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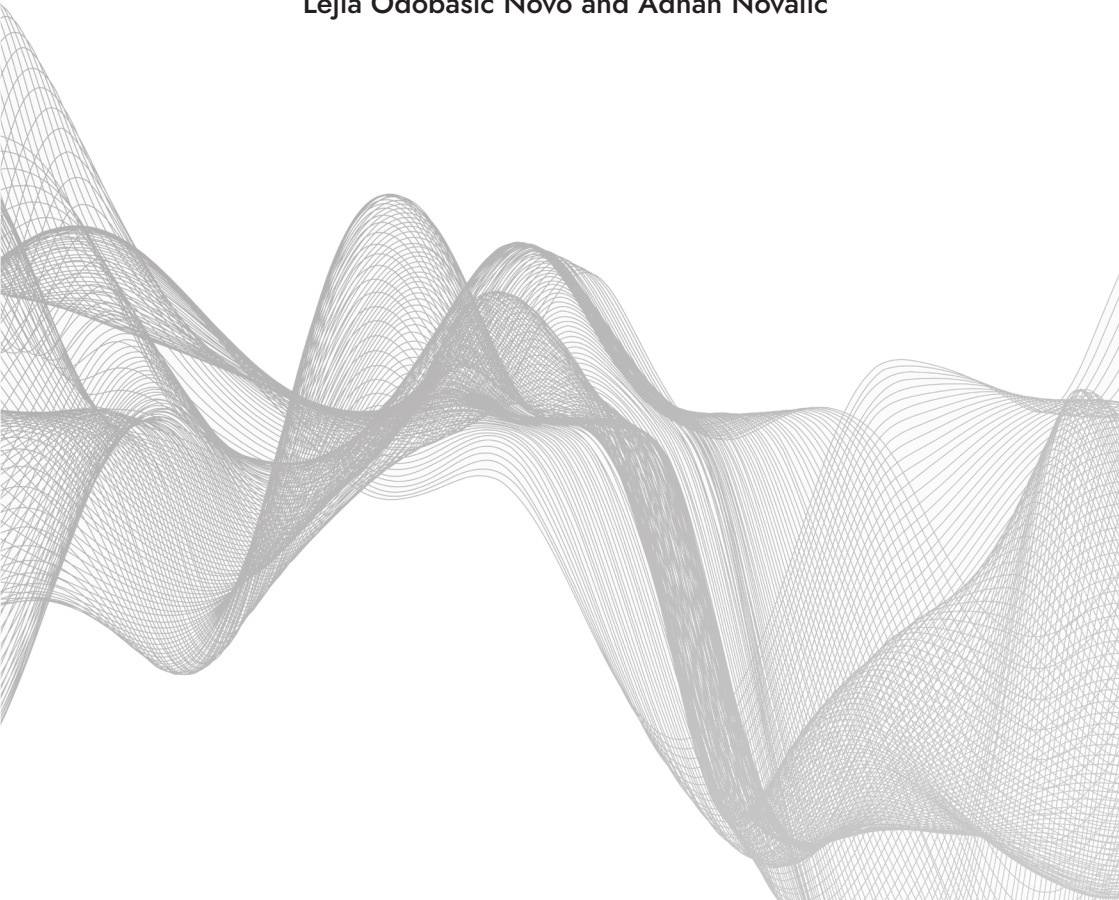
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# SOUND LIFELINE

