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The Adventures of Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled:
Queering the Streets of Belgrade

By

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Abstract

Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled (Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani) is an activist project by Nikola Herman (Nikša), which also included his pug Yoda in creating a street art alter-ego to bring critical commentary and humor to the streets of Belgrade, Serbia, between 2014 and 2018. Their work is closely interwoven with the LGBTQ+ history and street art interventions in the past two decades in Belgrade, and provides an example of locally contextualized and critical appropriation of the concept and term queer (in Serbian, *kvar* which literally means malfunction). In almost 200 distinct graffiti/visual messages, Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled playfully appropriated vernacular language, often subverting the meaning, and offering an important gender and social critique in the nationalistic and sometimes violent public space of Belgrade during the mid-2010s. It is paramount to look at these interventions in a contextualized and embodied way: as situational artworks which serve as tools of queer place-making. The stenciled little pug with speech balloons Nikša used to tag the city could be interpreted as a sign of resistance and hope in an environment prone to desensitization to violence and general apathy.

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Nikša Herman's openness, selflessness and "peace loving lunacy" both inspired this research and contributed to it. This is an homage to Yoda as well as to your unique vision.

My cohort has been listening to stories about Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled for more than a year. Thank you Hunter Kiley, Simone Gage, Sienna Weldon, Hannah Thompson and Xuying Liu, for your camaraderie, insightful comments and unquestionable support.

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Introduction

Imagine you are walking down familiar streets, between the charming but somewhat run down pre-WWII buildings and more recent gray socialist blocks, passing by cafes and parks, until you realize there is a dog following and even talking to you. Every now and then you see a little pug painted on the walls, with dozens of messages such as *Izvini, nisi moj stereotip* (Sorry, you're not my stereotype), *Ne tuci (p)se!* (Don't beat the dogs/yourself!), and *Hejteroseksualci* (Haterosexuals), among others.

The pug is Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled (IYW, Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani), an activist project by Nikola Herman (Nikša), which also included his pug Yoda in creating a mysterious street art character.¹ They operated mainly throughout the streets of Belgrade, Serbia, between 2014 and 2018, and communicated almost 200 unique messages by using stenciled pugs with speech balloons, ranging from activist comments to everyday sayings.² In these messages, they playfully appropriated vernacular language, often subverting (or queering) the meaning, and thus offering an important gender and especially LGBTQ+ social critique in an overtly nationalistic and sometimes violent public space during the mid-2010s.

Despite their significance, as well as notable presence and original style, Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled's opus has not been properly analyzed as a whole. Their work has been discussed in several interviews and newspaper articles,³ but analytical pieces are few and

¹ Artivism as a term comes from the intersection of art and activism, combining strategies and language of both.

² To avoid confusion, I am using *he* when referring to Nikša as an individual/author, and *they* when talking about IYW as a project which includes Yoda the dog.

³ Dolores Marčetić, "Krenimo od onog što je dobro – Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani u Zagrebu," *Libela: Portal o rodu, spolu i demokraciji*, November 26th 2014; Miloš Belčević, "Yoda Zgužvani: Revolucija beogradskog mopsa," *iSerbia*, January 23rd 2015.

part of a wider discussions on Serbian street art,⁴ activist interventions in the city,⁵ or part of mapping social extremism.⁶ It is my goal to provide a more comprehensive account of their work, although in selective fashion due to limited space, by offering more context and interweaving queer theory, visual analysis and social art history, in order to demonstrate how their activism is still relevant today.

There is a sense of urgency in readdressing these works by Nikša and IYW in light of recent events. The appearance of IYW during the 2010s emerged against a background of resurgent far right nationalism that in turn caused LGBTQ+ individuals to fear expressing themselves in public. Despite better visibility and a more stable presence of the LGBTQ+ community in Serbia over the years, numerous contemporary social controversies and ongoing discrimination unfortunately echo similar challenges with the 2010s. At the same time, in the past five or so years, it seems like LGBTQ+ street art has almost but disappeared from the streets.

Turning to IYW is timely, and can be a means of supporting existing and future queer and activist movements in challenging this troubled sense of progress. This effort is also closely related to writing a responsible contemporary history of LGBTQ+ voices and experiences in Serbia which is often unstable, under threat of suppression or invisibility, and

⁴ Ljiljana Radošević, "TAKE 3 VR Exhibition: Loving Street Art Belgrade," *VR All Art*, 2020; Srđan Tunić, "Street Art & Graffiti in Belgrade: Ecological Potentials?," *SAUC: Graffiti, Street Art & Urban Creativity Scientific Journal* (2020): 71–102.

⁵ Andrijana Danilović, "Grad i slika: Značaj i funkcija slikarskih intervencija u javnom prostoru" (PhD dissertation, Univerzitet umetnosti, Fakultet primenjenih umetnosti Beograd, 2017), 90.

⁶ Mirjana Stošić, "Face the Wall – (De)kontaminacija javnog prostora," *Politike (ne)prijateljstva: politike jezika i pitanje odgovornosti*, edited by Mirjana Stošić and Milka Vasiljević (Beograd: Centar za istraživanje kultura, politika i identiteta [IPAK.Centar], 2015), 33–46; Jana Danilović, "Slavimo Beograd, operimo grafite mržnje," *Liceulice br. 24 – Bolje da se uzalud boriš, nego da uzalud živiš* (2015), 16–17; Marina Balaž, "Ulično gaženje hejta!," *Liceulice br. 3 – Sloboda* (2016), 28–29.

hard to grasp due to social, political, class, religious prejudices, and especially rightwing extremism.⁷

An additional sense of urgency is the fact that IYW's stencils, as a form of street art which are often used for activism, are ephemeral in their core, and many pieces have already disappeared. Considering there has been no continuous production since 2018, their work is no longer in the public focus aside from occasional documentary exhibitions and street art aficionados' social media posts. This also brings to mind an issue that several authors have addressed: although popular, street art is often decontextualized with the overwhelming digital dissemination in the past ten or so years, often tied with the lack of direct contact with the lived environment. Therefore, I would like to propose a more experiential, embodied and grounded line of inquiry.

Considering all of the above, I want to argue how Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled's street activism, as a form of situational art, has been central in queer acts of place making and enacting counter-publics in Belgrade during the 2010s. The goal is to emphasize the importance of these critical marginalized voices in public spaces as means of condemning violence by various right-wing groups and tackling general apathy and desensitization to violence among city dwellers.

⁷ Jelisaveta Blagojević and Olga Dimitrijević (eds), "Još uvek nismo kvir: tragovi prošlosti i/ili osmišljavanje budućnosti," *Među nama: Neispričane priče gej i lezbejskih života* (Beograd: Hartefakt Fond, 2014), 9; Bojan Bilić and Sanja Kajinić (eds), "LGBT Activist Politics and Intersectionality in Croatia and Serbia: An Introduction," *Intersectionality and LGBT Activist Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1–29.

Research Questions & Methods

My research questions are: How did Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled tackle issues of violence and desensitization of Serbian society? Which locations and messages did they choose to communicate in Belgrade? How were the streets of Belgrade “queered” by their interventions? To answer these questions, this paper takes into consideration the following:

- The use of street art as a public and situational form of art, which encompasses an invented character (pseudonym, alter ego), and the graffiti practice of tagging—visually claiming public spaces.
- A variety of intelligent and humorous messages which point to social and symbolic violence and interconnectedness of social struggles.
- The choice of several city locations according to applicable surfaces, availability, personal interaction, and history.
- Ephemerality of both street art and queer practices, where IYW is purposefully claiming public spaces for LGBTQ+ people, creating an internal critique of identity politics, and thinking outside the “gay box.” This ephemerality is also a key difference from the majority of past and ongoing discussions on queer spaces which are predominantly focused on indoor spaces, or public ones such as parks and toilets.⁸

⁸ See: Aaron Betsky, *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc, 1997); Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette and Yolanda Retter (eds), *Queers in Space: Communities, Public Places, Sites of Resistance* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997); Adam Nathaniel Furman and Joshua Mardell (eds), *Queer Spaces: An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places and Stories* (London: RIBA Publishing, 2022); Branko V. Burmaz, *Arhitektonski model kvir prostora: studija slučaja Beograd* (Arhitektonski fakultet, Univerzitet u Beogradu, 2017, PhD dissertation).

The intersection between street art, queer theory, and Serbia is rather a particular field. Street art has been well present in academia in the last twenty years with the internationally growing (and exploited) movement. Despite the ongoing gender analyses, however, discussions about queer street art seem to be in its infancy.⁹ There is very little mention of Serbia in the global street art world (and a rather small amount of in-depth analyses from the region), while queer theory is well received in the academic sphere. Combining the three areas, it is my aim to try to bridge this gap between the fields and advocate for interconnectedness of issues on a glocal scale.¹⁰

In approaching street art in general, I am echoing concerns by several researchers that street art needs to be approached in a contextualized and experiential way, especially in our era of overwhelming digitalization and popularization of street art.¹¹ In following this advice, I rely generously on Mitja Velikonja's analytical framework, which takes into consideration the message (content, artwork), the producer (artist), location (physical context) and reactions (public). This approach can provide the researcher a more rounded, informed and contextualized insight.

To achieve this inquiry, I implemented several methodological tools to contextualize Belgrade, collect the material, and demonstrate what makes public spaces really queer in IWV's case. Embodied research methodology emphasizes physical presence of the researcher and temporality in constructing shared social meanings with other people

⁹ See *(Queer) Street Art in Belgrade* section.

¹⁰ From global and local, indicating interconnection of issues.

¹¹ Peter Bengtson, *The Street Art World* (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2014), 146–159; Mitja Velikonja, *Post-Socialist Political Graffiti in the Balkans and Central Europe* (London & New York: Routledge, 2020), 6; John Lennon, *Conflict graffiti: from revolution to gentrification* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 19; Anna Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2011), 61, 192.

involved in the study and embodied experiences.¹² In this case, it includes my discussions with the artist and exploring the streets of Belgrade in person, both as a native speaker, guide, and a local. When it comes to the artworks, social semiotics is employed to understand social meanings and humor of IYW's messages.¹³ This is supplemented by two interviews and several informal chats with the artist.

