

Tom Soloveitzik
Air 2011

Interview with Frantz Lorient
March 2021

The album *Air 2011* was released in June 2020 on the Jerusalem based label [Hedim](#).

“*Air 2011*” – **Tom Soloveitzik** on bandcamp: <https://hedim.bandcamp.com/album/air-2011>

Frantz Lorient: *Could you tell us about the context this document was made and how you proceed for its elaboration? (I call documents all objects made for sound fixation; could be a cd, vinyl, cassette etc.) Did you already have a plan before you started? Did you have the plan to release something or was it only meant to be an installation?*

Tom Soloveitzik: *Well, I guess that at this point it has already its own history. I was living and studying in London with my partner at the time (2011) I started this project. Tracks 1-5 on the current album were part of a bigger [installation](#) called ‘Air 2011’ I presented back then as part of my MA in Sound Arts final exhibition. The installation consisted of written texts, images and various recordings of all sorts that were organized around several themes that occupied me during my time in London: The subject that listens and furthermore: how one mediates his listening through technology (eg. recording devices etc.). The qualities of sound to express and explore the zeitgeist, so to speak, of the time. Be it social injustice that occurred near to me in London or the Middle East - where I was coming from - or just the quality of sound to reflect and consider space and place. I remember that my initial idea was to produce a CD at the time; but the vastness of different materials persuaded me to change course and go for an installation instead. Those recordings were surfacing around during the years that passed¹; I think I always felt good about them when I listened back but I didn’t think to present them seriously. Only after I shared them with my friend Shaul Kohn and got a supportive response from him I started to compile tracks for an album. I decided to add two newer tracks that were thematically connected, in my mind at least, to the older tracks that were recorded back in London 2011.*

¹ Just stumbled upon this quote by Aki Onda: “After I do a field recording, I will normally leave the tapes for some years. I need some kind of detachment from the sounds I collected.”

FL: This document refers to the Arab's spring revolution, to Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, or the Israeli Independence Day. Why did you use these elements and what is your personal relation to these events, personality, as an Israeli?

TS: In a sense, it is a political work from my point of view. But a personal one that isn't trying to say something or to convince in that way or the other. So in that respect I definitely read it like this (but I'm not declaring it; it's up to the listener to decide how he or she would like to decipher it). The events you're mentioning in your question - the Arab Spring in particular - were affecting me personally during my time in London. It was really exciting for a moment in time; Though I was far from home there was a fleeting feeling that things could change in the Middle East. The Israeli Independence Day is always a reminder of the upheavals that were made by the state of Israel to the Palestinians since 1948. I used all those materials, including those by Chinese authorities against Ai Weiwei, and tried to channel them back while recording. Ironically, and very (very) sadly the album was released a few days after that [Eyad el Hallaq](#) was shot to death by IDF.

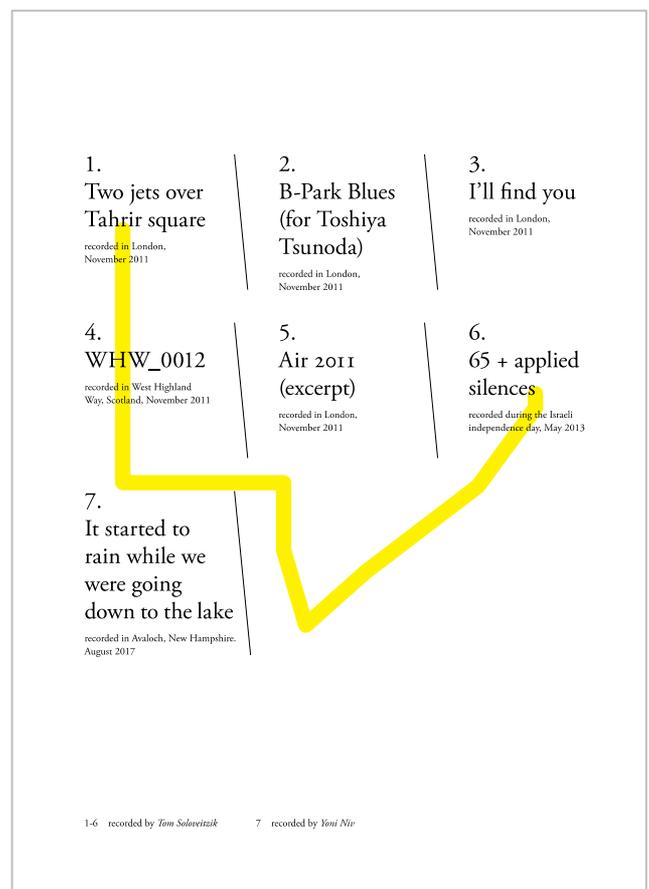
This is what I wrote at the time for the press release:

