Creating the soundscape for *Zagreb Everywhere*

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***Zagreb Everywhere* (2001), a video portrayal of the city of Zagreb, Croatia, is the result of an international collaboration between writer Gordana Crnković (Croatia), video artist Victor Ingrassia (US), and composer David Hahn (US), who collected sounds from Zagreb and together with some of his own music created the soundscape for the piece. Opposing stereotypes about the 'barbaric Balkans' often reinforced by Western media during the recent war in that region, *Zagreb Everywhere* provides a unique view of Zagreb and its inimitable features, while at the same time showing the experiences of that city and its people as having a broad human appeal and resonance. The piece exists in two formats: (i) a stand-alone video work, and (ii) a multimedia performance piece with projected visual images, sound, and live narration. After a brief recounting of the genesis of the idea for *Zagreb Everywhere* and the main aesthetic aspects of the project, this paper discusses the methods in which the sounds were collected in the field and compiled, how these sounds were edited in the studio, and how the entire piece was assembled. *Zagreb Everywhere* premiered in May 2001 at the University of Washington in Seattle.**

1. EMERGENCE OF THE IDEA

Zagreb Everywhere is a synthesis of multi-layered video, spoken word, *audio verité*, and music, presenting a unique evocation of Zagreb, capital city of the Republic of Croatia, formerly part of Yugoslavia. The work is the result of an international collaboration between three artists: writer and University of Washington professor Gordana Crnković (Croatia), video artist Victor Ingrassia (US), and myself, a composer/musician (US). The recording of the soundscape was funded by a grant from the Jack Straw Foundation, Seattle, underwritten by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Seattle Arts Commission. The piece exists in two formats: it is both a stand-alone VHS-format video work and a multimedia performance piece with projected visual images, sound, and live narration. *Zagreb Everywhere* premiered in the latter format on 23 May 2001 at Mary Gates Hall on the University of Washington campus in Seattle. Following is a discussion of how the idea for the piece came about and of some of the techniques I used in selecting, working with and assembling the source recordings.

Throughout the 1990s, I often visited Zagreb accompanied by my wife, a native of that city, and family. These visits, usually two to three months in duration, served both personal and creative functions. To an American, Zagreb is a fascinating vortex of new attitudes, sights, languages and points of view. A sample list of some memorable images from the city and its people includes:

- A mother making a strudel by spreading out the fine phyllo dough on a table and blowing under it to ensure that it is paper thin and yet strong enough to hold the sweet contents.
- Bevies of callus-handed old women dressed in black at the main square – a beehive of activity – where they sell everything from fruits and vegetables to pasta to hand-made cheeses and coleslaw.
- Family dinners of lamb and red wine, often begun and ended with one of the various home-made brandies such as *šljivovi̱ca* (plum brandy) or *travarica* (made from grass) from the region.
- Sidewalk cafes filled with young people talking, flirting, laughing, and watching other people.
- People milling around the clock tower at the city's heart, Ban Jelačić Square – a popular rendezvous spot as well as the central tram stop – always brimming with activity.

My own personal experience of Zagreb is one of the elements which led to the idea for *Zagreb Everywhere*. This intriguing city stands at a crossroads between Western and Eastern Europe. It was an important city to Yugoslavia, which under the rule of Tito adopted a form of communism decidedly independent from that of the Soviet Union. Coming from America, where corporate culture and customer service are the *lingua franca*, I was often taken aback at how little the customer seems to be important in Zagreb. One especially Kafkaesque experience will serve as an illustration. In 1991, before the war began and Zagreb was still a part of Yugoslavia, my wife and I decided to rent a car to travel to Bohinj, a Slovenian mountain resort town. We went by tram to the central train station where we remembered seeing signs for rent-a-car agencies. We asked one of the several attendants behind the window prominently displaying a 'Hertz' sign about renting a car. 'What gives you the idea we rent cars?' he asked, looking bemused. Several others behind the window laughed openly through thick cigarette smoke. After the initial shock discovering that

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there was no way to rent a car there, we asked if by any chance they would know of where we might do this. 'Esplanade, Room 222', was the reply as the man quickly turned his back to us – as if to say that this information was more than worth his while giving it. Climbing the stairs of the Esplanade, a beautiful turn-of-the-century hotel, we were not optimistic. This was a typical hotel hallway – not a place to find a rent-a-car agency. We knocked on the door with '222' on it. The door opened a crack – several figures, a laptop, someone on a cell phone – enough to see that this was a group of foreign journalists. 'Excuse us', we said and fled laughing. We ultimately found a rental agency, as everything is most often found in Zagreb, through a friend's recommendation. The unpredictable nature of the city has later found its way into the creation of *Zagreb Everywhere*.