In collecting, selecting and analyzing the material, I relied on a mix of ethnographic, digital, and semiotic tools. A mix of urban walking (as an ethnographic method), cruising (a queer theory method), and playing with Serbian term *bazanje* (idle wandering) was used to understand IYW's choice of locations in a given space and viewers' potential encounter with them.¹⁴ These locations and IYW's artworks were geocoded, mapped and grouped by relying on several digital photo archives,¹⁵ artist's social media (Facebook and Instagram),¹⁶ and the use of Google maps. The latter was useful to see the wider street context and clusters of other artworks and messages nearby by way of Google's photographing Belgrade's street views in 2013 and 2014, during the IYW's initial peak period of activity.

I would also like to highlight how this thesis is not just an attempt at documenting LGBTQ+ art-making, but also how the embodied methodology is an extension of the queer act itself, countering the erasure of LGBTQ+ voices and experiences. Backed by these

¹² Malin Fransberg, Mari Myllylä and Jonna Tolonen, "Embodied graffiti and street art research," *Qualitative Research*, 0(0) (2021): 5.

¹³ Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism: Creative Nonviolent Resistance* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 17–26; Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 48–50.

¹⁴ Noel B. Salazar, "The Art of Urban Walking," *Teaching Urban Art Practices in Pandemic Times* (Brussels: Blurbs, 2022), 22–25; Simon Ofield, "Cruising the Archive," *Journal of Visual Culture*, Vol 4(3) (2005): 357; Luka Knežević-Strika, "Bazanje," *U10 Art Space*, 2022; Luka Knežević-Strika, "Bazanje – to je nešto što meni nedostaje (intervju sa Marijom Todorović)," *Oblakoder*, June 17th 2022.

¹⁵ Aside from my own collection, I relied on the material from the artist and from my street art colleagues Ljiljana Radošević and Aleksandar Đalek Đorđević, courtesy of Street Art Belgrade.

¹⁶ Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani, "Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani's Facebook Page," Facebook; Nikša Herman, "realnost_ujeda Instagram page," Instagram.

methodological tools, I focus on two city locations—Savamala and Dorćol—and several individual pieces by IYW, notably: *Do jajnika, Ovde je butchno, HIV sloveni, Hejteroseksualci, Pis mačo, Femmenalno, Istraži svoj klitoris, Čekam ovas, Budi muško oženstveni se, Drug od drugog, Oblaci, J*beš p*edere, and Sada je najbolje*. But before diving in the little pug’s wisdom, a brief overview of LGBTQ+ activism is necessary to situate IYW in recent Serbian and street art history.

LGBTQ+ Activism in Serbia, Queer Spaces and the Meaning of Queer/Kvir/Kvar

The key for understanding LGBTQ+ activism in Serbia, and previously SFR Yugoslavia, is feminism. “The women’s movement in the territory of former Yugoslavia has a long history and it represents a crucial point in the struggles against the oppression of patriarchy, but it also overlaps with hidden histories of homosexuality.”¹⁷ After several organized actions that took place in the mid-1970s, the first international feminist conference *Drug-ca žena: Žensko pitanje – novi pristup (Comrade Women: The Woman Question—A New Approach)* was organized in Belgrade in 1978. The conference was a “...beginning of the critique of the socialist patriarchy and the critique of the socialist concept of the women’s destiny,”¹⁸ establishing a blueprint for future socialist and internationalist engagement. The “softer ideological cage” of orthodox socialism saw feminism as either unnecessary or a bourgeois concept, but the conference opened new perspectives and possibilities. Under the tenets of feminism, the first LGBTQ+ activist groups were formed in the 1980s (like

¹⁷ Ivana Marjanović, “Staging the Politics of Interconnectedness between Queer, Anti-fascism and No Borders Politics” (PhD dissertation, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2017), 70.

¹⁸ Žarana Papić, “Women’s Movement in Former Yugoslavia: 1970s and 1980s,” *What Can We Do For Ourselves?*, eds. Marina Blagojević, Daša Duhaček and Jasmina Lukić (Beograd: Center for Women’s Studies, Research and Communication, 1995), 21.

Magnus and Lilit in Ljubljana, Slovenia), sharing members, organizations, values and strategies.¹⁹

Officially the first gay-lesbian organization in Serbia was Arkadija, formed in 1990, with the main aim to lobby against homophobia and decriminalize homosexuality (which occurred in 1994), among other goals. After the breakup of Yugoslavia due to the civil war in 1991, many feminist and LGBTQ+ organizations in Serbia were dedicated to the anti-war movement and were critical of the nationalistic regime and rising political role of the Serbian Orthodox Church. During these years, a once peaceful socialist country turned to aggressive nationalism and polarizing war rhetoric, introducing regressive gender policies where both feminism and everything LGBTQ+ related were labeled as foreign enemies, a homosexual conspiracy, and a Western vice.²⁰

After 2000, there was another turn. With the first democratic elections in 2000, Serbia entered an allegedly democratic, liberal and pro-EU period of stabilization and growth after almost a decade of economic sanctions and conflicts. However, this process has been observed to be simplistic and misleading; the core system remained unchallenged and a rubber band effect took place. In the past two decades we have seen an almost schizophrenic process of retraditionalization under the banner of ethno-nationalism (which is essentially against LGBTQ+ rights) and neoliberalism following European Union policies.²¹

¹⁹ Papić, "Women's Movement in Former Yugoslavia," 20–22; Sonja Gočanin, "Počeci LGBT organizovanja u Srbiji – Pismo iz Slovenije koje je pokrenulo istoriju," *Među nama: Neispričane priče gej i lezbejskih života*, eds. Jelisaveta Blagojević and Olga Dimitrijević (Beograd: Hartefakt Fond, 2014), 336–338; Marjanović, "Staging the Politics," 70–85.

²⁰ Gočanin, "Počeci LGBT organizovanja u Srbiji," 338–339;

²¹ Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 131–145.

LGBTQ+ activism seems to be stuck somewhere in the middle, between local struggles and international support.

After the overthrow of the Milošević regime in 2000, a period of optimism followed with a rise in LGBTQ+ activism and visibility, as well as a large influx of foreign, Western funding. With the new century, previous strategies of anti-militarism, rejection of nationalism, and internationalism were diversified and fused with queer and leftist activism.²² Unfortunately, the first Pride parade organized in 2001 ended with bloody consequences. Due to a lack of adequate police protection, many participants were attacked and numerous nationalistic, clero-fascist/neo-Nazi and ultra-right groups were very loud and violent in shaping the populist discourse of the whole decade.²³ These and similar Pride-related controversies contributed to a significant part of LGBTQ+ activism and public attention, although there have been numerous other issues.²⁴

The fact that Pride parade took over as the symbol of the LGBTQ+ struggle is also closely related to the process of European integration, as a “litmus test” of democracy with imperialistic overtones. After heavy criticism from EU officials for banning multiple subsequent Prides, for right-wing and hooligan Pride-related violence, and for ongoing homophobia, Serbia saw a series of officially sanctioned Prides from 2014, often attended by EU officials. As several authors noted, this created a paradox. To keep up appearances in

²² Gočanin, “Počeci LGBT organizovanja u Srbiji,” 344–345; Marjanović, “Staging the Politics,” 86–92.

²³ See: Izabela Kisić, *Desni ekstremizam u Srbiji* (Beograd: Helsinški odmor za ljudska prava u Srbiji, 2020).

²⁴ Labris, *Prvo je stiglo jedno pismo: Petnaest godina lezbejskog i gej aktivizma u Srbiji i Crnoj Gori 1990-2005* (Beograd: Labris – organizacija za lezbejska ljudska prava, 2005); Sofija Petković, “LGBT aktivizam u savremenoj Srbiji: politizacija identiteta i strategije LGBT aktivista,” *Etnološko-antropološke sveske* 25, (n.s.) 14 (2015): 49–88; Bilić & Kajinić, *LGBT Activist Politics and Intersectionality in Croatia and Serbia*; Bojan Bilić, “Europe ♥Gays? Europeanisation and Pride Parades in Serbia,” *LGBT Activism and Europeanisation in the Post-Yugoslav Space: On the Rainbow Way to Europe*, ed. Bojan Bilić (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 117–174; Saša Kesić, “Theory of Queer Identities: Representation in Contemporary East-European Art and Culture,” *AM Journal of Art and Media Studies*, No. 14, (2017): 123–131.

an effort to enter the EU, the conservative ethno-nationalist government led by SNS political party is supporting Pride, allegedly sharing the same (neo)liberal values. At the same time, LGBTQ+ rights are more and more seen as means of globalization rather than community engagement.²⁵

Against this broad backdrop, IYW's peak activity between 2014 and 2018 was marked by two cornerstone events: a third successful Pride parade in 2014, after which no further Pride parades were banned or prevented until today, and the appointment of Ana Brnabić as the first gay/lesbian prime minister of Serbia in 2017. Critics noted that during her tenure, she has failed to advocate for better LGBTQ+ rights and equality, introducing surface-level changes aimed to satisfy the EU while being part of a right-wing, nationalistic and conservative government.²⁶ While these events have contributed to better visibility and a more stable presence of LGBTQ+ community in Serbia, it is paramount to question this ultimately false sense that LGBTQ+ rights have been finally won with ongoing officially sanctioned Pride parades and a lesbian prime minister.

At the same time, the reasons for contemporary activist resistance are numerous. "In 2020, the European Agency for Fundamental Rights reported that 71% of Serbian respondents still avoided holding hands in public with a same-sex partner for fear of being assaulted, threatened, or harassed."²⁷ In 2022, a pan-European international event—EuroPride 2022, took place in Belgrade, in what was seen as a major win for the LGBTQ+ community, yet was held under precarious conditions. Threats of police ban (introduced,

²⁵ Bilić, "Europe ♥Gays?" 144–146. See: Petković, "LGBT aktivizam u savremenoj Srbiji," 49–88; Kesić, "Theory of Queer Identities," 123–131; Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 131–145.

²⁶ Clara Lhullier, "The First EuroPride in the Balkans: Why it might take more than a walk to address LGBTIQ+ rights in Serbia," *Platform.mk*, November 11th 2022.