It is almost impossible these days to separate between the personal and the political, between artistic work and the space where it takes place. My heart is broken from Eyad el Hallaq's death. It seems that the cycle of violence and racism that shadows our lives here, day after day, keeps growing. The recordings for this album began around moments that we unfortunately witness too often. In the summer of 2011, the London riots erupted after local police shot and killed Mark Duggan, a 29 year old black man. Earlier that year, a wave of anti-government protests swept across the Arab world, in the hope of bringing a much-desired change; a brief moment of optimism suspended in air, grasping for a foothold, and slipping away.

FL: There is a certain narrative in this document. What is the discourse behind or under what you want to share, if there is a clear one?

TS: It's a very good question and a difficult one for me to answer at the same time. As I said earlier, I prefer to leave the interpretation to the listener. If you had that sense (of narrative) as a listener (and a reader of the text) I can relate to it, definitely. But it is not something I tried to convey, at least consciously. 'The discourse', so to speak, or the 'main themes' that interested me, were the subjectivity of recordings and sound as a means to mediate the times, to name a few.

FL: Why did you choose this specific paper book and digital format for the music/sound? Did you want the object to have a different content? Bring another attention? When you have a first look at the object, the attention is clearly focused on the written material, the images and the whole design.



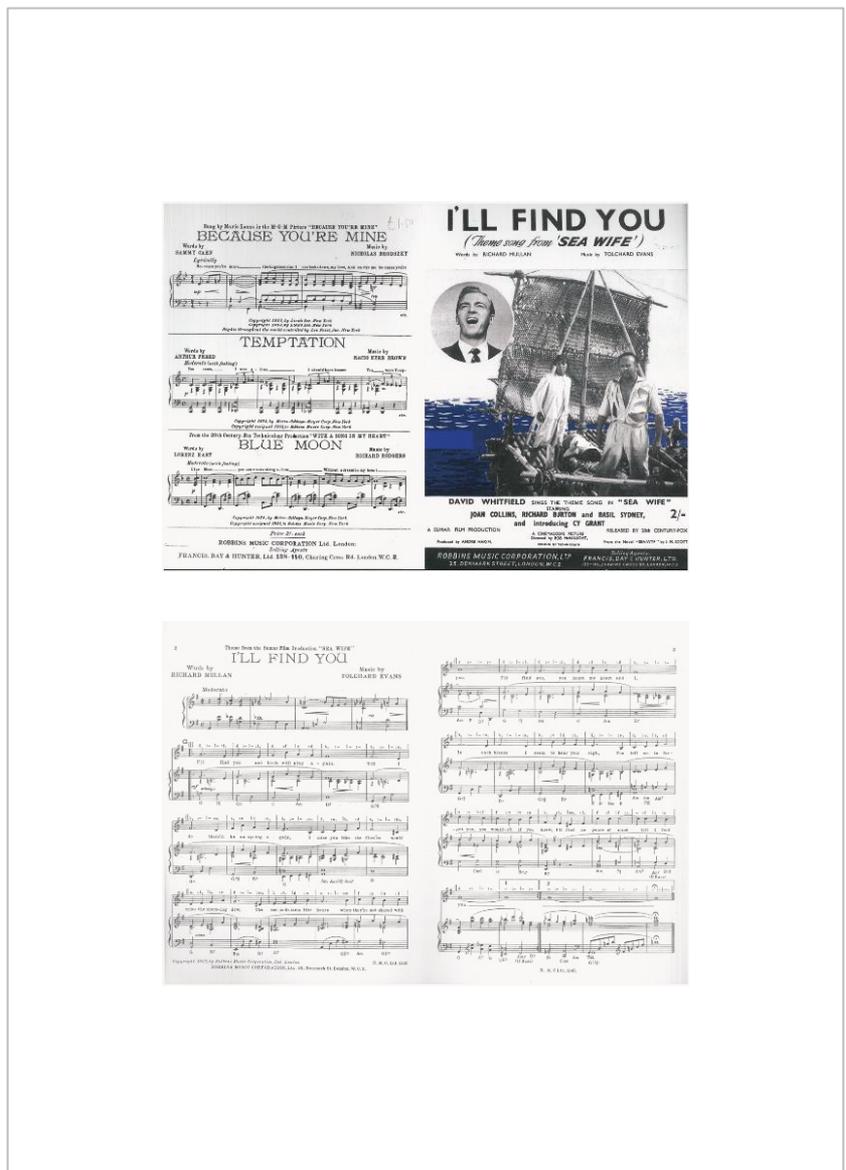
TS: Yeah, I agree with your observation. For me it is two folded. One can listen just to the digital album on Bandcamp without any context whatsoever and this is of course totally fine by me (A digital version of the booklet is attached in BC). As for the printed booklet: for me it's a different version of presentation. I'll explain: All the materials included (texts, images, graphic design) except the introduction and track index, were part of the installation I did back then; Even the format itself - A5 cards - remained the same. It was a natural decision to use them again in this context. For this occasion, I chose a few texts & images from the installation that I felt were corresponding with the sound files I chose for the album.

