

**DANCE RESEARCH NRW # 15
in Düsseldorf
PERIOD: 29.9.-21.11.2014**

HOST:

**Düsseldorf / Tanzhaus NRW and
WELTKUNSTZIMMER/Hans Peter
Zimmer Stiftung**

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Boglarka Börcsök, Budapest, Hungary**

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH:

**Unheard Of: The Performative Possi-
bilities of Foley Artist Labour**

*Please give a short summary of the in-
tended research in NRW*

A foley artist (dtsch. 'Geräuschemacher') refers to the person in cinematic post-production who adds the sounds of character movement, clothing and props to movies by manipulating and recording the sounds of everyday objects. One well-known example of foley is the use of coconut shells to simulate the sound of horses's hooves. The research project "Unheard Of: The Performative Possibilities of Foley Artist Labour" develops foley as a performative practice and compositional tool, and examines the possibilities of its application as such in contemporary performance. The foley artist must possess a good sense of rhythm, spatial awareness, and sensitivity towards materiality and physicality. Like a dancer, the profession has a large and varied performative component, and yet the performance of the foley artist is not the ultimate goal of her labour: the performance is never even seen, it only serves the creation of sound. Understanding foley as a movement practice is one main goal of the research project: what types of movements, what interactions with which kind of objects and materials, are necessary to produce which sounds? The second goal sees foley as a compositional tool: how can bodies, objects, and microphones be negotiated in space to create sounds? Where does the image of sound creation and the sound itself diverge, opening up different narra-

tives, different associations, different experiences? The translation of foley to a situation of live performance makes an invisible art visible. Thus the research must be prepared to consider the value of labour for both cinema and dance, and the potential of the body to point 'outside itself' into an uncanny realm between the aural and the visual.

Is the City of Düsseldorf or North-Rhine Westphalia relevant in your research?

If yes, in what respect? Düsseldorf is home to the 'Foley Lounge', Germany's largest professional foley studio, run by an internationally renowned foley artist. One part of the research will be a one- or two-week assistance at the Foley Lounge to deepen our knowledge of the craftsmanship involved in making foley.

What is specifically outstanding and innovative about the project?

As far as Boglarka and I know, no systematic attempt has yet been made to translate the art of foley to a live performance situation in a way that goes beyond the simple addition of sound effects. The research proposal is transdisciplinary in that its focal areas involve dance, sound, and film, but beyond transdisciplinary it is also trans-market: the commercial entertainment purposes of foley will be juxtaposed with state-subsidized contemporary dance, a market where the visible labour of the body itself is the central fascination. Furthermore, the research proposal focuses on questions that combine three aspects of artistic research (see Borgdorff, 'The debate on research in the arts':

http://www.ips.gu.se/digitalAssets/1322/1322713_the_debate_on_research_in_the_arts.pdf): in acquiring the craft of foley, we engage in 'research for the arts', in translating this to a staged situation we engage in artistic research, in meditating on the implications of this performative practice we engage in 'research on the arts'. The research consciously subscribes to a very basic notion of contemporary performing arts, i.e. that any movement can be dance and any sound can be music. In studying foley we can

discover new performative potentials based on a profound symbiosis of the two.

How will you proceed?

The research 'Unheard Of: The Performative Possibilities of Foley Artist Labour' will divide its research into three complementary phases:

- 1) The appropriation of the craft of foley: as mentioned above, a 1- to 2-week 'internship' at the Foley Lounge in Düsseldorf will assist in acquiring basic knowledge of practical/technical aspects of doing foley for cinema.
- 2) Studio research: after the Foley Lounge, movement research in the studios will follow a series of experiments designed to deepen technical skills in foley while examining it as a performative or compositional tool. These experiments will include:

The preparation and recording of a series of foley soundtracks to accompany comics from 'The Book of Bunny Suicides' by Andy Riley (this book was chosen because the plots are short, narrative, and visceral).

The preparation and live performance of foley accompaniment to excerpts of (silent) films. (This may be an open showing, as a relevant question includes how the performance of foley can be staged with the projection of visual material)

The creation of a foley 'parcours' for two performers, with a concentration on a) the possibilities for soundlayering through the use of more than one performer (or the production of two or more sounds by one performer); b) the spatial composition required for full manipulation and accurate amplification of foley in a studio/theatre space; c) how sounds and the movements in function of them create/support/contradict narrative.

- 3) In addition to the above 'practical' research methods, throughout the 8 weeks a historical and interpretive study of foley

will be carried out through the examination of the film work of foley artists (such as Dennie Thorpe, George Hardig, Chris Watson), research into instances of live foley (for example, foley artists employed by silent movie theaters), and a critical perusal of sonic art literature, such as Seth Kim Cohen's 'In the Blink of An Ear' (2009).

What are the results you would like to achieve?

The research proposal 'Unheard Of: The Performative Possibilities of Foley Artist Labour' will strengthen the technical/practical knowledge of the researchers in the art of foley. The studio research phase is aimed at developing a matrix of the parameters affecting foley, their concrete effects on movement and vice versa, and the consideration of foley when faced with the stage situation (i.e. a situation with unpredictable acoustics, expectations of a visual, etc.). One tangible outcome of the research will be an outline of future performance and exhibition formats. In addition, various by-products of the experimentation phase (audiorecordings, the foley parcours) will be available for presentation or documentation.

How and in what kind of format should the results be presented in public at the end of the research?

As stated already, a relevant question to the research of staged foley is how a live performance of sound can interact with either live dance or film. Therefore, during the research period performance experiments will be presented to spectators, as their feedback is vital to this question. We would like to present all generated material at the end of the research, but not necessarily in a performance situation: in order to evaluate our research process we would like to present our findings and enter into a dialogue with those interested.