²⁷ Lhullier, "The First EuroPride in the Balkans."

then withdrawn due to political pressure), the government's schizophrenic love-hate relationship with the event, and resurgent right-wing supporters, including oppositional political parties and the Serbian Orthodox Church,²⁸ all contributed to resurfacing of multiple political and social issues which were so common in the 2010s.²⁹ Hate speech from these events often finds its place on LGBTQ+ spaces and public walls, and like a tip of an iceberg stands as a reminder of socio-political controversies (such as the right-wing murals made in the past couple of years).³⁰

Keeping this in mind, communicating any LGBTQ+ topics and issues in public spaces in Serbia in the last twenty years was risky in multiple ways. The overwhelming hate speech created a very toxic and challenging environment to work with and in.³¹ This atmosphere significantly influenced LGBTQ+ artistic expressions and culture in Belgrade, and Serbia overall. Many initiatives were semi-public, if not entirely private, creating a safe space for expression. Other, more radical initiatives challenged the status quo by *poking the bear*,³² and speaking up about problematic issues in the public, at least for a short period of time. Among the activists in Serbia, one of the favorite avenues for creative expression has been

²⁸ According to the 2011 census, 85% of the population is Christian Orthodox.

²⁹ Lhullier, "The First EuroPride in the Balkans."

³⁰ Amelia Hansford, "Belgrade Pride building vandalised by anti-LGBTQ+ thugs," *PinkNews*, February 20th 2023; Aleks Eror, "How Serbian street art is using the past to shape the future," *The Calvert Journal*, December 14th 2021. Also since August 2021, there has been a public outcry over murals celebrating controversial nationalistic figures such as war criminal Ratko Mladić, controversial WWII general and Draža Mihajlović, and the most recent Russian president Vladimir Putin, made by an anonymous group of young right-wing supporters which have not been sanctioned by the police nor the government.

³¹ See: Labris, *Prvo je stiglo jedno pismo*; Petković, "LGBT aktivizam u savremenoj Srbiji;" Bilić & Kajinić, "LGBT Activist Politics and Intersectionality in Croatia and Serbia;" Kisić, *Desni ekstremizam u Srbiji*. In the domain of street art, see: Danilović, "Grad i slika;" Stošić, "Face the Wall;" Start Street Art BG, "Grafiti kao oružje borbe za „Srpstvo“," *Start Street Art BG*, February 22nd 2014.

³² A common expression *Ne čačkaj mečku* (Do not poke the bear) means do not look for trouble.

the performing arts, most likely because as a medium, performance is uncommercial, critical, focused on the body, direct and easily adaptable to any public space.³³

Several researchers have argued that this temporality and resistance to heteronormativity aided to form specific *queer spaces*. Whether these spaces are constructed for queer consumption from the start or appropriated for this particular use, they are constantly negotiated between public and private, experiential, impermanent and unstable in their meaning and use.³⁴ Having this in mind, *ephemera is evidence*, as José Esteban Muñoz famously said, that can help us understand queer acts of resistance and sociability.³⁵ It is also a link to another form of temporal practice—street art—which is explored in the next section.

Before looking at several LGBTQ+ activist pieces in the streets as a pre-history of IYW's activity, it is necessary to explain a term that has been in widespread use in theory and activism in the last twenty years in the region. Originally, especially from the 1980s, *queer* as a term traditionally denoted a more politicized or activist stance towards gender identities, avoiding essentialist categorizations of identity and sexuality, and operating in both theory and practice.³⁶ According to David J. Getsy, the term can be seen as a strategic artistic practice of queering relations, creating subversions and different kinships, resisting heteronormativity, and defying oppression in a performative way.³⁷ Following Getsy's

³³ Sabo, "LGBT i kvir aktivizam i umetničke prakse," *Među nama: Neispričane priče gej i lezbejskih života*, eds. Jelisaveta Blagojević and Olga Dimitrijević (Beograd: Hartefakt Fond, 2014), 388.

³⁴ Betsky, *Queer Space*, 18; Brent Ingram, Bouthillette, & Retter, *Queers in Space*, 27-31; Furman & Mardell, *Queer Spaces*, x.

³⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, "Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts," *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 8 (2) (1996): 6, 10; Amin Ghaziani and Matt Brim (eds), "Introduction: Queer Methods," *Imagining Queer Methods* (New York University Press, 2019), 15.

³⁶ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York University Press, 1996), 72–100.

³⁷ David J. Getsy, "Introduction//Queer Intolerability and its Attachments," *Queer (Documents of Contemporary Art)* (London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 12–16. Also: Gordon Hall, "Reading Things: On Sculpture, Gender, and Relearning How to See," in *Over-beliefs:*

conceptualization of queering relations, we need to take into consideration an entire network of meanings and resistance, which is both social and aesthetic.

In Serbia, just like the word *gej* (gay), *kvir* (queer) is a loanword from Western Europe and the United States which became more frequently used from the 2000s. In the history of LGBTQ+ activism in Serbia, it has been mostly used strategically, as an innovative, self-reflective, politically charged and critical call for radical action.³⁸ One of the most striking examples of the locally contextualized and critical appropriation of queer was *QueerBeograd Cabaret* from the latter half of 2000s. Several researchers argued that the QueerBeograd collective playfully translated the loanword of queer as *kvar* (malfunction), "...pointing to a malfunction in hegemonic regimes, and queer politics as the politics of interconnectedness."³⁹ Overall, their approach was relational and based on political solidarity, avoiding pigeonholing themselves on a single issue or exclusive gender and sexual identity issues.⁴⁰

Having this intersectional perspective in mind, I would argue that queer/*kvar* can be useful in interpreting Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled's artistic oeuvre. Between 2014 and 2018, IYW served as a proxy for Nikša in continuing the legacy and activism of previous queer initiatives and collectives. On another level, Nikša also queered the streets by communicating messages promoting queer relationally that went beyond identity politics

Collected Writing 2011-2018, ed. Spencer Byrne-Seres (Portland, OR: Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, 2019), 9.

³⁸ Dušan Maljković, "A lesson in queer (Interview with Federico Sicurella)," *Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa*, 2013; Blagojević & Dimitrijević, "Još uvek nismo kvir;" Petković, "LGBT aktivizam u savremenoj Srbiji," 52–56.

³⁹ Marjanović, "Staging the Politics," 4.

⁴⁰ Marjanović, "Staging the Politics," 92–98, 238–246; Bojan Bilić and Irene Dioli, "Queer Beograd Collective: Beyond Single-Issue Activism in Serbia and the Post-Yugoslav Space," *Intersectionality and LGBT Activist Politics*, eds. Bojan Bilić and Sanja Kajinić (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 110–112.

and included commentaries concerning deep-rooted systems of power and exclusion (such as the trans community, people living with HIV, migrants, homophobia, hate speech). All of these issues take place in public space via street art, as a democratic and situational art form with large communication potentials.

Queer Street Art in Belgrade

To avoid any possible confusion, I am using the word *street art* in a very narrow sense. Street art is a type of contemporary art made at the intersection of graffiti subculture and fine arts techniques, operating in public spaces. It is ephemeral, done both with and without permission, with larger communicative potential than graffiti since it employs clear messages and/or characters.⁴¹ With its origin in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the United States and Europe, it quickly spread and became an international phenomenon in the 1990s, while in Serbia it has been present from the mid-2000s.

One of the most common techniques in street art is the use of stencils—template patterns one sprays or paints over to leave letters and images on the surface below. While the preparation could take some time, the execution in the street itself is rather quick, depending on the number of colors or layers the creator wants to utilize. Comprehension and direct messages are of the defining features of street art, and due to this very nature, stencils are commonly used for both artistic and activist ends.⁴² One of the key defining

⁴¹ See: Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 3, 65; Ljiljana Radošević, “Graffiti, Street Art, Urban Art: Terminological Problems and Generic Properties,” *New Cultural Capitals: Urban Pop Cultures in Focus*, ed. L. Koos (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013), 1–13; Alison Young, *Street Art, Public City: Law, Crime and the Urban Imagination* (London & New York: Routledge, 2014), 2–4; Bengtsen, *The Street Art World*, 11–13, 131–164; Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 3–32.

⁴² Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 62; Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 33–36.

aspects of street art is ephemerality—the art is not made to last. The life of a given artwork in the street is dictated by *the law of the street*. Since a larger part of the production is made illegally (or without permit), it can be taken down anytime.

Despite the political and community potential, intersections between street art and LGBTQ+ rights and creativity worldwide seem to exist in the margins, outside the mainstream. According to the filmmaker of the forthcoming *Queer Street Art* documentary, Daniel “Dusty” Albanese (The Dusty Rebel), who interviewed artists from Europe, the United States and Mexico, this new burgeoning art still lacks visibility and acknowledgment, and a large part of the production in the United States is not actually made by the queer community at all.⁴³ The reasons might be the omnipresent patriarchal- and heteronormative-biased environment which often sidelines other groups, such as women, whose participation in public life is always negotiated and often undermined.⁴⁴

Following this thread, a recent article on queer street art in the United States noted: “A quick look around even the most liberal cities confirms that misogynistic and homophobic imagery remains prevalent: walls, sidewalks, signs, and other makeshift canvases within urban spaces often boast objectified depictions of women, hyper-masculine portrayals of men, and hateful anti-gay tags.”⁴⁵ While a comprehensive global overview and history of queer street art is yet to be written, in the case of IYW, it is important to ground

⁴³ See: Daniel “Dusty” Albanese (The Dusty Rebel), “Out In The Streets: Queer Liberation Through Street Art;” Abigail Dore, “‘Making the Stones Speak’ Exploring the motivations of queer street artists in the United States” (BA Thesis, University of Leeds, 2020), 7–8, 57–58.

⁴⁴ Anna Augusto Rodrigues, “Pop Up Pedagogy: Exploring Connections between Street Art, Feminist Literacy Practices and Communities” (PhD dissertation, York University, 2018), 13–14; Ilana Herzig, “The Renegades Making Feminist Art in the Streets,” *Hyperallergic*, October 31st 2019.

⁴⁵ Paige Towers, “A Very Queer Street Art Movement Is Spreading Across the US,” *Hyperallergic*, June 15th 2018.

these concerns into a specific local context. One of the means to achieve it is to look at historical examples of similar artworks *in situ* prior, and in parallel to IYW's activity.