FL: There is a certain narrative which builds up during the listening of the recording. Was any specific intention in the way you built the narration?

TS: Well, the main decision was to present the recorded materials chronologically. So, the first five tracks were all recorded During my stay in the UK in 2011. Track number 5, Air 2011, is an excerpt of a longer version and used here as kind of a buffer (to paraphrase Howard Zinn) between the London period and what comes after in the album - Israel Independence Day 2013 (in a way a continuation to some of the previous tracks from London) and the concluding track that found its way in - a recording from a residency in Avaloch, New Hampshire from 2017.

FL: In the text and explanation about "I'll find you", you talk about wandering. Is this document also about that topic? A lot of philosophers, authors & poets refer to the idea of "flâneur/flâneuse" or "l'errance" in French. Are these different concepts familiar to you? I found it interesting to have some kind of contradiction between these ideas and the title when "flâner" means wandering around without any goals. Could you comment on this?

TS: At the time when I lived in London the concept you mention - flâneur and its related history - was certainly something that interested me. Authors like W. G Sebald, whom I admire, and his protagonist in his book Austerlitz, who goes to very long walks around the never-ending London because of sleeping problems and Ian Sinclair's Lights Out Of The Territory whose first words in the book are very much self-explanatory to the subject:



“The notion was to cut a crude V into the sprawl of the city, to vandalize dormant energies by an act of ambulant signmaking. To walk out from Hackney to Greenwich Hill, and back along the River Lea... recording and retrieving the messages on walls, lampposts, door jambs...”²

Patrick Keiller's film [London](#) was also a great inspiration for me at the time. I remember having the idea to make a work that its main focus is walking in London and exploring this medium in a city that in a sense is physically limitless.

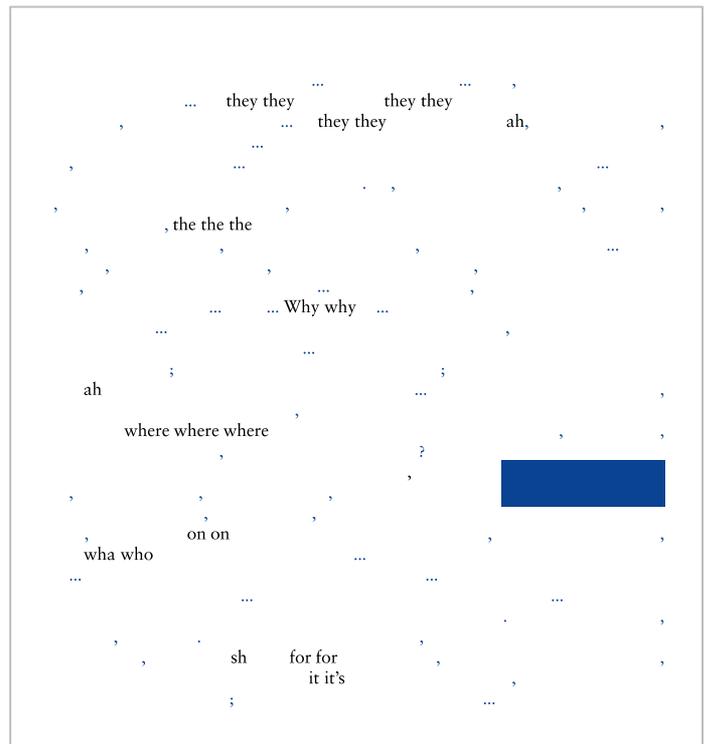
So, I guess that's part one of your question:).