The war which began in Croatia in 1991 affected the city immensely; the most noticeable effect to the occasional visitor such as myself was an economic one. By 1995, the final year of the war in Bosnia and the three-year-long siege of Sarajevo (to be followed in 1999 by the NATO campaign in Kosovo), beggars could be seen in the Zagreb streets – an extremely rare site before the war. People were thinner, seemed to be smiling less, and more young people were leaving or planning to leave the country for any opportunity anywhere else. People who had jobs were often paid very poorly – if at all – and the standard of living was decidedly lower than just four years before. All of my Croatian musical colleagues were affected by the lack of work – not to mention that the Croatian National Theatre itself was hit by a stray mortar shell and several ballet dancers were wounded. Despite the conditions, I continued to work with musicians there.

It has always been satisfying to work with artists in Croatia. As a professional musician and composer, I worked with musicians from Zagreb's Music Academy and from the Croatian National Theater. Both of these institutions are excellent sources for high calibre musicians willing to experiment with new music and alternative forms of performance. In fact, the creative climate among musicians there is very inviting and stimulating, because they are excellent performers, interested in working on new things, open to challenges, and generally unaffected by the whims and fashions of the art world in the West. In 1995, with support from a Soros Foundation ArtsLink Grant, I collaborated with soprano Davorka Horvat and saxophonist Damir Horvat on a performance and recording of my music. I named our ensemble ConneXions and wrote over two dozen pieces for it. Later, in 1997, I hired students from the Zagreb Music Academy to record my piece *E/gone* for two cellos and tape. (This piece is dedicated to the German journalist Egon Scotland whom I had known and who was killed during the war in Yugoslavia.). The recording engineer at the session is considered to be one of the best classical recording engineers in Croatia. Even though he is the respected chief engineer for the Zagreb Philharmonic and Croatian Television (HTV), when we worked together he told me that he had not been paid in six months and was glad to have some outside work.

During 1998–9, I was able to spend a longer period of time – nine months – in Zagreb collaborating with musicians and other composers and lyricists there and in other parts of central Europe on an oratorio and various other pieces. During that period of time, the longest period I had ever spent in the city, it became obvious that the Western concept of 'globalisation' might simply mean imposing American cultural products onto the globe, a process which does not help us learn about a foreign city, its people and its culture.

At that time I arrived at the idea to create a piece about Zagreb which would try to communicate – in an artistic and unorthodox way – an idea about the city to people outside Croatia. This would not be a 'travelogue' but rather a collection of layered sounds, words and images which came to be titled *Zagreb Everywhere*. A second strand which led to the emergence of the idea for this multimedia piece was the influence of the writings of American composer John Cage (1912–92). I have always been intrigued with the ideas of 'chance operations' as described and used by Cage in his music, art and philosophy – for those unfamiliar with these ideas, the most explicit prose regarding chance operations can be found in Cage's book *Silence* (Wesleyan University Press, 1961). Chance operations is a compositional technique used to eliminate as much as possible the will of the composer; this process of 'chance operations' or indeterminacy is put into practice in a number of ways including using dice, the computer or the *I Ching*. Removing the composer's overall guiding 'idea' for the piece, which turns discrete elements of the piece into parts of that idea, one can appreciate better and hear in different ways these discrete elements (e.g. sounds) as individual elements in themselves.