A small but notable number of past examples of LGBTQ+ street activism is known, some of which I had a chance to encounter in-person in the streets of Belgrade.⁴⁶ Probably one of the most famous early feminist graffiti from SFR Yugoslavia was *Proleter i svih zemalja, tko vam pere čarape?* (Workers of the world, who is washing your socks?) from the early 1980s.⁴⁷ Referencing the famous communist slogan *Workers of the world, unite!*, the graffiti questioned the domestic sphere and gender imbalances behind the official ideology. In Serbia, the earliest record available to me was Lepa Mladenović's note that lesbian activists were making anti-war graffiti in 1995 in the Dorćol area of Belgrade. This included the feminist symbol of a clenched fist and goddess/planet Venus (similar to Figure 1), but their action was cut short by a violent encounter with several men.⁴⁸

However, graffiti and street art blossomed with the arrival of the 21st century. During the 2000s, with the proliferation of LGBTQ+ initiatives and public controversies (such as the first Pride parade in 2001), the street became an important place for resistance. Several informal groups made affirmative and informative graffiti around 2002. For example, Gayrilla/Gejrila tagged the city both with *Gej je OK* (Gay is OK) messages and gay

⁴⁶ According to my experience, since many of them occurred prior to widespread use of social networks, not to mention the general switch of web domains from .yu to .rs, many results are not online and researchers need to rely on archival work and interviews with activists. Information about several of these initiatives I have obtained by informal chats with their authors, such as Lepa Mladenović, Anđela Mujčić, Majda Puača, and Dorian Fuk. Also see: Sabo, "LGBT i kvir aktivizam i umetničke prakse."

⁴⁷ Mitja Velikonja, "Ustavimo LGBT revolucijo! – Kar poskusite! (Anti)homofobni in (anti)patriarhalni grafiti postsocialistične tranzicije," *Časopis za kritiko znanosti, domišljijo in novo antropologijo* #280, *Boj z neumnostjo / novi feminizmi* (2020), 274; Tea Hvala, "Streetwise Feminism: Feminist and Lesbian Street Actions, Street Art and Graffiti in Ljubljana," *Amnis* [Online] 8, *Femmes et militantisme*, September 1st 2008, 4.

⁴⁸ Lepa Mladjenovic, "III. Notes of a Feminist Lesbian during Wartime," *The European Journal of Women's Studies* Vol. 8 (3) (2001): 387-388; Labris, *Prvo je stiglo jedno pismo*, 16.

and lesbian symbols, while Lambda center erased homophobic and violent graffiti.⁴⁹ While homophobia still persisted, in the latter half of 2000s when the revived Pride parade question took over the mainstream discourse, LGBTQ+ graffiti was joined by another powerful medium—stencils. Majda Puača from the QueerBeograd collective along with a group of younger activists bombed the city center in 2008 with a provocative stencil depiction of the Serbian nationalist symbol—fist with three fingers representing love, faith and hope—saying *U d*pe/guzu* (In your *ss), taking nationalism head on. These stencils were strategically positioned in underpassages with a heavy flow of pedestrian traffic.

Another group marked the public space between 2009 and 2011. Before the announced (but ultimately banned) Pride parade in 2009, three activists, including artist Anđela Mujčić⁵⁰ sprayed dozens of stencils with superheroes (Figure 2). Batman and Joker, and Modesty Blaise and Superman countered nearby anti-gay messages by nationalistic and extremist organizations. By responding to provocative threats *Čekamo vas* (We are waiting for you) sprayed around the city before the planned Pride parade, these pop culture icons responded *Nas/mene čekate?* (Are you waiting for me/us?) and *Stigao sam* (I'm here). Here we see an appropriation of (Western) pop culture heroes contextualized as bearers of justice and defenders of the weak, which might reveal the double-edged sword of the West as both a major source of LGBTQ+ support, but also an alleged “foreign” threat to nationalistic Serbian identity.⁵¹ Nevertheless, their actions were influential and widely covered by the media. Around 2011, a message began appearing both in Belgrade and the

⁴⁹ Labris, *Prvo je stiglo jedno pismo*, 26.

⁵⁰ Anđela Mujčić, Radojica Bunčić and Ruta Ranđelović.

⁵¹ See: Costas Canakis and Roswitha Kersten-Pejanić, “Spray-canned Discourses: Reimagining Gender, Sexuality, and Citizenship through Linguistic Landscapes in the Balkans,” *Othering in Southeastern European Societies: Debates on Right-Wing Extremism, Anticiganism, Homophobia, and Ethnocentrism*, eds. Martin Mlinarić, Johannes Gold, and Sebastian Goll (Wiessbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2016), 140–147.

city of Niš, *Ne j*bu vas p*deri nego kapitalizam* (The f*gs don't scr*w with you but capitalism does), shifting the critique towards economy, but also offering potential means of (non-homophobic) solidarity.⁵² All these messages by self-organized individuals and groups provided critical visibility of the LGBTQ+ community and issues in public space, countering the populist discourse of homophobia.

The enthusiasm and proliferation of queer activism seemed almost infectious at the time. Towards the mid-2010s there were several new initiatives: *Mesto za ljubljenje* (Kissing area) from 2012, which is addressed in next section; the 2013 Pride parade stencils which played with the traditional *slava* religious celebration (Figure 4); *IPAK Mirrors* in 2014 with portraits and quotes from famous feminist and lesbian authors (Figure 3);⁵³ *A koga ti voliš?* (And who do you love?) by Mujčić (Figure 11); *Feminist Jesus* (Figure 12); *Lez be honest*; and *Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled* from late 2013, among others.⁵⁴ Adding to the previous graffiti messages, which were sporadically sprayed throughout the city, at this point these easily reproducible activist stencils significantly and unavoidably shaped the image of the urban core.

Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled

Although sometimes there seems to be a clear distinction between street pieces done by activists and artists, some of the previous examples demonstrate how these

⁵² Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 59. Mujčić also did several activist stencils in the city of Niš and artist Jelena Jelača bombed Jagodina with lesbian stencils in 2011. See: Street Art Niš, "Niški odgovor na zabranu Parade ponosa," Facebook, October 2nd 2011; Vesti-online, "Lezbejke Jagodine uzvrćaju udarac!" Jelača's action was erroneously attributed to QueerBeograd collective, see Bilić & Dioli, "Queer Beograd Collective," 121.

⁵³ IPAK.Center, "IPAK Mirror;" Stošić, "Face the Wall," 43–45.

⁵⁴ This is not a definite number of initiatives nor interventions, rather a selection available to the author through literature, personal archive, and contacts with activists.

distinctions are porous. In a similar pattern, the groundwork for IYW's beginnings lie with one of the most influential street artists in Serbia, TKV—The Kraljica Vila (The fairy queen). She and a couple of other women artists introduced street art in Serbia when the first stencils started appearing in Belgrade in 2004. Since then, she has been the Queen, as graffiti writers would say, with an art career that often intersects with activism.⁵⁵ In 2012 for IPAK Center and together with Kornelija Sabo, TKV took part in a project and workshop called *Rodno čitanje grada* (Gendered readings of the city), aimed at supporting young artists.

Nikša, who would later create Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled, took part in their workshop, a crucial point for his way to activism.⁵⁶ As one of the outcomes, a team of participants including himself realized an independent project called *Mesto za ljubljenje* (Kissing area) which operated from late 2012 until 2014 (Figures 5 & 8).⁵⁷ Behind *Kissing area* was the idea to mark metaphorical safe spaces around the city and position them on public sidewalks and in parks. Playing with the common homophobic saying that LGBTQ+ people should keep to themselves inside their own four walls, the authors created a stencil marking the four corners signifying the walls of a room (or a brick triangle signifying a house), framing an inscription which is (usually) the very name of the project in Serbian.⁵⁸

However, Nikša at some point was dissatisfied with the project since its essentially pro-LGBTQ+ and non-heteronormative messages appeared unclear and people were

⁵⁵ She was also one of the co-authors of *IPAK Mirrors*.

⁵⁶ Sabo, "LGBT i kvir aktivizam i umetničke prakse," 393.

⁵⁷ Authors were: Anđela Čeh, Sanja Seliškar, Petar Đošev and Nikola Nikša Herman. Stošić, "Face the Wall," 42–43; IPAK.Center, "Kissing area," *Research Center for Cultures, Politics and Identities*.

⁵⁸ Some variations existed, such as inscriptions in Macedonian, *Feminističko mesto* (Feminist area) for BeFem 2013 festival, and a few literary/pop culture references: *Naše je iskustvo palanačko*, *All beauty must die*, and *Another world is possible*. See: Mesto za ljubljenje/Kissing area, "Mesto za ljubljenje/Kissing area Facebook page," Facebook.

appropriating the popular stencils as romantic urban spots. At the time he was also experimenting on his own, under the Nique Chat pseudonym. Some of his early street interventions were playful and humorous counter renditions of homophobic messages and stencils with Freddie Mercury.⁵⁹ With the new knowledge of stencil-making and LGBTQ+ activism, very soon he came up with the new project—IYW.

Like in previous examples of LGBTQ+ activism, Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled utilized the medium of stencils to communicate a combination of text and images, this time coupled with speech balloons drawn manually with markers. The dominant image in the stencil is a pug called Yoda (Figure 6), an adopted pet dog of Nikša. The name comes from Yoda from Star Wars, referencing not only the outward appearance of both characters, but also their age. Together they embody IYW, in a collaboration between the human and the animal. The dog not only served as inspiration for the character, but accompanied Nikša to almost all of the street interventions, and served as a mouthpiece for his messages. To paraphrase Nikša (Figure 7), “It was as if I was imagining what Yoda would say to all these [homophobic and hate] messages we were encountering during our walks.” The stenciled pug is predominantly life-sized, positioned either within the reach of Yoda the dog (often emphasized on IYW’s social media accounts), or at the average line of sight of us humans.

In an interview, Nikša described Yoda as: “...a pug, reaction, answer, message, awareness, sobering up, kick in the butt, wordplay, empowerment, defense, protection, questioning, critique, intervention, conversation, joke, memory, recycling, activism, Kissing area.”⁶⁰ This multifaceted and repetitive image made this street alter ego a true character

⁵⁹ Two examples from September 2013: *Стоп параду!* (Stop the parade!) with only one letter omitted became *Стоп прду* (Stop fart); unfinished *Убий п*де[ра]* (Kill the f*[g]) was commented with *Prpa, aaa? P*čko!* (Scaredy cat, aaa? C*nt!).

