DID YOU SAY SOUND LIBRARY?

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foreword

In Acousmatic, the sound library can be considered as a tool inherent to its mode of production i.e. fixed-media composition. Whether it's a hard disk or a rack of reels, in all cases it refers to a pool of sounds; a palette organising the raw materials that the composer will elaborate and then use to compose a work. Alongside the working space, the sound library is involved in every stage of the composition, through a continuous back and forth process, wether it be on the scale of a single piece or else over an entire career.

For this work, I have asked some of these composers to talk about the "sound library" as a tool in their work, in a fairly free way, taking the form of articles or interviews. Throughout these various texts, the reflection around the sound library will focus on all the singularities it suggests: its relationship to the project and the compositional process, the making of musical material and its use in the work, and finally, sound classification. The aim has been to cross borders, generations and musicalities in order to represent a certain diversity in today's Acousmatic scene.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this corpus.

This collective work was inspired by the second issue of *Lien* magazine, "Vous avez dit acousmatique ?", published in 1991 and edited by Annette Vande Gorne.

Valentin Sismann

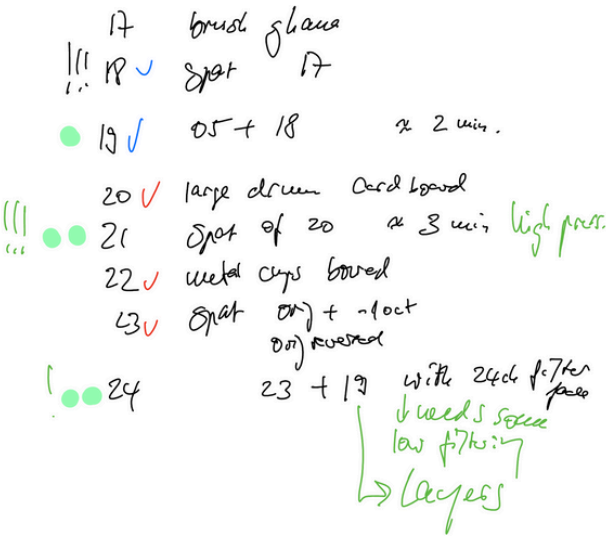
Hans Tutschku

My *sonothèque*: Sound as Material - Memory as Method

For the past twenty years, my compositional process has centered on building a unique and evolving collection of sounds for each new piece. It always begins the same way: selecting a fresh set of sounds to start from. I never reuse material from earlier works—those sounds have already fulfilled their purpose. Hearing them again instantly evokes the emotional and atmospheric context of their original composition. I need a clean slate each time, a fresh sonic palette.

All the source sounds are imported into a single track in my DAW. I place markers at their start points and document each one in my notebook. During follow-up listening sessions—usually in the mornings when my ears are fresh—I annotate these sounds with exclamation marks, brief notes, or question marks. If a sound collects too many question marks, I cross it out. It's not deleted from the session (at least not immediately), but if repeated listening doesn't bring it into resonance with the new work, I stop considering it.

As I begin to experiment with layering and treatments, the sound collection naturally expands. I never move the originals from their place. Instead, I copy them to a new marker location and document their combination or treatment.

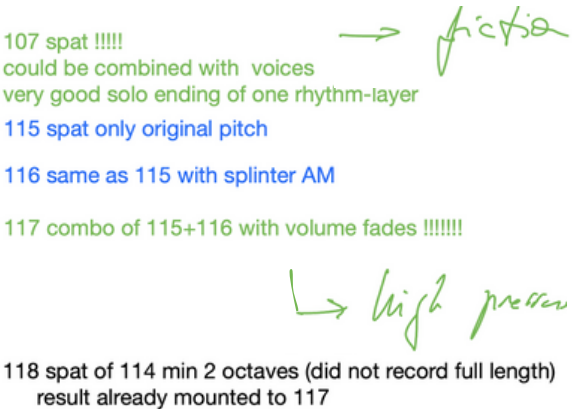


In the example above from *Spaces: high pressure* (2021), sound 17 is a playing sequence with a brush on a medium-sized Ghanaian drum. Most of my treatments happen outside the DAW. I send this original sound to a second computer running a custom Max/MSP patch for processing and spatialization. Depending on the final format, the output might be an 8-, 16-, or 24-channel signal, which I record in real-time back into the DAW on new tracks.

In the notebook excerpt, sound 18 is a spatialized version of the brush sequence 17. Sound 19 combines sound 5 with 18—adding a previously composed texture to the spatialized result of 17. As the session grows, I begin forming what I call "islands"—intricate layers built from the multichannel treatments and their combinations.

For a time, I focus solely on composing with this initial selection—their transformations and combinations. But inevitably, a point comes when I feel the need for contrast or renewal. That's when I return to my broader *sonothèque*, searching for unused material—sounds untouched by previous compositions that might bring a new perspective to the current piece.

These "islands" are then shaped further by experimenting with their placement within larger formal sections. Each section and each island receives its own marker number, both in the DAW and in my notebook:



The first piece where I fully applied this method was *Distance liquide*, composed in 2006 at the GRM. Over time, the session expanded to a total duration of ten hours.

What I appreciated most about this approach was the ability to return to any earlier stage at will—whether to original sounds, intermediate textures, or partial structures. It allowed me to trace the piece's evolution, reflect on its development, and generate ideas for the next step.

It's become a personal synthesis of German rigor and French sensibility—a dialogue between two traditions, where form meets intuition and discipline gives way to poetic invention.

Boston, March 2025

(Figure 1) Excerpt from my workbook for *Spaces: high pressure*
(Figure 2) Excerpt from my workbook for *Spaces: high pressure*: short descriptions of longer textures