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## My Four Dogs: Urban Ecology in Vjeran Miladinović Merlinka's *Terezin sin*

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In this article, I analyze the relations between humans, non-humans, and infrastructure in Vjeran Miladinović Merlinka's fictionalized autobiography *Terezin sin*. I argue that queer humans and non-humans share a particular ontological and axiological space and time in urban ecology in relation to the built environment of cis-heteronormative socius grounded in reproductive heterosexuality. The fictionalized autobiography that is explored in this article offers a particular view of minoritarian relation as it depicts a queer form of relationality that is lived sideways to the cis-heteronormativity and reproductive heterosexuality as an oppressive form of life that creates a specific kind of infrastructural intimacy for itself in the urban built environment. Relations between queer humans and non-humans under these conditions are decidedly messy, as they are described as both caring and exploitative in *Terezin sin*.

**KEYWORDS:** urban ecology; animal; infrastructure; queer; (post-)Yugoslav literature

## 1. Introduction

The part of the title of this article, “My four dogs,” alludes to a way in which Merlinka, the main character of *Terezin sin* (Theresa’s Son), a fictionalized account of Vjeron Miladinović Merlinka’s life, addresses her four dogs. However, it could also be read as pertaining to Merlinka’s closest sex-working “transvestite” companions Likana, Šeherzada, Suzana, and Sanela, as s\_he often refers to them as “her dogs.” Merlinka openly identified herself as ‘transvestite’ at the time of writing the book and during most of the events the book describes, and it was the first book to have such a character in Yugoslav and Serbian literature. Why allude to dogs in the title of the article that deals with urban ecology and queerness? The first thing that comes to mind when the term ‘urban ecology’ is considered are the streets and numerous bodies moving on them. These bodies are mostly human, but a number of more or less visible and audible animal and plant species also constitute the ecology of every urban settlement. Moreover, dogs and humans enter into a complex relationality that includes processes of racialization, animalization, and humanization (Howell, 2015; Dayan, 2016; Wallen, 2017; Besson, 2021; Kendall-Morwick, 2021). Dogs can be understood, in this context, as a synecdoche for all non-human life in a city. But then, the term ‘dog’ itself carries certain ontological and axiological presuppositions—it is used as an offense when applied to humans in certain contexts. ‘Dog,’ as well as ‘bitch,’ as an offense aims to dehumanize the offended party, and in this sense dogs and dehumanized/animalized humans share a position outside of humanity. In addition to those who are racialized as non-white, humans who are dehumanized through animalization are usually queer individuals. Hence, queer human and non-human animals share a particular onto-axiological space and time in the urban ecology in relation to cis-heteronormative socius that is grounded in (re)productive heterosexuality.

I write, then, from the point of view of “my four dogs,” of multispecies multiplicity (Kirksey, 2014; Gillespie, Collard, 2015; Yates, 2017; Swanson, Lien, Ween, 2018), in which the (re)productive heterosexuality and its effects on urban ecology is what needs to be de-naturalized. I will explore the relationship between human and non-human animals in the

urban ecology of Belgrade as it is depicted in *Terezin sin*. This particular relationship is produced and maintained in a certain environment—the built environment which includes infrastructure in the form of transport, energy, waste, and housing infrastructure. In other words, urban ecology's conditions of (im)possibility are defined by the urban infrastructure (Chattopadhyay, 2012; Graham, McFarlane, 2015; Holmberg, 2015; Anand, Gupta, Appel, 2018).

In the first section, I look into how Merlinka's sexual and gender queerness is (self-)defined and (self-)experienced. These self-definitions and self-experiences are produced under the conditions of socius (Deleuze, Guattari, 1983) grounded in (re)productive heterosexuality and cis-normativity and, thus, are produced through violence and, on rare occasions, through mutual care between queer individuals and non-human animals and plants. The second section of this article is dedicated to the analysis of relations between human queer bodies and urban infrastructure. I pay particular attention to the ways in which queer human characters form their relations and interact within the infrastructure that has been built for the (re)production of (re)productive heterosexuality. This section of the article also deals with the analysis of the ways in which queer bodies are imagined to interact with animals and plants in urban ecology. I show how particular space and time is produced through such encounters in contradistinction to relations with non-human animals and plants that cis-heteronormative majority (re)produces. Finally, I argue that specific kinds of urban ecological and multispecies relations depicted in Merlinka's *Terezin sin* are particular to queer relationality as formed within the built environment produced for the (re)production of the (re)productive heterosexuality. *Terezin sin* offers us a view of minority relations with non-human animals, plants, and infrastructure that are decidedly messy, exploitative and caring at the same time under the conditions of infrastructural intimacy of (re)productive heterosexuality (on queerness and messiness v. Campbell, Farrier, 2015; Dadas, 2016).