⁶⁰ Balaž, “Ulično gaženje hejta!,” 28.

tag, at the same time of recognizable authorship and anonymity, a common feature in the world of graffiti and street art.⁶¹ According to our interview, TKV's colorful stencils and paste ups of strong women inspired his approach, as well as Shepard Fairey's stickers *Obey Giant*. In both cases artists were covering the city with their characters, creating persistent and alternative advertising with a sense of mystery. Just like in the *Obey Giant* case, Nikša was not signing their pieces. In a way, you needed to know who the artist was beforehand or through word of mouth.⁶²

One could argue that the choice of a dog brings several interpretations to mind. Dogs are present in the streets of Belgrade, as desirable pets or undesirable strays. Symbolically, "marking the territory" is often related to dogs, as well as social groups such as gangs and sport fans. But IYW's approach is far from violent: "I consider myself a peace loving lunatic and that's somehow a story that I figured out sits well with people and the authorities [...]."⁶³ Doing graffiti and street art through the action of tagging and bombing—covering a large area with your signature/character—is also a way of claiming the public space visually and symbolically.⁶⁴ And with a queer perspective in mind, it is a way of claiming space, asking for cultural validation and breaking the silence about one's existence.⁶⁵

According to Nikša, Yoda the dog helped him to overcome addiction, and by taking care of the animal, he was empowered to make positive changes in his own life and

⁶¹ Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 12–16, 32–38. See for example: Ronald C. Roth (ed.), *Keith Haring: Journey of the Radiant Baby* (Piermont: Bunker Hill Publishing Inc, Reading Public Museum, 2006), 13.

⁶² Because of this, I would argue that many people are not informed about the name of the initiative, let alone the author, and that there is more material present in social media and the press without attribution to IYW.

⁶³ Nikola Herman (Nique chat / Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani) and Nevena Jovanović, "Yodorus (drugi deo)," Youtube video, 1:42–1:53, January 26th 2016.

⁶⁴ Possibly because of this, dogs are common character tags. See: Roth, *Keith Haring*, 13, and Wacławek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 14.

⁶⁵ Getsy, "Introduction//Queer Intolerability and its Attachments," 44, 79.

immediate surroundings. The motivation was to face indifference and ignorance, fight violence and hate, and “start with something positive.”⁶⁶ IYW was mainly active from late 2014 to 2018, when the dog passed away. During the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, he made just a few stencils with Yoda in 2020, and has a large number of messages pending for years that he wanted to put up. Since then, Nikša has been trying to continue his work, possibly with a different approach and a new character. Until that happens, there is a large body of past work that deserves our attention.

Some of the key aspects of public interventions that IYW introduced was a combination of: an amiable character; clear, critical and diverse messages; humor and wit in playing with words and meanings;⁶⁷ queering the public space; and a continuous production. A little pug, just like Batman and Joker, is an instantly recognizable image, made intentionally cute and benevolent. He stands as the artist’s surrogate, a proxy, and a transmitter of messages. In a fashion typical of stencils in particular, their messages are written clearly, in Latin script,⁶⁸ and a great majority in Serbian. The aim was to reach a large audience in public spaces, by utilizing this alternative media of street art. There is also care to the surface below to make the message legible, using markers to contrast the background color.

While activism might sometimes seem dull in its seriousness and utilitarianism, it does not necessarily need to be so. Humor operates in a social, cognitive and emotional way

⁶⁶ Marčetić, “Krenimo od onog što je dobro.”

⁶⁷ An interesting parallel could be made with slogans and graffiti made during the student protests in the 1990s in Belgrade which demonstrated a highly humorous and politically charged content. See: Milena Dragičević Šešić, *Umetnost i kultura otpora* (Beograd: Institut za pozorište, film, radio i televiziju, Fakultet dramskih umetnosti & Clio, 2018), 263–328.

⁶⁸ Serbia uses two scripts: Cyrillic (official) and Latin.

that allows activists to playfully and publicly criticize power.⁶⁹ And when artists use it to destabilize dominant ideas, in a *discursive guerilla war*, they can stir up public opinion and offer alternatives to the prevailing order of things.⁷⁰ However, many of these humorous and political stunts suffer from a lack of continuity. Many times they are responding to a particular political event or cases of discrimination and do not continue with their engagement.⁷¹ The situation is quite different in the case of IYW who maintained public production for a number of years.

Diving into this production is not an easy feat. Unlike the *Kissing area*, IYW communicated a larger body of content. According to my research, from almost 200 unique messages, about 30% is related to everyday sayings and general positive messages, 30% question gender and sexuality, and the last 30% are some sort of a social critique.⁷² They range from pop culture references, social media (mis)use, and everyday sayings, to social critique, gender expectations, and animal rights.⁷³ In socio-political commentary, IYW's messages were always relevant to current events.⁷⁴ The majority of them employ a combination of wit and humor, often subverting the meaning of words, in revealing alternative or transgressive meanings. Nikša tagged the city relying on an interplay between the message, location, available surface and inspiration. Therefore, taking into consideration the physical public space as the space of production and communication in analyzing street art is paramount.

⁶⁹ Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 7–9.

⁷⁰ Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 21–22.

⁷¹ Hvala, "Streetwise Feminism," 2.

⁷² This number does not include how many times a given message was reproduced in streets.

⁷³ Danilović, "Grad i slika," 90; Marčetić, "Krenimo od onog što je dobro," Belčević, "Yoda Zgužvani."

⁷⁴ Danilović, "Grad i slika," 90.

The city space is, after all, a large part of the meaning of these situational artworks,⁷⁵ its primary context,⁷⁶ created purposefully to be communicative and democratic.⁷⁷ In order to understand the power of both artistic and political street art, we should address not only the content (artwork) and producer (artist), but also context (location) and audience (public, reception).⁷⁸ Given the overwhelming number of messages, I will focus on two city areas and discuss IYW's placing and meaning-making in interaction with the surrounding context.⁷⁹

Femmenalno: Marking an LGBTQ+ Friendly Zone and Deconstructing Gender

In queer literature, walking around the city is usually associated with cruising, a practice that can be imbued with erotic encounters, but also research potential. It “[...] has an in-built potential for diversion, irregular connections and disorderly encounters,”⁸⁰ which allows us to experience the city with a sense of surprise. Many IYW's messages are juxtaposing a familiar character—a small almost comic book looking pug—with messages that playfully question everyday life. One of the prime locations for such a strategy is Savamala urban neighborhood.

Once a prominent link with the nearby Sava river adorned with buildings made in a blend of secession and academicism, it fell into neglect after WWII despite being a major transport hub. Things started to change in the late 2000s when several cultural initiatives,

⁷⁵ Young, *Street Art, Public City*, 7–8.

⁷⁶ Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 84–90.

⁷⁷ Young, *Street Art, Public City*, 25–28; Waclawek, *Graffiti and Street Art*, 79–80.

⁷⁸ Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 36–44, 87–130.

⁷⁹ This selection is unavoidably subjective and eliminates other messages which do not fit the major theme; another study would be required to cover fully IYW's oeuvre.

⁸⁰ Ofield, “Cruising the Archive,” 357.

among them the pioneering Magacin Cultural Centre and GRAD – European Centre for Culture and Debate, started moving into the noisy, dirty and dilapidated neighborhood. The 2010s saw a rich artistic and cultural revitalization until gentrification kicked in with the controversial Belgrade Waterfront project.⁸¹ Apart from the arts, during this period the neighborhood became known for its nightlife, clubs, independent, and LGBTQ+ spaces (such as club Apartman).⁸² Nikša's activity in Savamala, first with *Mesto za ljubljenje* in late 2013 and then independently from 2014, takes place at a time when the artistic scene was still vibrant and gentrification was starting to take over, right before the Belgrade Waterfront demolition and construction took place.

A large group of IYW's messages could be found on Braće Krsmanović street, especially near the aforementioned cultural center GRAD and abandoned so-called Spanish house (Španska kuća). GRAD as an independent space engages in a variety of cultural activities, and has been an important LGBTQ+ ally supporting initiatives such as BeFem and IDAHO Belgrade. As such, it started being tagged with pro-LGBTQ+ content, where the queer presence was "spilling over" to the street, making the safe space visible and engaging with passers-by.

One of the early examples is the appearance of the *Mesto za ljubljenje*'s stencils in late 2013, the same time when Yoda the pug started showing up on IYW's social media as a street (art) character and Nikša's accomplice. Following the pre-established visual formula, a stencil with four corners and an inscription *Feminističko mesto* (Feminist area) was painted on the floor just in front of GRAD and other city locations, advertising the upcoming BeFem

⁸¹ Herbert Wright, "Belgrade Waterfront: an unlikely place for Gulf petrodollars to settle," *The Guardian*, December 10th 2015.

⁸² See: Burmaz, *Arhitektonski model kvir prostora*, 111–165.

festival taking place there. Another similar stencil with the message *Другачију па шта?* (Different so what?) was painted on the building wall itself. Interestingly, this is one of the rare inscriptions they made in the Cyrillic alphabet, the script which is often related to traditional, nationalistic and official cultural discourse. Here the use could be strategic, challenging tradition by appropriating its (stereotypical) script, creating a fissure for ambiguous difference. By placing these stencils next to GRAD, the authors of *Mesto za ljubljenje* strengthened the existing location as feminist (Figure 8).

Nearby, around the half-collapsed Spanish house, IYW continued this thread in 2014 with a variety of messages which purposefully played and deconstructed expected and traditional gender stereotypes. The building itself is off the beaten path, a sort of non-place awaiting renovation for decades, but nevertheless attracted several cultural initiatives. In a place like this, IYW's messages might be less visible, but they confirm the notion that graffiti and street art often thrive in abandoned spaces and contribute to a sense of discovery and surprise. One of the prominent pieces is *Do jajnika*, a funny multilayered word-play which refers to *Do jaja*, which roughly translates as *awesome*. Literally, it means "to the egg," where *egg* has the same connotation as *testicles* in English. IYW replaced the sexual organ by inserting the word *jajnik*⁸³ (ovary), while the original meaning remains recognizable.

Another one, *Ovde je butchno* plays with the words *butch* and *bučno* (loud), referencing the more masculine lesbian butch identity. Of two examples known to me, both are near not only LGBTQ+ spaces but also clubs, whose music is often heard from the street. By this intervention, IYW seems to signal a coded connection between the often protective indoor safe LGBTQ+ social spaces and sometimes threatening outdoors world, but it can also

⁸³ *Jajnik* (singular, nominative case), *jajnika* (singular or plural, accusative case).

be a commentary about the loud night clubs or amount of noise that this heavy transport hub experienced at the time (Figure 9).

Several IYW messages address the stigma of HIV, which is still widely regarded as a virus that predominantly affects the gay population. Breaking the taboo in a playful fashion, one found in Savamala says *HIV sloveni*. Here IYW referred to the previous, socialist Yugoslav anthem *Hej, sloveni* (Hey, Slavs), which was used from WWII until 2006. Catchy and subversive, the message has both a historical-cultural reference and acknowledges the visibility of people with HIV among the Slavs (Serbs included).