With *Zagreb Everywhere*, the emergent idea was to create a performance piece modelled on the techniques used by John Cage and David Tudor in their collaboration *Indeterminacy* (1958, Smithsonian Folkways 40804). *Indeterminacy* consists of Cage reading ninety very short stories, the speed of his reading determined by the story's length. In another room, beyond earshot of Cage, David Tudor performs miscellaneous selections from Cage's *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* and plays pre-recorded tape from Cage's *Fontana Mix*. My intention was that *Zagreb Everywhere* would also be an unorthodox 'lecture' with sections of disparate texts separated by silences, both interrupted and accompanied by selections of audio recorded and photographs taken in Zagreb, and that this assembly of text, audio and video would be combined by means of chance operations.

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2. COLLECTING THE SOUNDS

The equipment used for recording the audio material for *Zagreb Everywhere* was a Sony cassette walkman with a built-in microphone which I borrowed from a Zagreb-based Reuters reporter. This same device had a history of being used to record newsworthy people and events from the region, including press conferences with the late Croatian president Franjo Tudjm̄an, and an interview with two Bosnian Serbs suspected of war crimes. I had not gone to Zagreb expecting to do this kind of composition, so I was not prepared with a better quality DAT or mini-disc recorder and professional microphone. While this cassette recorder was far from the optimum quality audio, it was the only device I had access to and it ultimately turned out that the narrow frequency response of the audio was somehow more appropriate to the subject. When I embark on a similar project in the future, however, I would definitely use better recording equipment and media, although it is fair to say that limitations of any kind serve to help organise the project as well as produce a more 'organic' collection of raw material.

I had the use of the recorder only for two-and-a-half weeks before I had to return it. During that period, I made it a priority to sample sounds from as many parts of the city that I could. I wanted to get street sounds – traffic, trams, crowds, etc. – but I also wanted to record from the radio which was not only an excellent source for spoken examples of the Croatian language, but by direct recording allowed me to get optimum audio. I collected sounds without seeing or reading the texts or thinking about the photographs which were taken during the same period. The goal was to get audio which I felt would best illustrate 'typical' Zagreb city sounds at this particular point in time.

Of course, there are always difficulties recording people in real life situations while trying to remain as inconspicuous as possible. This led to various techniques such as pretending to listen to the walkman, holding it down at my side out of the way, etc. I know a recording engineer in Seattle who conceals a pair of miniature stereo microphones in the frames of his glasses. While this is an excellent idea, my solutions were limited to the equipment at hand. At some points, however, I actually wanted my subjects to know they were being recorded. This led to the priceless 'hammy' performance of the two eight-year-old boys in the *Joke* section.

3. COMPILING THE SOUNDSCAPE

I returned to Seattle from Zagreb in the late summer of 1999. At that time, writer Gordana Crnković and I were awarded an Artist Support Project Grant from Jack Straw Studios. Putting *Zagreb Everywhere* together with the awarded studio time began with recording the single cassette of source material into Pro Tools software and creating two forty-five-minute audio files. A professional recording of the sixteen texts – as read by Crnković – was also made at this time. I worked on the editing and assembling of the recorded material in my home studio because this was the most time-consuming part of the process.

Beginning to assemble the sounds and recorded texts drew me away from the original idea of using chance operations as a mode of assembling the elements. I experimented with composing certain sections by using dice to place silences and pictures and sounds but the end result was unacceptable. The sound material was too referential, as were the photographs (to be added later), and the potential for a completely awkward and inefficient conglomeration of sounds, text and images was too great. In the Cage–Tudor collaboration *Indeterminacy*, there are only two elements: sound and spoken text. The sound in that piece is abstract – it has no reference so it can be placed without regard to what the words are saying – although the sound does punctuate in unusual ways. In *Zagreb Everywhere*, however, not only does the sound conjure up images but there is the additional element of photographs. Some of the texts also tell a story which requires a certain affect. The photos present images and situations which should not be undercut by the sounds. Therefore, I concluded that chance operations was not a viable organising technique and the piece had to be structured in a different way.