## 2. Merlinka and her queerness

Vjeran Miladinović Merlinka was the first ‘transvestite’ and sex worker who came out as such in the 1980s Yugoslav, mostly Serbian and Croatian, media (for social context in which non-heterosexual and trans individuals lived at the time, v. Gavrić, Čaušević, 2020; for the 1990s and early 2000s v. Blagojević, Dimitrijević, 2014; Bilić, 2016; Filipović, 2019). S\_he was made famous for the role in Želimir Žilnik’s film *Dupe od mramora* (Marble ass) from 1995, and s\_he had played in his two earlier films from 1986—*Beograde, dobro jutro* (Belgrade, good morning) and *Lijepa žene prolaze kroz grad* (Pretty women walking through the city). Although Merlinka identified her\_himself as a ‘transvestite’ in the autobiography, the processes of identification and the attendant terminology shift throughout the text so much that the cisnormative gender binary is thoroughly destabilized. Merlinka refers to her\_himself in both masculine and feminine genders insisting on their variable uses depending on the context, but also intentionally transgressing the borders set by those social contexts. S\_he uses masculine pronouns to talk about her\_himself as a cis man doing his day job, and feminine pronouns to refer to the part of her\_his identity that involves wearing female attire and makeup and working in the streets at night. In the textual practice of gendering, the use of feminine and masculine pronouns in the book is more complex. In the passage that perhaps illustrates the gender confusion the best, Merlinka writes:

Of the transvestites, I was the oldest one [masculine gender]. The youngest one [feminine gender] was Sanela, underage [feminine gender] at the time. She was [feminine gender] almost 17 years old. Close to my age was Greta, five years younger [feminine gender]. Likana and Šeherezada were [feminine gender] 10–12 years younger than me. Sanela and I were *Srbi—Srpkinje* [male Serbs—female Serbs], Likana and Greta Orthodox *Romi—Romkinje* [male Roma—female Roma], and Šeherezada *Rom* [male Roma] of Muslim faith. We were unencumbered by religion and nationality. We had something in common that kept us tightly together, and that is—all of us loved men (Merlinka, 2013, 98, translation mine).

As can be seen, even though Merlinka refers to her\_himself as a transvestite, s\_he uses the masculine to talk about her\_himself, while using the feminine for her sex-working companions. S\_he insists on male-female gendered pairs when referring to her\_himself and some of the friends, while only one is referred to exclusively in the masculine form. As it turns out, the only thing they have in common is their love for men, but even in this respect certain intentional differences and gender/sexual confusions are produced. Merlinka dedicates some space in the book to claims that s\_he and her sex-working friends are entirely different from homosexual men. S\_he not only uses offensive terms for homosexual men (*peder* in Serbian, *faggot* in English), but s\_he also describes how homosexuals are chased away from the place Merlinka and her companions frequent, with occasional fights breaking out, especially when homosexual men interfere with their sex work by cruising their potential customers. Merlinka also jokes with Sanela about her inclination to perform an active role in sexual encounters with men, which Merlinka sees as characteristic of homosexual men.

S\_he also uses the medical-judicial term ‘transvestite’ to refer to her\_himself and her companions, complicating the genealogies of contemporary forms of trans identity (v. Filipović, 2021b, 2–4). The first time Vjeran encounters the term ‘transvestite’ is in the Yugoslav People’s Army, when s\_he and a gay man are seen referring to each other in the feminine form. Vjeran took a handful of tranquilizers and was sent to hospital: “In the release form, after the drug poisoning, the doctors wrote: suicide or suicide attempt, but they wrote another diagnosis— ‘transvestism,’ which means—mimicking women” (Merlinka, 2013, 35). Together with the term ‘transvestite,’ s\_he uses the term *prerušeni muškarac* (Merlinka, 2013, 90), a dressed up or made up man, to signify her gender presentation while working the streets. However, throughout the text Merlinka is clear that s\_he is not perverse, insane, or a criminal, defying the prevailing medical-judicial notion of transvestism. Merlinka does not claim s he wants to perform gender confirmation surgery, in contrast to her friend Sanela. Or she claims she wanted one but the narrative veers off that course:

The earlier infatuation with the idea that I would fix my problem with an operation, by changing sex, was extinguished by everything I ex-

perienced later. We decided to sell ourselves for money, believing that we would do that for two, three, six months tops. We wanted to earn some money for ourselves that way, to raise our living standards for a short time. I planned to buy myself a cassette player and a golden ring for those few months. Not one of us even dreamed that we would begin earning a lot of money from the very start (Merlinka, 2013, 100).