Next, a corner between GRAD and the Spanish house features a closely knit group of three stencils on concrete blocks and a wall (Figures 10 & 11). *Hejteroseksualci* (Heterosexuals) is a twist on *heterosexuals*, purposefully mislabeling and problematizing whether being straight equals hate toward sexual and gender difference. *Pis mačo* (Shoo macho) plays with the words *mačo* (macho) and *maco* (pussy cat), where instead of shooing a cat (*Pis maco*) one does so with aggressive masculinity, weakening its power. *Femmenalno* blends *fenomenalno* (phenomenal) and *femme*, equating exceptionalism with women. All three can be seen as a critique of masculinity and aggressive heterosexuality which is essentially patriarchal.

These messages are surrounded with another three pieces done by different artists around that time (Figure 11). The well-known stencil artist INK portrayed the character Enid from the movie and comic book *Ghost World*; studio КРИШКА made an abstract shape reminiscent of a breast with nipple, filled in what appears to be colored of lesbian flag, with a question *What?*; and there is a fragment of Anđela Mujčić's stencil *A koga ti voliš?* (And who do you love?) made for the *Kvir salon "Zajednička snaga"* [The Queer Salon "Joint

Force”] exhibition in GRAD in 2014. Minus INK’s work, all the others seem to be following a general pro-LGBTQ+ thread.

However, someone crossed over parts of IYW’s messages and INK’s figure with red spray paint, which Nikša attributed to football fans and hooligans from the Red Star club (their signature colors being red and white), one of the common and most visible anti-LGBTQ+ groups at the time. He restored the messages back to their original form. Nearby, in at least three spots on Braće Krsmanović street (including GRAD) one could see several variations of threatening inscriptions *П*дер неће шетати* (F*g will not walk), made prior to the 2014 Pride parade.⁸⁴ In another, this time positive twist, someone changed them to *П*дер неће сметати* (F*g won’t bother) and adding heart symbols (Figure 13), neutralizing the harmful language and threat, and symbolically defending the area.

Most likely the same perpetrators crossed over another, complex activist stencil (Figures 12 & 13). Depicting a ninja warrior figure with Jesus Christ’s head, together with a halo and anarchy symbol, in a pose ready to fight, it reads: *Јеванђеље по мутант панк феминисти Исусу: ‘Нека буде Прајда’ и би Прајд (1:3-5)* (Gospel according to mutant punk feminist Jesus: “Let there be Pride” and there was Pride). Just like *Mesto za ljubljenje’s Другачији па шта?*, the author of this stencil strategically used the Cyrillic script to undermine nationalism. It fuses religion, popular culture, and leftist ideology to advertise the forthcoming Pride, mock Christianity’s blind spot when it comes to the LGBTQ+ population, and offer a fictitious, alternative savior. Unfortunately, possibly because of the religious connotations, none of these stencils lasted for long. Another of IYW’s piece which

⁸⁴ Also accompanied by: *П*д[е]р градом неће шетати* (F*g won’t walk around the city) and *Смрт п*дерима* (Death to f*gs).

remained intact seems to comment on this situation, targeting the anti-LGBTQ+ and nationalistic discourse, *Neznanje rađa strah* (Ignorance gives birth to fear). In other areas of the city this message was sometimes coupled with “*Strah rađa nasilje*” (Fear gives birth to violence).

All of these elements, which might appear like a cacophony of voices, emphasize an ongoing spray can discursive guerilla war, fighting for visibility and attention between two opposing sides. IYW’s and other similar messages can be interpreted as a means of claiming existent queer spaces and queering the public space. In the case of locations which have a prior LGBTQ+ history or contemporary social use, but which are often obscured for protection and privacy sake, IYW was contributing to their coded visibility. On the other hand, everyday public locations which are not explicitly associated with the LGBTQ+ population were queered by inserting queer subjects and topics in a space where they are unexpected, suppressed or invisible.

Drug od drugog: Solidarity and Interconnectedness of Struggles

Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled usually operated around the city center and a few other more or less isolated areas, finding appropriate spots according to availability, surface, visibility, prior confluence of street art, inspiration, spontaneity, and urgency.⁸⁵ Their repertoire reflects this mix of improvisation and premediation, which sometimes makes it hard to disentangle distinct topics. Therefore, why not take into consideration all of these

⁸⁵ In Belgrade, some of them include taking part in festivals like D9vet, Vreva, and Rekonstrukcija. Their work is concentrated in Belgrade and just a few pieces were made in other places in Serbia. A couple of stencils were purposefully made (or translated) in Skopje, Macedonia, and Zagreb, Croatia, and there was even one stencil in Barcelona, Spain.

heterogeneous messages all together? This endeavor can be a possible application of *kvar*, where the LGBTQ+ struggle is expanded and is advocating for social and political solidarity. Another part of Savamala can be a good testing ground for this complexity.

A short walking distance from the previous section is an area between Park Luke Ćelovića, Karađorđeva, Gavrila Principa and Koče Popovića (ex-Zagrebačka) streets. According to our interview, Nikša lived in the area for a while, and his pug tagging might be interpreted as a sign of claiming public space or marking a territory, a practice often encountered in the world of graffiti. There are three groups of messages. The first group from 2014 features the self-aware Yoda the dog, who engages in typical dog-related activities, asking for cuddles.⁸⁶ In some instances, Yoda is more confrontational with passers-by, commanding, or asking questions.⁸⁷ These messages give the pug a stronger feeling of a real animal and street art character, engaging with people around them, which adds a level of relatability.

The second group consists of gender and sexuality bending messages, similar to the ones in the previous section. Rather than claiming a public safe LGBTQ+ space such as GRAD, here IYW claims the neighborhood Nikša and Yoda actually lived in, expanding the personal to the public. Located on Karađorđeva street, surrounding the building entrance like guard dog sculptures, two pugs greet the tenants with *Diže mi se (rEVOLucija)* (I'm getting a hard on [the rEVOLution]) and *Istraži svoj klitoris* (Explore your clitoris). According to Nikša, the latter example had a very short street life wherever it was placed, and it was erased or crossed over within weeks of going up. If one of the neighbors wanted to express

⁸⁶ *Češ češće* (More scratches/cuddles) and *Pomazi me* (Cuddle me).

⁸⁷ Examples are: *Gubi se* (Get lost), *Šta gledaš* (What you're looking at) and *Licem u fejs* (Face to face); *Ne otežavaj* (Don't make it harder) and *Olakšaj se* (Relieve yourself); *I šta sad* (What now) and *Šta činiš sa kontrolom* (What do you do with control).

their displeasure of the message, the act of crossing it out makes little sense since the stencil is uncovered and readable. It is strange that among many male genitalia (as words or images) in the street, the female sex organ is considered inappropriate, which points to general gender inequality. However, this example is benign when compared to some other violent messages in the area.

Savamala was also not immune to hate messages targeting the LGBTQ+ population that usually appeared before the Pride parades during the 2000s and 2010s, and which proved durable in the streets due to general neglect or apathy. Right-wing extremist groups were trying to spread fear and oppose the Pride parade, which they achieved several times with the Pride parades being canceled due to alleged police understaffing and threats of urban violence. In dealing with the threats *Čekamo vas!* / *Чекамо вас!* (We are waiting for you!), it is useful to go back to the stencils of Batman, Joker, Modesty Blaise, and Superman from 2009, which were conceptually and visually tied to the provocations. By stating *Nas/mene čekate?* (Are you waiting for us/me?) and *Stigao sam* (I'm here), they introduced humor and a counter guerilla reaction, attacking the dominant street discourse with a humorous political stunt (Figure 2).⁸⁸ The same threats were similarly challenged by IYW, this time not physically tied to hate messages (Figure 14, 2014). By recomposing the two words from *Čekamo vas* into *Čekam ovas* (I am waiting for oats), the original threat has been humorously neutralized with an absurd twist.

Several other messages follow this confrontational gender thread,⁸⁹ but one really stands out, *Budi muško oženstveni se* (Be a man, feminize yourself, 2014, Figure 15). “Be a

⁸⁸ Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*, 21–22.

⁸⁹ *Ne po nosu ponosu* (Don't hit pride) and *J'adore Delano u* (referencing drag queen Adore Delano).

man” is usually said as a teasing encouragement to enact a stereotypical masculine gender role, a synonym to “be brave” in facing difficult situations or proving oneself. According to Judith Butler, since social reality is not a given, but continually constructed through language, gender itself is a performance. She uses this argument to emphasize the fight against oppression that governs “normative heterosexuality.”⁹⁰ In this line of thinking, we could say that Nikša is performing through his activist queer character as well as commenting on the social performances of gender.

By intentionally employing queering, they are destabilizing heteronormative language and gender (stereo)types, creating fissures for multiple, often contradictory readings. Here the message has a tone of a challenge where manliness should be proven by the very opposite—by being feminine. This is visually underlined by the pug’s pinkish background. It functions as a paradoxical contrast which destabilizes common sense and gender expectations. I would also argue that the message could be read in another way. By abandoning toxic masculinity, the message might call to accept the non-patriarchal, non-macho qualities of being a man, creating a balance of stereotypical feminine and masculine behavior (like men publicly crying, showing their “weak” side, etc).

Be a man, feminize yourself could also relate to the surrounding neighborhood, filled with graffiti tags and sport fan paroles. Today’s Park Luke Čelovića has been called *P*cin park* (P*ssy park), known for its cis-women and trans sex workers for decades. Challenging masculinity and praising femininity with stencils could be IYW’s way of acknowledging their

⁹⁰ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1988): 519–531; Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 83–93.

presence, something IYW also did with pro-trans content around the city.⁹¹ Interestingly, it is also a place with shifting identity in the mid-2010s which allows *kvar*—abandoning single-issue and identity struggles. For example, a group of stencils were addressing the notion of otherness and migration.

Around Park Luke Čelovića and along Karađorđeva street, on the walls and large garbage bins, IYW made a few pieces of *Drug od drugog* (Companion of the other), playing on the words *drug* (friend, buddy, comrade) and *drugi* (other, literally *second*). At that time the message was made (2014, Figure 16), Savamala was transforming from a transit into migrant hub, especially from 2015 with the large influx of immigrants from the Middle East who were located in the park itself (Figure 18). The stencil called for companionship, to side with the migrants (especially because the message was written in Serbian and not English or Arabic), resisting their othering and exclusion from Serbian society, adding up to other activist voices in the area which addressed notions of racism, class solidarity, war and nationalism (Figure 17). Following the trend, IYW temporarily abandoned the iconic pug and stenciled the neighborhood with the message *Rasizam ubija* (Racism kills).