The process began by deciding the order of the texts together with writer Gordana Crnković, then deciding the various lengths of time in between the texts for the sound files. An overall length of sixty minutes was used as a fence post to determine the duration of the entire piece. The texts are written in a variety of genres: dialog, joke, short story, poem, fairy tale, and so on. Gordana wanted to begin the piece with 'A Cold Winter Evening' and end with 'Once Upon A Time', and the others were placed in between these two by her own personal preference. Aside from citations from the last letter of Emily Dickinson (*Maya i Krešo*) and Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* (*Beckett I* and *Beckett II*), the texts almost without exception represent personal meditations on experiences of living in Zagreb. The complete order of the texts, sounds and music together with some sample texts can be seen in the appendices of this article.

With the order of the texts established, I took the two large audio files and broke them down into many shorter segments, which I then named and organised alphabetically. This step was essential to be able to work effectively. By giving sections names such as 'Church Yard with Bell', 'Swings', 'Man In Airport', 'Noisy Main Square', etc., I was able to quickly identify and locate various sections which helped tremendously in organising the piece.

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I wanted the whole piece to be organised in a symmetrical way so I used the same sound pastiche at the end (with some slight variations) as at the beginning. Consequently, I assembled a sequence from a number of sounds that worked well together, the city square, nuns praying on the radio, men talking and laughing, and a few others juxtaposed over the serene tolling of a church bell (sound example no. 1). I also wanted to create a 'motif' or audio tag which could be a guide in composing the soundtrack; something to drop in at various points of the soundscape. For this purpose, I switched to 'Grid mode' in the Pro Tools session – the mode most often used with music that is metred so there is a guide for placing events at exact note values – and created a short rhythmic 'motto' which served as a noticeable tag when it was heard. This motif appears for the first time about thirty seconds into sound example no. 1.

I decided that the texts would mostly be read without additional sound in the background and that the sounds would not infringe on the speaking. My task thus became to construct pre-arranged parts of the soundscape and work them in as an 'accompaniment' to the spoken words. I knew I wanted to begin with a Croatian radio sign-on which we heard every morning. This consisted of a sleepy, melodramatic organ arrangement followed by three startlingly harsh beeps and an announcer's soothing baritone saying '*Osam je sati, Hrvatski Radio*' ('Eight o'clock, Croatian Radio') then fading into a saccharin string arrangement (sound example no. 2). I felt this radio sign-on somehow captured the essence of the Zagreb experience and was the perfect opening for the bitter sweet first text, *A Cold Winter Evening*. Following the radio sign-on *Prelude* and the first text, I placed a longer section of source audio (described above) which would both end and begin the soundtrack. The method for assembling the remainder of the pieces came from how I felt certain audio excerpts resonated with the texts in direct and indirect ways. Most of the sounds were juxtaposed in succession, as a concatenation, rarely simultaneously. At one point late in the piece, with sounds that give an effect of walking and movement, there is a long continuous segment recorded in Zagreb's main square (sound example no. 3).

Playing off the texts in this manner, I assembled the piece. The first draft of the soundscape together with the texts was a little over an hour in duration. I was not happy with the pacing and the entry points of the texts and the fact that there were too many repeated elements in the audio passages. A total of ninety minutes of source material is not a lot and there were a limited number of minutes which were usable due either to the low audio quality or to the fact that the sounds themselves were not compelling. Consequently, the piece was shortened a bit by omitting some *audio verité* interludes and by replacing them with music. To remain 'organic' I wanted to stay in the domain of Zagreb, so I used excerpts of pieces I had composed and recorded in that city with the ensemble ConneXions (mentioned above). I also used a verse of *Io son l'ocel*, a sixteenth-century frottola by Marcus Cara recorded by Andrea von Ramm and myself (lute) in Jordan Hall, Boston, 1982. (I had worked with Ms Von Ramm in Munich during 1998–9, the year I spent in Zagreb, so the choice still related to my stay in the city in a remote way). The decision to replace some of the *audio verité* with music was made for the following reason: listening to assorted city sounds in a piece like this, one listens in a very localised and intense way, trying to discern a 'meaning' or to see if one can discover what the sound actually is. This sharp focus can be exhausting over a period of time. Music, on the other hand, requires a different kind of listening, focused to be sure, but in a very different way. For this reason, the musical excerpts in *Zagreb Everywhere* work very well in the context of the entire piece. They allow the viewer a moment of reflection while enabling the incorporation of excerpts from some of my musical works performed with Zagreb musicians, adding a different dimension to the whole piece.

