was basically me trying to stumble through the smooth communication that George and Dina have that I've previously described, and I think I've done okay. Props are easier to record than footsteps, because you don't have to create the illusion of movement through the manipulation of the microphones. We recorded one sound--a door opening--that I tried to record in a way that implied that the room got bigger from the door being open. As the door opened, I basically raised the level of the 'small room' mic so that it would record more for the rest of the scene....the fader's job is a subtle one.

I also discussed with George what he thinks will be a good audio set-up to experiment with during the residency, especially keeping in mind that the rooms we are working in are lined with tiles...feedback will be a big problem. His idea is to have as many boxes as possible (every box adds 3dB, which makes things twice as loud), while at the same time minimising the feedback problem. (why this would be the case, I don't know, but if he sez so...!) He thinks we should be working with wireless mics (also minimising wire hum), and we should line whatever part of the space we are working in in molton, ideally 1 to 2 metres away from the walls. George will also lend us 2 wireless mics and four boxes. He sniffs at the idea of us using contact mics for anything, but I am still interested in them because a) they don't cause any feedback at all, and b) they disturb the audiovisual contract of spectators by making sounds out of mechanic vibrations, ie the type of sound they produce does not correspond with what one would expect from a manipulation. According to George they sound like shit, but this isn't his research!

In any case, the fact that he will loan us mics and boxes puts me at ease, I think the Musikzimmer should be able to organise a decent mixer for us and we will be pretty well-endowed in the sound department. Of course, a looping machine could also be handy...but you just get here and see!

I will now attempt to record body motion for episode 6 by myself...George usually does this by himself with a remote keyboard in the foley pit.

xo
KS

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Kareth Schaffer** <[REDACTED]>k>
Date: Sat, Oct 4, 2014 at 23:41 PM
Subject: Foley Diaries, day six
To: BOGLÁRKA BÖRCsök <[REDACTED]>

Hi there,

I'm getting too lazy to write in prose form, so make of this what you can...

-There's no *Hall* (echo?) in cars, you can use an outside mic!

With a digital mixer one can save the *Einstellungen* for certain spaces: i.e. a church then always has the same sound

-for recording movies they use yet another microphone, very *hässlich*, for outside walls, jails, etc.

Mwaha, SEE YOU TOMORROW!

xoxo
KS