After this quote, she goes on to describe how she began putting on makeup and appearing on the train station in dresses for the sex-work: “Driven by poverty, I officially became a prostitute on January 15, 1989. It took us a long time to get used to what we were. We threw up for a long time from fear, anxiety, being scared that our johns would figure out we were dressed up men” (Merlinka, 2013, 101). She does not elucidate further why she did not go through the initial idea of “changing sex.” What is more, s\_he writes: “Happy, careless, drunk on success in our park, our kingdom, we began to think, to discover new things, to make plans. If men want us as men, let’s see how they will react if we put on makeup and dress like women!” (Merlinka, 2013, 47). Merlinka thus deftly navigates between the narrow confines of contemporary essentializing discourses of both gay and trans identity: s\_he has sex and falls in love with cis men who do not identify themselves and are not identified by Merlinka’s companions as homosexual, while working as a female sex-worker, but does not intend to undergo surgical gender adjustment unlike some of her sex-working friends. This queerness of Merlinka’s affects the ways in which s\_he navigates urban infrastructure, the built environment and urban ecology of Belgrade. This queerness is decisive in dis/en/abling the constitution of relationality with the environment and (non)human others in *Terezin sin*.

### 3. Merlinka, infrastructure, and urban ecology

Merlinka works the streets during the nights, while Vjeran works at some unidentified company during the day. In both cases infrastructures of various sorts that are a constitutive part of the built environment of urban ecology enable Merlinka’s and Vjeran’s work, movement, life,

and relationality. Or in Ara Wilson's (2016, 247) words, infrastructures "shape the conditions for relational life." While writing about the relationship between urban ecology and energy infrastructure, Alan Stoekl (2017, 361–362) points out that "understanding ecologies of organisms in cities is inseparable from understanding their energy regimes [...] It is impossible to extricate human energetic needs—the very basis of human existence—from those of all the other living things (edible by humans or not) within the urban environment." Michelle Murphy's definition of infrastructures as "spatial arrangements of relationship that draws humans, things, words and non-humans into patterned conjunctures" (Merlinka, 2013, 104) follows what Hinchliffe and Whatmore (2008, 116) wrote a few years earlier that "cities are inhabited with and against the grain of urban design; [...] inhabitants are not static beings but entangled in complex processes of becoming." And indeed, the absence of the static at both the ontological and ontic levels is dependent on urban infrastructure. Describing months of the NATO bombing campaign of Serbia in 1999, Merlinka writes:

Later, after they damaged large electricity substations with bombs, Belgrade was left without electricity. Phew! How complicated and disgusting life is without it! You can't listen to the radio, watch television, or make coffee in the morning [...] Now I had to go to Kalemegdan and collect thin and dry twigs, and set them on fire to make some coffee for me and Nena. The loss of electricity had a very depressing effect on all of us in Belgrade because we had to move a lot less, and stare for hours on end at the candle flame (Merlinka, 2013, 363, translation mine).

Before the NATO bombing campaign, Merlinka and her sex-working companions expertly navigated the streets, especially the hustle and bustle of the area surrounding the train and bus station. They chose the park across the station because at the time it was not only a very crowded one, but also dark, especially its side streets, allowing them to work more or less unhindered. Merlinka writes:

Our park, our little debaucherous empire, is a few hundred meters away from Gavrilo Princip Street. We first planned for the park to be

our working spot. But we gave up because it was impossible to work in it. There were many who looked at our first whorish steps with curiosity, constantly calling out. The ones who'd want our services wouldn't have the courage to come up to us among all the people who were flooding the park, so we felt more like circus bears than whores. Annoyed, provoked, we sought our salvation in Picin (Pussy) park (Merlinka, 2013, 90).