## AS SONIC RESONANCE

NAVIGATING SPACE, ARCHITECTURE, AND MEMORY IN BESIEGED SARAJEVO

Lejla Odošaić Novo and Adnan Novalić





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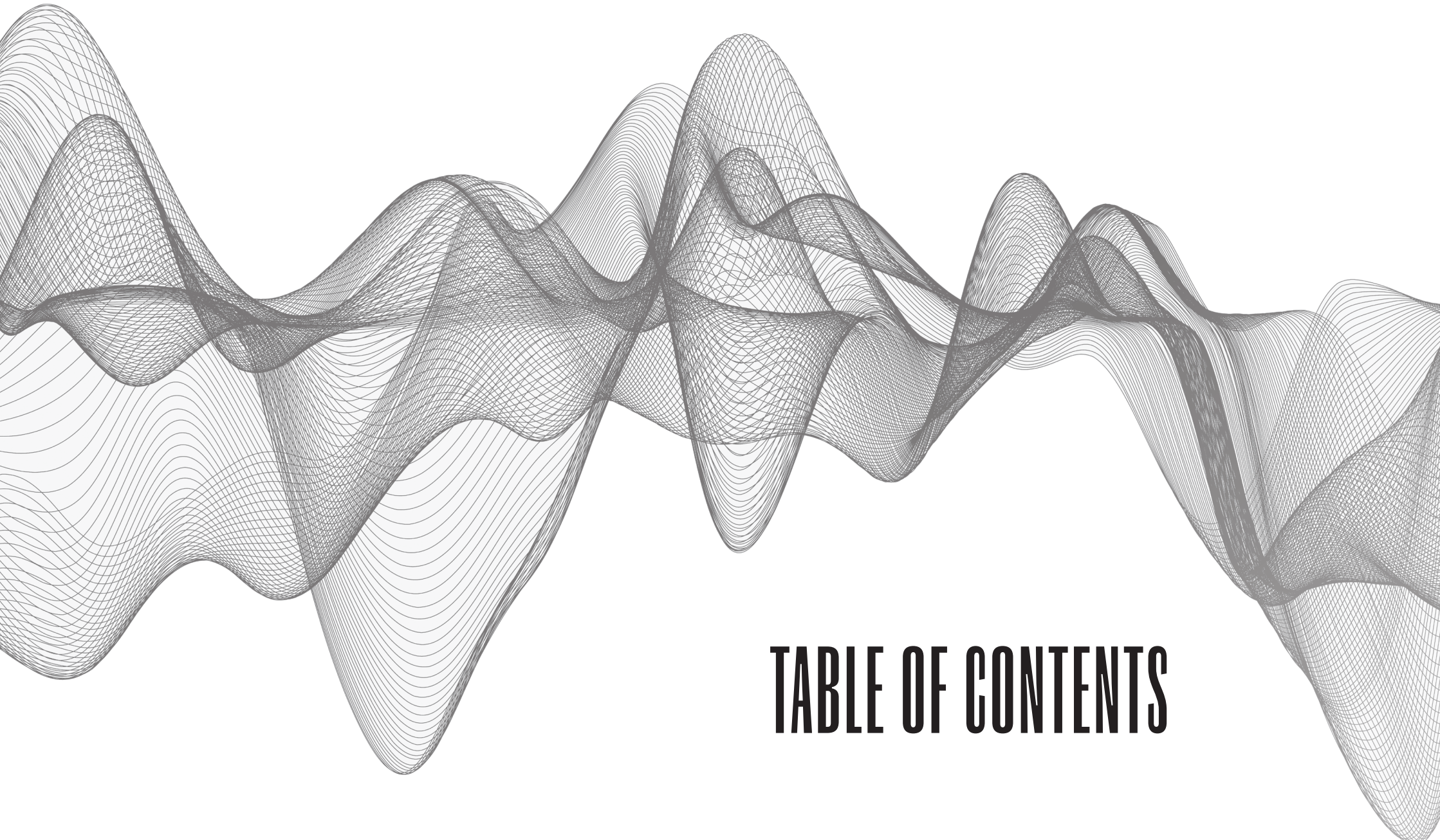
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# **CRITICAL REVIEWS**

## Nicolas Tixier,

Professor, Director of AAU CRESSON, CNRS, University Grenoble Alpes, France.

## Nicolas Remy,

Assistant Professor, Department of Architecture – University of Thessaly, Greece and associated researcher at AAU CRESSON, CNRS, University Grenoble Alpes, France.

With the work of Lejla Odošić and Adnan Novalić, we share the sound Lifelines of fifteen witnesses, as fifteen individuals as well as collective narratives of the siege of the city of Sarajevo between 1991 and 1995. There is no sound to be heard in the work of Lejla Odošić and Adnan Novalić, and yet the stories they gather and the accompanying documentary and exhibition are full of it.