I like your observation: it's indeed two contradicting concepts superimposed together as one can hear on track 3 of the album. I'm playing this kitschy melody 'I'll Find You' while my Iphone, that was inserted to the saxophone bell, played back a Gaddafi's speech (he was hiding and escaping for his life at the time). So, this document (I'll Find You score), if I use your term, was found during this wandering in London one afternoon. Later, when I recorded the track, I found it appropriate to use it as the title referring to Gaddafi's state. It's interesting to note that this melody is taken from a Hollywood movie from the fifties that tells a story of a few British sailors during WWII. I like to think of these few story lines, imagined and real, intermingle together.

FL: What was the aim for bringing these songs you found, these political field recordings to the surface? What is your relation to memory in this specific recording?

TS: At the time I was recording news snippets from Al Jazeera in a very primitive way (recording the broadcast from my computer with my Iphone). This specific recording is by Gaddafi who was running away for his life, stopping sporadically in different places around Libya to give speeches and this recording is one of them. I'm not sure how much you can understand what he's saying in the recording but this is quite an insane one (in the installation I made I used this speech separately. You can see in the booklet a [negative] textual version of it).

FL: There is a lot of relation to externality in your recording, and interaction with it. It seems to me you approach it in different ways. For some, you bring that exteriority inside (your saxophone), close to our ears and listening (*B Park Blues*, for Toshiya Tsunoda); sometimes, it is just bringing us out, with a



This is a transcription of a Gaddafi speech, translated into English by a simultaneous interpreter, and broadcasted live on Al Jazeera's live streaming. I recorded it with my iPhone during the last days of May 2011, erased any trace of the speech and its translation except for those few times when the seamless flow of words and content was disrupted by the interpreter's unconscious stops and repeated hesitations.

² Ian Sinclair, *lights Out Of The Territory*, 1997. p.1

clear cut (65 + applied silences); an interaction where the boundaries start to be blurred (I'll find you) with the different layers between Gaddafi, the translator and the saxophone. In "Air 2011" and the last track "It started to rain while we were going down to the lake", the process seems to be the same, although the "live" performance impression is stronger on the last track.

Were all these differences consciously taken? Was it for narrative purposes? What would you say about these remarks?

TS: Yes, I agree with you, and this goes back to my remark regarding one's mediation of listening through technology. Narratively speaking, tracks 1-3 were recorded inside the body of the saxophone (e.g. my portable recorder was inserted inside the saxophone bell; on track 3 I inserted my Iphone as well, playing back Gaddafi's speech) and the remaining four tracks were recorded outside (although track 2 is happening outside [physically] and inside at once; see related image of me sitting on the window edge), at least as a reference point for listening. In a sense, all tracks were trials to use mics in a playful manner; to intervene with the act of the recording.

65 + applied silences is a recording I made on the eve of Israel independence day and it is the only track on the album I have worked on in post-production.

In the album version, "Air 2011" is just a short excerpt of a much longer track recorded in my neighbors' garden. I use it here just as a 'placeholder' and a marker in the album to conclude the London recordings. So, in that sense your intuition about the process of "Air 2011" and "it started to rain"... is right. Both were recorded outdoors with the environment sipping into the recordings.



FL: The 6 first tracks are recorded by you. We hear the moments you put your elements in your saxophone, when you activate the microphone etc. This recording has a homemade, but also a studioish sound, probably related to the gesture you made these recordings, the way you wanted things to sound, their relation to externality and their relation to time. The last track is pretty different in that manner, being a live performance. The length is definitely longer and it is a track where somebody else (Yoni Niv) is intervening as sound engineer. This last track has also been recorded 6 years after. Why did you decide to include it in your document? What is its role in the narrative?

TS: I remember that Shaul Kohn (from Hedim label) asked me quite the same question about this track. I think that the decision to include it in the album derived from a couple of reasons. In my mind it has a nice resolution to some intense materials that came beforehand; The process of recording felt to me

connected to the issues I have dealt with previously in the album; and maybe most importantly - I liked it and thought it would be a good inclusion to the album. The track was recorded at Avaloch, NH during a residency we had there with Ensemble Musica Nova. I remember it as a magical moment, just standing inside an apple orchard after the rain and listening to the raindrops hitting the leaves and ground. In retrospect, it might have been the best moments of the residency. Yoni and I already had a history of working together and he is also a very good friend. I think we had the intention to record beforehand and this recurring multiphonic was something that we worked on together during our residency.

It's always a question when a performance becomes one, but in this case, it was a 'live performance' for one 'audience member'. Yoni was recording and indeed it's a difference compared to the other tracks in the album. Though I must add that even here I tried to maintain my presence throughout the recording.