This rather small space, "a world in itself" (Merlinka, 2013, 155), was where a tight community was formed: "Whatever happened: a fight, a traffic accident, an arrest, one of the whores got beaten by her john or someone won at gambling—all of that would be known to everyone in minutes" (Merlinka, 2013, 155). That space also enabled violence, individual and systemic, from the police and state judicial system, both of which are grounded in the cis-heteronormative and (re)productive heterosexual form of life (on the concept form of life v. Massumi, 2014). Merlinka herself was sentenced five times (Merlinka, 2013, 170–171), and she describes in sometimes gruesome details the beatings and violence suffered by her and her friends. In a particularly violent situation featuring Laza, a police officer prone to violence against sex workers, Merlinka uses the streets and all they can offer when one finds oneself in danger. One evening, Laza started harassing the working women, even beating up some of them. He almost caught Merlinka too, but "seeing that an empty cab was coming down the street I threw away the bricks, went to the sidewalk and hailed a taxi [...] After paying for the ride I entered my home upset, scared, angry, disappointed [...] Even my dogs, whining and jumping around me, wagging their tails, couldn't make me feel better" (Merlinka, 2013, 204). The streets are spaces for both queer sociality and violent encounters, where cars and other vehicles offer means of not only simple movement from one point to another, but also means for earning money, encountering other bodies, and escaping violence. Transportation infrastructure also enables the policing of queer bodies, their movements and actions. Merlinka describes one such encounter with the police as follows:

I decided to stay up, if need be, to three or four in the morning, however hard it was, just to earn the much needed money. Until 10 p.m., when



I was arrested, no one had asked for my services. Two or three couples went past me holding each other tightly under their umbrellas, without noticing me. Suddenly, two cars stopped with the tires screeching, and to my astonishment four men and one woman ran out. It took me several seconds to grasp that the first, tallest man was the officer for public order and prostitution... Caught by Petar, surrounded by his three male colleagues and a female colleague, I figured I had no chance to escape, knowing they'd chase me in their cars and quickly catch me, and that I'd get a decent beating. So I ended up sitting in the backseat together with two of my colleagues caught on the highway by the Blue Bridge (Merlinka, 2013, 173).

As can be seen, the existing infrastructure, particularly transportation infrastructure (streets, stations), was adapted by Merlinka and her companions for sex-work and their social lives, even though such space is oftentimes surveilled and policed. Merlinka and her friends do not live in the space created by urban infrastructure, but adopt and adapt to its various blind spots, such as dark streets and backyards in crowded areas where in fact these crowds offer them protection from potential violence and allow them to make money. I write 'adapt' intentionally because infrastructure, and especially energy and transportation infrastructure, was made for reproduction of the dominant form of life—the (re)productive heterosexuality. Sex-working 'transvestites' can merely use and adapt to the existing space that has been specifically constructed for the (re)production of cis-heteronormativity and (re)productive heterosexuality. This is what I call infrastructural intimacy in contradistinction to Ara Wilson's term "infrastructures of intimacy." As Wilson (2016, 259, bold mine) writes, "an eye toward infrastructure [...] links blow jobs to urban planning," and reveals "how official intentions can be betrayed by a plurality of uses, including the way men, transwomen, and sex workers **re-purpose** public spaces for transactions." Wilson notes that queer forms of life usually re-purpose the found infrastructure, such as infrastructure for bodily waste (like public bathrooms), but also non-residential zones like parks or "decaying infrastructure of defunct industries or neglected public sites" (Wilson, 2016, 254). Infrastructure (and the relational life that infrastructure

enables) is not built for those who are sideways to the cis-normative (re) productive heterosexuality. Queer individuals merely use infrastructure, but do not live within it. What is more, queer individuals are exposed to intense surveillance, control and violence if they become suddenly visible in the dominant form of life.

This infrastructural intimacy of (re)productive heterosexuality directly shapes the multispecies relationality of queer bodies and non-human animals. It influences the formation of urban ecology through construction, maintenance, and use of various infrastructures, as well as through being a foundation for the dominant form of life. The violent control and policing of public spaces that are created through the construction and use of the urban infrastructure also bring in close encounters, intimate even, of queer bodies and non-human animals. As the space for pursuing sex work begins to shrink due to competition from cis women and old building sites being replaced with apartment blocks, coffee shops and restaurants, Merlinka describes one secluded place in the middle of it all to which even the police have no access:

Late at night, around 2 a.m. or later, knowing that my neighbors were asleep, I brought my johns. The place which was filled with darkness that allowed me to hide from all those I thought could hurt me, had one flaw. In the summer, mostly after it rained, there were a lot of mosquitoes. Just imagine: there's a police raid fifty meters away from you, hunting down your female friends, and you're just sitting in the bushes, all bitten, waiting for them to get back inside the police cars and drive away. You break a twig and swat around until you get sore muscles (Merlinka, 2013, 199).