What is striking about their work is not all the new sounds of war that emerge overnight in the soundscape of Sarajevo. What really stands out is the evocative power of each sound in our daily lives. Talking about sounds also means talking about their disappearance, waiting for their return or their end. As we know, silence is not the most reassuring sound in a war time when every modulation, disappearance or appearance of sound makes sense. We learn to listen, to interpret any variation in sound. It's a new communality that we share, like the individual and collective stories of apartment blocks suddenly plunged into darkness and the silence of domestic sounds during power cuts. These are the sounds of hoovers, washing machines, televisions, the Internet, ventilation systems - all the mechanical objects that make up our everyday soundtrack, and which suddenly stop or reappear as the electricity comes back on. They sometimes emerge in the middle of the night, in concert, all at the same time within the same block of flats, like lanterns of sound communicating to others and to the atmosphere that the ordinary sound is stronger than the sounds of war.

These are, of course, the sounds of the radio broadcasting the news, but also the music scene in resistance.

These are windows walled in with wooden panels that rattle to the percussive sound of sniper bullets. It's these new echoes, these new resonances of public and natural space (the hill in Sarajevo comes to mind) that suddenly sound like mortars. These sounds are even more noticeable because all the ordinary sounds have disappeared - the traffic, the shops, the activities, the schools, the children, the street, etc. These spaces, known and used for so many years by their inhabitants, no longer sound the same. They will certainly never sound the same again to anyone who has lived through this siege. These new resonances of the public space, where the sounds of motorization have disappeared, leave plenty of room for the sound world of an ongoing war, a sensitive stigma that lingers in people's memories long after the war is over.

Dramatically, they are the absence of the sounds associated with the loss of a loved one, sounds that cannot be forgotten and that will resonate forever in the memories of the people of Sarajevo.

Listening is one of the foundations of living together, opening the way to a sensitive understanding of others in specific and of the world in general, especially when narration becomes difficult. In his 1933 text *Experience and Poverty*, Walter Benjamin observed that after the horrors and dehumanization of war "the time of narration is in free fall. The First World War rendered it obsolete, even impossible." For some people, it is no longer possible to transmit their lived experiences. Words are sometimes no longer available to express the experience. So how can we bear witness? How can we, who did not live through the war, not be left with the experience?

The evocative power of sound, as much as that of its absence, transcends what cannot be said or told - it becomes a universal language and, thanks to the work of Lejla Odošić and Adnan Novalić, a means of in-

timate introspection into our own sound Lifelines. The evocative power of sound shows us once again how sound cements our lives together, how it shapes our individuality and forms the basis of our shared way of life. Sound is life, in every situation, and the work of Lejla Odošić and Adnan Novalić is a perfect demonstration of that. Merci.

## Helmi Järviluoma

Professor Emerita, Cultural Studies,  
University of Eastern Finland

The present publication *Sound Lifeline as Sonic Resonance* offers a very interesting read and experience for those interested in urban studies, sonic remembering and recent European history. Survivors of the siege of Sarajevo (1991-1995) have been interviewed as sense witnesses in the Sound Lifeline project. These fifteen witnesses represent different professions, genders and age groups, and lived in different parts of the city during the war. The witnesses in the project work as reflective thinkers. Their talk about the sounds of the war three decades ago reaches into the present, into the realm of morality.

Sound Lifeline has been part of the B-Air project. Part of this project focused on sonic memories, and particular attention was paid to ways of remembering. Sound Lifeline made an important contribution to our goal of raising awareness of Europe's polyphonic sonic history and values. Our aim was also to promote the empowerment of vulnerable groups, not only older radio listeners but also people who have experienced war trauma.

The present publication, however, does not only focus on trauma "but rather tried to understand how the siege affected spatial morphology and the daily routine conducted in it, and furthermore, how that was reflected through the soundscape and what physiological effects it had on the witnesses both during and after the war". In the middle of the horrors of war, people engaged in therapeutic sonic resistance, for example through music. Even today, sonic performances such as the remarkable electro-acoustic compositions and musical performances produced by the Sound Lifeline project are proving to be powerful, and also healing, means of exploring and processing the sonic experiences of war and trauma.