FL: *I'd say there are political statements in this document (through the content of your field recordings, the texts, the titles). What would be the statements of track 4, 5 & 7?*

TS: *Track 4 was recorded during a hike in Scotland. But that is just to say something about the environment and materials being used. For me, its rhythm is corresponding with tracks no. 1 & 6.*

Track 5 definitely can be read as a political statement. It represents London at that certain time. You can hear the air around you and reflect upon it. When I recorded the longer version of this piece I thought about Marx's famous quote: "All that is solid melts into air", and that is what I wanted to represent with this recording.

Track 7 represents a resolution of sort and a non-final conclusion. I think I wrote more about this track in my previous answer.

FL: *It seems to me there is a clear link to the subjects of revolution and rebellion through the use of the content of the field recordings and text and the way you relate to it with your instrument and musicality.*

Is this recording an expression of rebellion? Even on track 6 it refers to anarchy (in French)? As an Israeli artist, how do you feel today about the political situation in your country? Is your document saying and stating something towards the political situation in Israel but also in the world more generally?

TS: *You are right about your assumptions regarding this album. But It's a personal statement of course. As political as some of the materials are, I used them as reference points for thinking and creation. I had this eerie moment that I wrote about in the booklet last year when I visited London for the first time since I left. I heard a huge roar coming from the radio and it caught me off guard completely because it reminded me of the sounds from the Arab spring in 2011. This Deja Entendre, so to speak, was a dark reminder that things can always get worse... Which brings me to Israel where you can see many trends that are unfortunately similar or reminding other right governments around the globe. But the main issue, in my mind, is the occupation over the Palestinians and until that won't be over things will never be normal as normal as they can be over here... Nowadays especially, there's a sense that we are all in this together with the pandemic of course, and the climate change. It seems that things got worse from almost a decade ago when this album was recorded. And things do not look good at the moment; but I'd like to conclude on an optimistic note, trying to remain positive in these difficult times.*

FL: According to you, why do we do recordings? What are we aiming for, exactly, through this act? I think music performance is an ephemeral form of art which cannot really be “objectified” if I could say so, despite this we still do live recordings. Would it be an attempt to crystalize a specific moment which would be a kind of an archive (in the case of a live performance)? Or can a recording be a piece of art in itself, like a photography or a painting or a sculpture? This would confront us to another approach to the act of recording but also in the way we would perceive the object of the recording.

Is a recording an object of socialization, in the sense of sharing and creating different forms of interaction and relations?

TS: I’m not sure how to tackle those questions or where exactly to start my answer. But I would say that the function of a record or recording changes from project to project. Personally, I’m interested in the mechanics and the technology (of recording) from an interfering, malfunctioning, not ‘by the book’ standpoint. Recording to me is not an objective act. Having said that, I’m interested in it as a creative tool. It seems to me that the pandemic changed or accelerated various facets of mediating recordings, as well as it pushed people to record by themselves due to necessity. I could sense that some of those recordings had a different feeling to them, maybe a more personal touch that transpired through. As for your last question: Yes, definitely. I really like to do the act of exchange with other musicians and artists. Like in the good old days of Homer.



FL: How do you consider the place of the author? Shall s/he fade behind the work, the music itself? Isn’t the object of a recording also a way to present the author? Can we actually separate the work from its author? I am thinking of the text of Roland Barthes who claimed the death of the author. My feeling is that we try to avoid putting ourselves, individuals, in the front of our work (this is not our goal). The content would be more what it is about more than the questions related to our personalities. But the work would also reflect the author and her/his visions, thus personality. What is your position regarding this topic of author and authorship?

TS: Try as one/i might, for me there’s always an author’s presence. Whether it is intentional or not, the decision making, so to speak, is present to the listener. Furthermore, one’s personality can be heard, even in generative music. For me it’s a good sign when a listener can reflect about those issues. Personally, I find myself lately intermingling with various

story lines. In my latest release [‘Tel Aviv Flora & Fauna’](#) I placed a microphone on the roof of the recording studio while we were playing inside. It took me a while to fully decipher how to use it in the final editing, but I liked the fact that certain scenarios or decisions that one takes can open up future possibilities that you are not aware of instantly. In a current project, I use recording and processing of a park in southern Tel Aviv as another facet to explore

landscape and notions of continuity. Landscape as a concept and how it has been developed in China and in the West is something that interests me lately. I feel that there is always a paradox between being in place (without any technological means) and placing a microphone (as a listening device). We are affecting reality in one way or another.