The final soundtrack was mastered at Jack Straw Studios in Seattle with the help of recording engineer Matthew Bauer. Some sections of the spoken parts were processed slightly to accentuate particular texts. For example, the excerpt from *Endgame* contained in *Beckett II* has a noticeable reverb on the voice, as if coming from a remote place. This reverberation was picked up in the video by Victor Ingrassia, who illustrated that section with a large brass door – a space where that kind of reverb might be heard. Also, the section *City Limits* contains a brief spoken fugue which suggests the many voices of friends and family from Croatia living in America or elsewhere abroad (sound example no. 4 and text in Appendix V).

When the master CD had been created, it was given together with the collection of eighty-five photographs taken in Zagreb to Victor Ingrassia. This made the construction of the final form of the video slightly unusual in that the photographs were processed and digitally composited only after the soundtrack had been completely finished. This method of working leads to an interesting hierarchy atypical for film, where sounds are usually fit to the pictures. Selecting and using Final Cut Pro software, Victor had to time sections of video exactly to fit the length of each individual audio excerpt. Selected clips from the video in Quick Time format can be viewed on the Web at <http://homepage.mac.com/victoringrassia> and clicking on 'Zagreb' (see Appendix IV).

In the past I have used environmental sounds in my own compositions; *Zagreb Everywhere* represents the first time I have used found sounds in an extended form. The process of organising the sounds collected in Zagreb

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is essentially one of juxtaposition. I made an effort to unify the piece by the symmetrical placement of an extended sound collage at the beginning and the end. As a prelude, I created an introductory segment from a radio broadcast sign-on and as a postlude used a nursery rhyme as played by a child's toy (following *Once Upon A Time*). Sounds and music inserted between the spoken texts were collages which I felt in some way both related to the texts while at the same time created a certain space which aided in the 'mental digestion' of the spoken words. The source audio was enhanced more by means of sequential juxtaposition than by any electronic processing of the sound source. What was achieved was a significant emotional impact associated with various sounds: the metallic squeaking of a set of playground swings, the tolling of a church bell, the energetic whistling and laughing of high school students on the last day of school, etc. What is most interesting in this piece as well as in general about capturing sound sources and taking them back to the studio to work on is how poignant and compelling they sound when listened to outside of their original contexts.

Zagreb Everywhere presented challenges with regard to collecting, organising and presenting source audio in an artful way. As a composer, I very much enjoyed grappling with these challenges. The soundscape ultimately acts as an accompaniment for the video and a commentary on the texts. The sounds, however, also have their own integrity and often impress the mind of the viewer with the same potency as the text or visuals. The strongest organising principle of the work is its organic nature: sounds and images were gathered, and texts written, at the same place and at the same time.

Zagreb Everywhere was made by my two collaborators and myself following my basic idea for both the structure of the piece and also for what the piece is supposed to be. My main idea for *Zagreb Everywhere* is that it would stand as a work of art which has an aspect of cross-cultural interpretation, as opposed to a travelogue or a history book or a documentary commonly employed in cross-cultural communication. By viewing this video about Zagreb, one both gets to know 'another place' and reflects differently on one's own city and situation.