As we had a chance to see, although it seems easy to remain in the narrow circle of LGBTQ+ messages, queering as an artistic strategy should not be essentialized.⁹² Looking over IYW's entire opus can provide multiple points of connection and interpretation. Challenging gender norms and posing taboo questions, offering solidarity and confronting ignorance all operate at the same time, and sometimes even place.⁹³ The combination of

⁹¹ Some of them were *Trans*fer ponosa* (Trans*fer of P/pride) and *Ne trans*fojiši se, trans*formiši se* (Don't trans*phobe yourself, trans*form yourself).

⁹² See: David L. Eng and Jasbir K. Puar, "Introduction: Left of queer," *Social Text* 145 (December 2020): 1–23.

⁹³ Apart from commenting on people with HIV, trans population and migrants, IYW also addressed violence against animals.

these stencils *in situ* might emphasize a thread, like resistance to gender or social discrimination, or simply expose the passersby with bits of Yoda's wisdom. If we add the context and other artworks to the mix, the interpretative options grow and vary.

And this is a good thing. A recent exhibition in Serbia emphasized the need for *bazanje*, idle wandering around the city, in order to see Belgrade from a new perspective and open other possibilities. In a more practical tone, it is a need to let go and reject digital tools in order to "get lost" and explore.⁹⁴ This is also where cruising proves useful—avoiding preconceived routes and enabling diversion, irregularity and different encounters. By relying on embodied research, all of these factors in the street are in juxtaposition with our own, possibly engaged experience,⁹⁵ and offer grounds for a more informed and possibly emphatic interpretation.

Another term, *flâneur*, which has been widely used in art history, is also useful in situating the researcher in an urban context.⁹⁶ But from the artist's perspective, it might not be too appropriate since it often carries connotations of detachment and aesthetic pleasure. I believe IYW is more directly engaging and in dialogue with the city and the spaces they use. Having this in mind, in the next section I focus on a variety of messages which are dialogical in nature, closely related to other hate messages and socio-political groups in public space.

Sada je najbolje: Countering the Hate

By virtue of being in the public space, street art is accessible to the passersby, for better or worse. Due to its unsanctioned character, people might object and react. Street art

⁹⁴ Knežević-Strika, "Bazanje;" Knežević-Strika, "Bazanje – to je nešto što meni nedostaje."

⁹⁵ Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 53.

⁹⁶ Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 43.

pieces can be erased, *white walled* (painted over by city services or tenants), *buffed* (crossed over by other street artists), or people can engage creatively by adding content of their own. To go back to Velikonja's approach, given location, including third-party interventions, also play a significant role in contextual analysis. We must not forget that this combination of elements is crucial for analyzing the artworks *in situ*.

A great example is the Dorćol neighborhood with several aggressive sports fan/hooligan practices of tagging the public space and IYW's response to them. Dorćol is an old neighborhood, with a rich history and multicultural heritage (Austrian, Jewish, Muslim), in a prime location between the very center and Danube river. Territorially, it has been divided into upper and lower Dorćol, where sport fans of Partizan (called *grobari*, gravediggers) claim the upper, and fans of Crvena Zvezda (*delije*, warriors/braves) claim the lower part. Both groups of these two biggest sport clubs in Serbia use graffiti, murals and street art for marketing and to extend their reach, physically and symbolically. Hooligans at the time were generally notorious for street violence, homophobia, and their political and criminal ties.⁹⁷ In a few instances, IYW decided to counter and address their messages that sometimes oversaturated the streets. Given that Dorćol was Nikša's and Yoda's primary home at the time, we can see the pugs as a way to reclaim the public space.

In several interventions IYW reacted upon the already existing hate speech, with the strategy to "decontaminate" the streets.⁹⁸ For example, in 2015 they joined forces with the initiative *Ne budi ograničen. Misli!* (Don't be ignorant. Think!) to react against ultra-right wing, nationalistic, neo-Nazi, and hooligan hate messages in Belgrade.⁹⁹ Erasing hate

⁹⁷ Danilović, "Grad i slika," 52–62; Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 273–326.

⁹⁸ Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 53; Velikonja, "Ustavimo LGBT revolucijo! – Kar poskusite!," 280.

⁹⁹ Danilović, "Grad i slika," 85–86; Danilović, "Slavimo Beograd, operimo grafite mržnje;" Balaž, "Ulično gaženje hejta!"

messages in public space is a staple activist activity, but in this case the artists aimed to leave their creative mark as well. In the action called *Hejt ubija – četke na gotovs* (Hate kills – paintbrushes ready), IYW's made small stencils of pugs walking over "clouds," areas of paint that covered the undesirable content (Figure 19). The joyful colors also make a contrast with often gray or dilapidated surfaces underneath. As we can see in the example from Strahinjića Bana street, an upscale area, they transformed the negative messages into a visual pleasure of looking. This action was coordinated among several cities, which resulted in a unified regional response with other antifa groups.¹⁰⁰

While this strategy erased, blurred, or simply crossed over hate messages, contributing to a wall palimpsest, anonymous public feedback can also reveal multiple readings of a given message. Originally reproduced in several locations, standing solo or reacting to a nearby hate message, *J*beš p*dere* (F*ck f*gs) from 2014 received a special treatment (Figure 20, 2014). According to Nikša, the motivation was to react to a set of nearby hooligan graffiti by Partizan fans, which were aggressively claiming the area with their signature black color.¹⁰¹ Looking at Google maps, the area is full of them—the closest ones are sexist *Jer lepa si do mog*,¹⁰² ГД (Горњи Дорћол, upper Dorćol), PFC/ПФК (Partizan football club), and a nationalistic stencil *Пиши ћирилицом* (Write in Cyrillic). IYW's message *J*beš p*dere* (F*ck f*gs) explicitly reflected the dual-meaning, implicating both the sexual intercourse (as attraction or aggression) and indifference. Many homophobic men turn out to be unsure of their sexuality and even "latent homosexuals," who channel their aggression

¹⁰⁰ See: Iva Martinović, "Zajednička akcija antifašista regije: Ne grafitima mržnje," *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, June 25th 2015; Bagarić, *Kako se crta ekstremizam*.

¹⁰¹ Partizan colors are black and white.

¹⁰² Literally, it addresses a woman with "You are beautiful to my [penis]," so it functions like "You are beautiful, not" while the statement uses a sexualized slang "do mog."

towards the LGBTQ+ population. According to Nikša, there is a parallel sentiment where actual gays just want to be left alone from these hetero pressures and frustrations. Possibly because the speech bubble used a derogatory word, somebody reacted crossing over in red spray the word *p*dere* and wrote *homofobiju!*, thus changing the message to *J*beš homofobiju!* (F*ck homophobia!). In this interesting twist, with an exclamation mark, the sexual agency and critical indifference is again targeting the homophobic sentiment.

In an additional twist, two police officers caught Nikša in the act, asking him why he was writing a seemingly homophobic message on the wall.¹⁰³ Located on a wall in a small street overlooking the memorial Museum of Vuk and Dositej and kindergarten Mestašće, as well as the nearby Mihailo Petrović Alas elementary school, it was no wonder he caught the police's attention (Figure 21). But the real elephant in the room is what happens to hooligans who oversaturate the area with their tagging which often remain unchallenged, not to mention hate messages? Popular explanation is that there is no money to whitewall and decorate the old facades, where some owners might be just preparing a fresh clean wall for next taggers, but I think the underlying reason might be simple desensitization and apathy. In other words, the citizens do not notice the discriminatory language anymore, it all becomes white noise in an environment already filled with public advertising. While this might suggest the hate messages are semi-neutralized, even abandoned by not being erased or reacted upon, their content continues to spread and "contaminate" the environment.

Reacting against hate is only one strategy. Apart from clear activist messages, a large part of Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled's opus are everyday sayings, spontaneous jokes and "spreading positivity." One of the positive stencils is *Sada je najlepše* (Now's the best time)

¹⁰³ Belčević, "Yoda Zgužvani."

from 2017 (Figure 23). According to Nikša, this “saying which our grandmothers used” indicates a state or situation when all is well. What is interesting is that one of the versions of this stencil found its way to an unlikely place, a football fan mural in their own territory.

Near Nikša’s neighborhood, lower Dorćol, many walls and almost entire residential blocks have been marked as belonging to one of the largest sport clubs in Serbia, Crvena Zvezda (Red Star). IYW wanted to test their territoriality by placing another *Sada je najlepše* stencil on their wall, while respecting the existing color scheme (red and white). Poking the bear indeed. Some young fans spotted him during the act, but due to his benevolent behavior and message, let him go unharmed. In a way, IYW managed to make a lasting physical and symbolic intervention within the space which is usually extremely homophobic (Figure 22). Seeing this message in its contextual use, I think IYW created a potent double-alternative: both to violent or overly politicized messages on Belgrade’s walls, and the sometimes prevalent victim discourse of the LGBTQ+ community.

These examples can be interpreted as cases of *kvar*—malfunction of logic, expectations, normative relationships and “common,” “public” opinion.¹⁰⁴ That is, purposefully challenging the alleged neutrality and objectivity of these everyday notions which have been hijacked by ultra-right nationalism, coupled with social solidarity and antifa sentiment. When everyday language reproduces violence and homophobia,¹⁰⁵ IYW’s guerilla war interventions create ruptures in the dominant discourse by confronting the passersby.

¹⁰⁴ Addressing hooligans, IYW also jokingly turned *Делује* into *зДелује* (Red Star fans *Delije* became something like “Where is he”) and in another part of the city wrote *И навјаћи тепажу* (Sport fans also beat/coo).

¹⁰⁵ Blagojević & Dimitrijević, “Još uvek nismo kvir,” 11; Ksenija Bogetić, “Normal Straight Gays: Lexical Collocations and Ideologies of Masculinity in Personal Ads of Serbian Gay Teenagers,” *Queering Language, Gender and Sexuality*, ed. Tommaso M. Milani (Sheffield & Bristol: Equinox, 2018), 226–227.

The value of these actions is not just in reacting publicly against hate and condemning violence, but also in challenging the desensitization of the public, where these hate messages remain unsanctioned or unquestioned in the streets for a long time. As we had a chance to see, many messages in public spaces made under the ultra-right wing or “banal nationalist” pretext are violent in content or call for violence, contributing to a toxic and fearful atmosphere targeting certain minorities. According to Velikonja, in regards to nationalism, “[s]arcastically speaking, there is always someone to hate.” Street art can challenge apathy, by giving a public voice to a certain social group, a counter-narrative, and as such is inherently a democratic and political act.¹⁰⁶

Conclusion

I mean, a police officer asked me, “do you truly think you’re going to change anything by doing what you do?” [...] I don’t think so but I can’t be silent anymore, I mean... somehow I think that there’s been enough silence. You can only be silent for so long.¹⁰⁷

Reviewing Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled’s activism, I want to underline that this little pug is a symbol of hope. While the physical stencils have mostly been erased by now, its messages resonated with the public and are still relevant in today’s Serbian society. As we have seen, marginalization, stigmatization and violence towards the LGBTQ+ community have been reproduced in public space, physically and symbolically. Having a critical minoritarian voice in this setting has great potential to create fissures in this context, reacting against

¹⁰⁶ Lewisohn, *Abstract graffiti*, 10–11; Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 105. But Velikonja also claims that certain extremist political groups can misuse this assumption by voicing out dominant discourse under the guise of a spontaneous anonymous public (publicly stating what the government cannot) or aiming to erase that very same freedom of speech. See: Velikonja, *Post-Socialist*, 20, 110–111.

¹⁰⁷ Herman and Jovanović, “Yodorus (drugi deo),” 1:59–2:19.

desensitization of the general public, confronting the hate messages, and presenting a discourse of its own. IYW is one of those voices who was queering the streets, destabilizing “the common sense,” questioning gender norms, challenging the status quo, and providing alternative gender and social relations.

His own personal empowerment was intentionally reflected in his immediate surroundings: the city of Belgrade, artistic, activist and queer circles. This enabled a certain temporal queer space, interwoven in the everyday fabric of the city. And by expanding the focus outside of “pure” LGBTQ+ topics and activism, IYW managed to tackle some intersectional potential which reflected not only Nikša’s interests, but also the interconnection of struggles. After all, the same urban space is shared by a variety of social groups and individuals encompassing multiple identities, which all points to an awareness of the local context and belonging. As a queered space, it reflects an aesthetic choice, but also fosters minoritarian politics of visibility and brings the private into the public as a means to face prejudices.¹⁰⁸ This is an important decision given the often marginalization and imposed secrecy of queer everyday experience in the public.¹⁰⁹

Finally, Inspector Yoda the Wrinkled brought play and positivity into the gray city which might be overlooked looking at the sometimes grim messages they were reacting to. Therefore, it is important to shift the weight from pure discrimination, hate and violence (or reaction to it), towards this discourse which brings and supports critical hope. After all, despite the fact that a little pug could not change society, their example challenged desensitization and apathy, which serves as the groundwork for resistance. I will conclude

¹⁰⁸ Getsy, “Introduction//Queer Intolerability and its Attachments,” 16, 78; Brent Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, *Queers in Space*, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Brent Ingram, Bouthillette, and Retter, *Queers in Space*, 27–31.

with a combination of a few of their inspirational messages: *I will not apologize for (t)art, It's easy to say what's wrong, Let's start with something positive, Don't trans*phobe yourself, trans*form yourself* (Figure 24), *Take (creative) care of yourself, You are nature's masterpiece, and Be realistic, demand the impossible.*¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ *Lako je reći šta ne valja, Krenimo od onog što je dobro*, both references to: Jack Halberstam, "On behalf of failure," Youtube video, 59:48, October 2nd 2014; *Ne trans*fobiši se, trans*formiši se; St(v)araj se o sebi*—a wordplay on *stvarati* (create) and *starati* (take care); *Ti si remek delo prirode*; and *Budimo realni zahtevajmo nemoguće*, an old slogan from 1968 student revolt.

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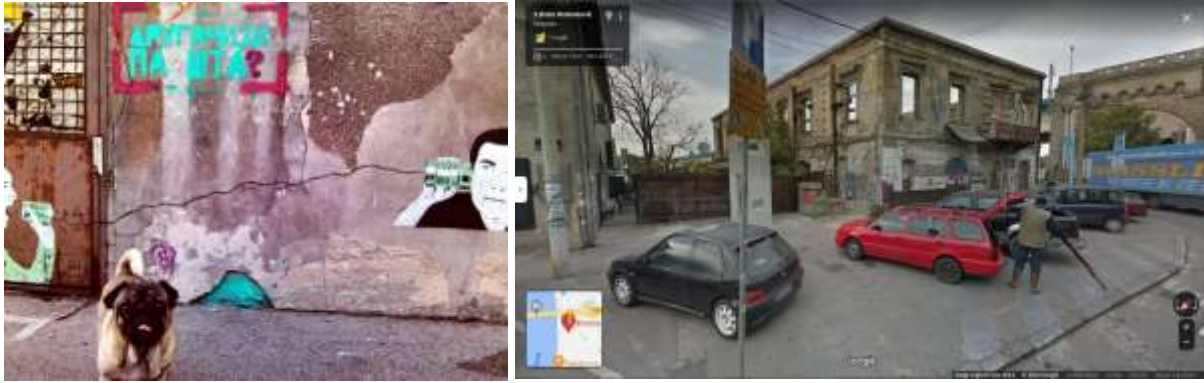


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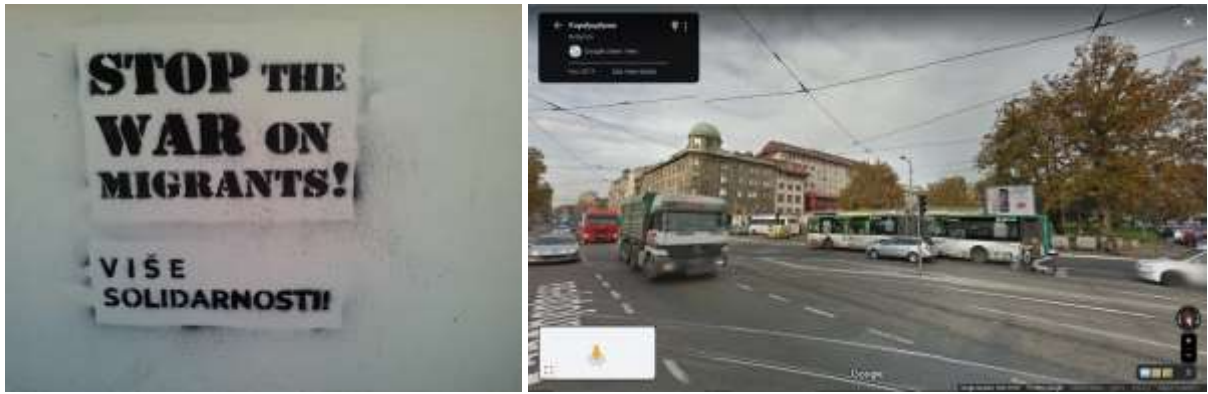


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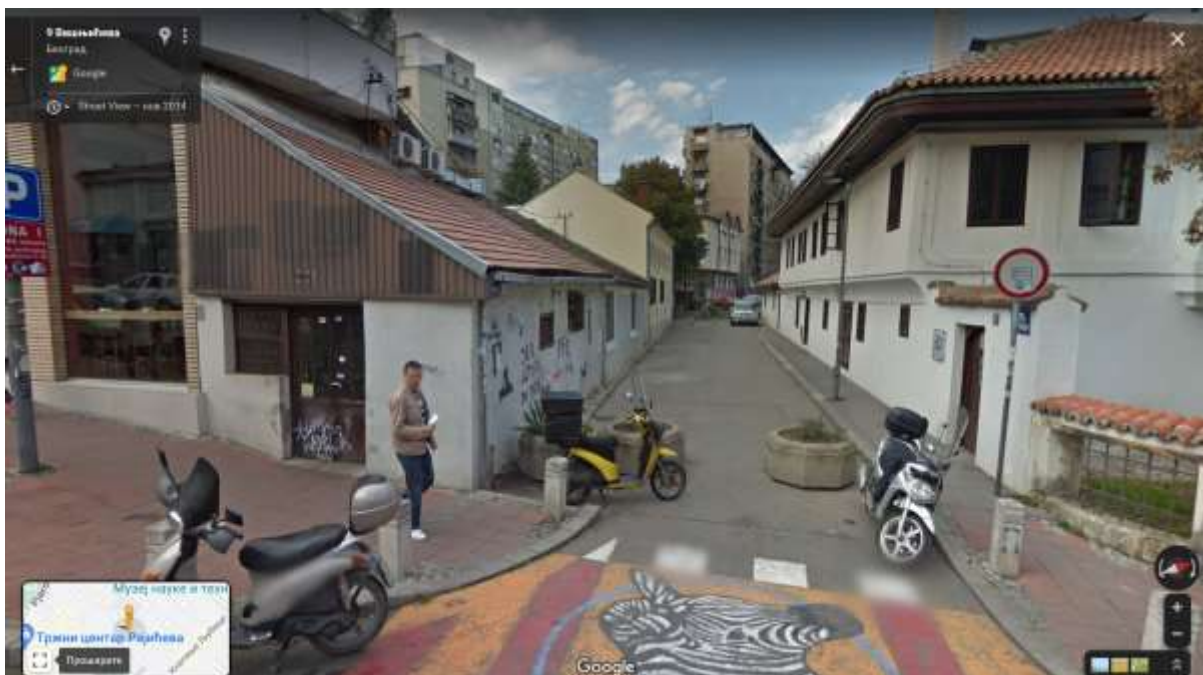


Figure 21: Google maps, corner of Gospodar Jevremova and Višnjićeva streets, November 2014, accessed May 2nd 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/t89zfv72>.



Figure 22: Google maps, Visokog Stevana street, November 2014, accessed May 2nd 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/yck8p49m>. Figure 23: IYW, *Sada je najlepše*, 2017, stencil, Visokog Stevana street, by IYW.



Figure 24: Inspektor Yoda Zgužvani, *Ne trans*fobiši trans*formiši se & I will not apologize for (t)art*, 2014 or 2015 (photographed in 2018), stencil, by Aleksandar Đalek Đorđević (Street Art Belgrade).

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