APPENDIX I. SYNOPSIS OF *ZAGREB EVERYWHERE*

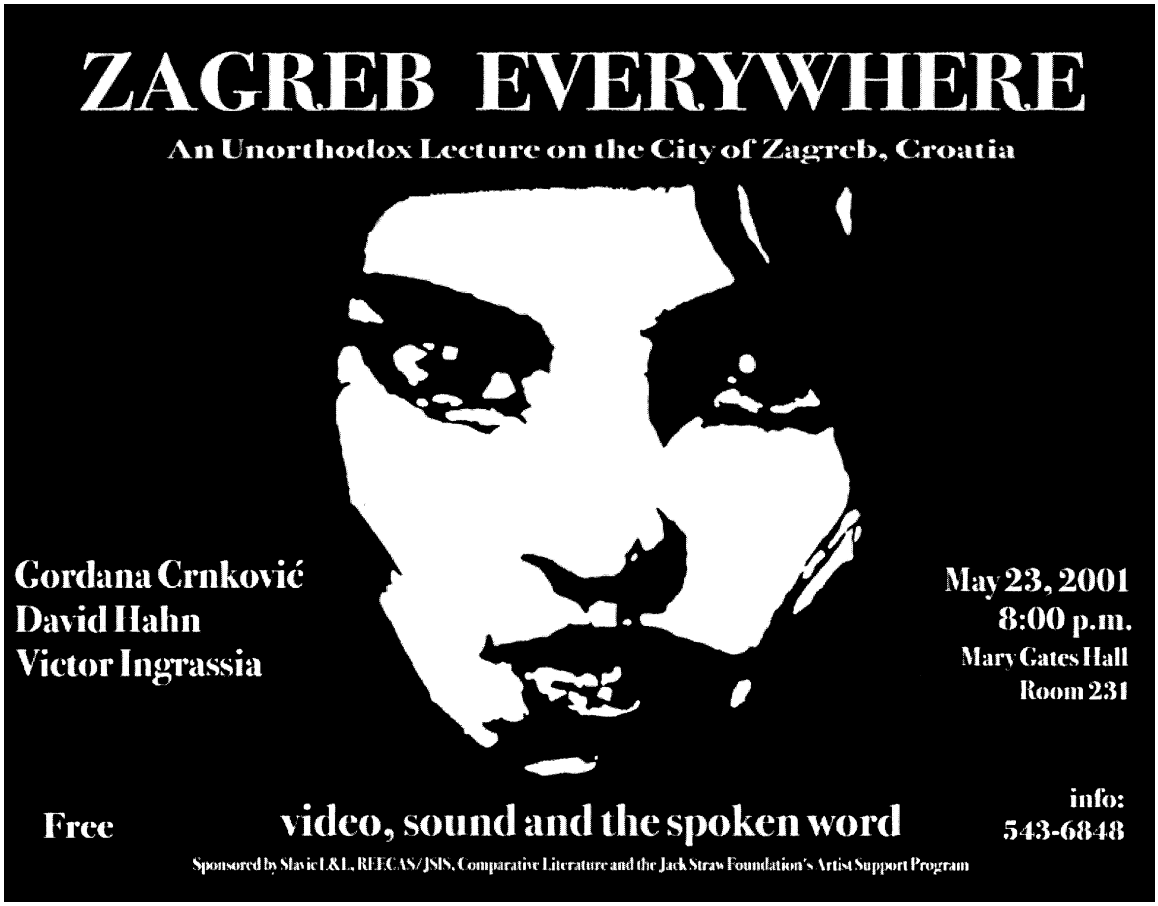
Zagreb Everywhere, a video portrayal of the city of Zagreb, Croatia, acclaimed as 'truly beautiful and moving' (Tony Geist, Cinema Studies Professor, University of Washington), is the result of an international collaboration between writer Gordana Crnković (Croatia) who narrates the video with her own various texts, video artist Victor Ingrassia (US), whose digital compositing of Zagreb photographs creates a lush and animated video landscape, and composer David Hahn (US), who collected sounds from Zagreb and together with some of his own music created the soundscape for the piece. Opposing conventional stereotypes about the 'barbaric Balkans' that were often reinforced by Western media during the recent war in that region, *Zagreb Everywhere* provides a unique insider's view on Crnković's native city and its inimitable features, while at the same time showing the experiences of that city and its people as having a broadly human appeal and resonance.

APPENDIX II. SEQUENCE OF *ZAGREB EVERYWHERE*

(Text titles are written in bold and the sounds and music in italic. All music composed by David Hahn except where noted.)

	Prelude
Z	**A COLD WINTER EVENING**
	Interlude #1
A	**RESIGNATION**
	Interlude #2
G	**MIROGOJ** [pronounced 'Mirogoy', the name of Zagreb's main cemetery]
	'Tis of thee . . . [guitar, sax]
R	**JOKE**
	Interlude #3
E	**A TRUE STORY**
	World Circus News [sax, accordion, guitar, tape collage]
B	**CONVERSATION WITH HER FATHER**
	Interlude #4
E	**GETTING THERE**
	Interlude #5
V	**A PLEASANT MORNING**
	Interlude #6
E	**BECKETT I** [variations of lines from Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*]
	Interlude #7
R	**BEWITCHED**
	Io son l'ocel (by Marcus Cara) [voice, lute]
Y	**HAND TO HAND**
	Dona Nobis Pacem [voice, guitar]
W	**BECKETT II** [variations of lines from Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*]
	Interlude #8
H	**CITY LIMITS**
	Interlude #9
E	**MAJA I KREŠO** [includes Emily Dickinson's last letter]
	Interlude #10
R	**ZAGREB 16**
	Interlude #11
E	**ONCE UPON A TIME**
	Postlude

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APPENDIX IV. CLIPS AVAILABLE ON THE WEB

The following clips from the video are available at: <http://homepage.mac.com/victoringrassia> and click on 'Zagreb'.

While the piece should definitely be seen as a whole, the clips are easily extracted from the sixteen discrete parts. Some stills from the work are also available. A video cassette copy of *Zagreb Everywhere* is also available for purchase at this site. PAL formatted videos are also available by special arrangement.

1. **RESIGNATION**
2. **A TRUE STORY**
3. **HAND TO HAND**
4. **MAJA I KREŠO**
5. **ZAGREB 16**
6. **BECKETT II**

APPENDIX V. SAMPLE TEXTS

(Written by Gordana Crnković)

MIROGOJ [Zagreb's main cemetery]
A flower vendor
An iron gate
A path
A grave

A grave
A flower
A tree
A bird

They go to the graveyard
much more
than people here
Important part of life
Every week, many of them
A habit, a ritual
A conversation never stopped

Marquez's story in *Cien Años de Soledad*, a girl and her lover meet on the sly, her family cripples the lover, and she spends the rest of her life remembering – perhaps – but alone for sure, surrounded by the yellow butterflies that always accompanied him, and he does not have any remorse either while, immobile in his wheelchair, he thinks year after year of the two of them

Something like that
The concept of 'moving on',
'going on with your life',
sounds quite strange here.

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Love does not stop just because
A loved one is dead

Don't you think so?

CONVERSATION WITH HER FATHER

– Why didn't you shave today? You look awful!
– I can't shave every day! That razor is so bad it's peeling my skin!
– Well, maybe we can replace that part.
– What part?
– The part of the razor that got worn out, you know, the top head so you get a new smooth one . . .
– You can't buy that in Zagreb!
– Yes we can.
– And where exactly would you buy such a thing?
– In that shop on the main square, you know the one, with electronics and stuff . . .
– Oh, the one on the corner of what's that street's name, the one with the prison?
– Yes, on the corner of that street and the square.
– I know that store.
– So you can go there and ask.
– Ask what?
– Ask to buy the razor part.
– I don't need any razor part.
– Yes you do, you just said it kills your skin.
– What kills my skin?
– Your razor, so you can't shave every day.
– Who says I can't shave because of the razor.
– You said so yourself, just a second ago.
– That's nonsense. I simply don't feel like shaving every day. Whatever gave you an idea that my shaver is at fault?

THE CITY LIMITS

The nervous system of the city reaches far in space and time through those many eyes and ears and brains who lived here and now live abroad – Australia, Austria, Argentina, Canada, China, Egypt, France, Germany, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Silicon Valley . . . Marko – along with others – is there, programming away: 'And now imagine me who did not have enough for a chocolate and now with all this money . . . and it is so boring . . . this work interests me just about as much as tying my shoelaces, what I did back home was much more interesting. Why does one always have to dumb oneself down to survive?'

'It is good here for us but it is not beautiful . . . People are so literal-minded . . . I'm homesick . . . I'm not homesick at all . . . I love it. If only I could move to San Francisco then all my dreams would come true.'

'Has anyone stayed in the city? Are you going there this summer? Shall I see you again?'

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