This passage reveals the ways in which multispecies relationality was formed in the urban ecology of Belgrade at the time and in relation to queer bodies. The sequence involves Merlinka, mosquitoes, bushes (or some unidentified plants), and the built environment of the city that shapes this relationality between all participants. Belgrade, a city situated in the estuary of the Sava in the Danube river, is a very suitable environment for mosquitoes because of its large swampy terrains, and in Merlinka's story urbanization has not even reached its peak yet. Mosquitoes are a constitutive part of the urban ecology of

Belgrade, and they are usually regarded as a mere nuisance, as in the fragment above, or occasionally as a threat to public health (Filipović, 2021a). This also pertains to the changing urban ecology in the time of global warming and the Anthropocene (Haraway, 2015), but in Merlinka's text it is too early for these changes to be registered. On the other hand, it is questionable if these changes in climate would be noticed in the same way as they are today given the social class Merlinka and her sex-working companions belong to.

Urban plants, bushes, and shrubs also significantly partake in the constitution of urban ecologies, as roosting places, sources of food, etc. Bushes and shrubs also offer secluded spots for public sex, as it used to be the case in Belgrade before the city undertook the “shaving” initiative in early 2000s when all the shrubs in public parks were trimmed as to reveal the ground. Namely, in a document from 2001, which defines the role of various city-owned agencies and companies in the upkeep of public spaces, the use of “public green space” (literal translation) is allowed only for “the purpose it is created for,” and exceptionally “temporarily for sport exercises, performances, children amusement parks and similar purposes in accordance with regulations” (Skupština grada Beograda, 2001, 5). While the document lists kinds of forbidden behavior in these public green spaces (cf. Skupština grada Beograda, 2001, 7–8), it nowhere mentions public sex. However, it can be read between the lines that such a behavior is forbidden, queer, and simply unthinkable, given the stated purposes that place so much emphasis on “children.” The “shaving” initiative was undertaken for the sole purpose of stopping the “menace” of public sex, but apart from that it also changed the appearance of public space, as well as the multispecies relationality within the built environment of parks and other urban areas.

As noted two paragraphs earlier, after a particularly violent event in the streets, Merlinka returns home to her dogs, but they cannot comfort her. That earlier event shows how infrastructure, technologies of maintaining it and controlling the bodies at home, all intertwine to produce particular affectivity between a human and non-human being, in this case, Merlinka and her dogs. The violence in urban ecology is produced through various technologies—policing and police brutality, state surveillance, beatings and harassment, exposure to the elements (rain, cold,

wind), etc. For Merlinka and all of her sex-working companions, urban ecology is constituted through relations of power. It is also formed through marginalization, which in itself is a product of racialization. Merlinka recounts how Ruža, a “transvestite” roommate of some years, took her for a visit to Ruža’s Roma family in Pančevački rit near Belgrade. The whole Roma settlement was located on a muddy terrain:

Black, oily mud, streaked with numerous footprints of various sizes, traces of horse shoes and dog paws. I won’t make a mistake if I say that there were a hundred dogs in such a small space. They were really angry when you were passing by their owners’ houses. Most of the little houses were built with wooden planks, mud, and covered with rusty sheets of tin (Merlinka, 2013, 257).

The settlement was without running water or electricity. The Roma people, writes Merlinka, later took her to the backyard and showed “a small stable for a little, stunted horse, who was a little larger than a pony. Harnessed to a wooden two-wheeler, it dragged everything they collected from trash containers that could be sold to junk yards and at flea markets” (Merlinka, 2013, 260). Besides the stunted horse, the Roma settlement also housed a bear, which Saša, Merlinka’s love interest, took around the city to dance. This is how Merlinka writes about the bear:

The bear looked just like a bear. She was two times smaller than she should be. Poor animal. Who knows where they found her, an entire life spent alone in a single shack next to their knocked-together house in Pančevački rit. Because of poverty and a lot of hungry mouths to feed in the family, she ate whatever they gave her; she got dry bread, half-rotten apples, bananas and other fruit found in trash containers in Pančevo. You won’t feel sad over her destiny, when I tell you that she was later, with the help of an animal protection group, taken from them and given to the Belgrade zoo where she now lives a much better life (Merlinka, 2013, 264).

A complex multispecies relationality (v. Kirksey, 2010) is formed as a consequence of racializing marginalization, and all participants in

that multivalent ecology suffer the consequences of racism (v. Elstein, 2003). Not only do the Roma people live in poverty, but also their animals are affected by poverty and are forced into exploitative relations. Horses and bears spend their lives together with their human companions in an environment that does not allow for non-exploitative relationships, even though it does enable relations of care. Another kind of multispecies relationality and affectivity appears in the midst of this violent and exploitative ecology, such as Merlinka's relationship with her dogs and the plants s\_he keeps at home (on multispecies community v. Arluke, Sanders, 1996; Francione, 2000). The dogs and roses are sources of comfort for Merlinka when s\_he feels melancholic: "I'm rarely paying visits, and even when that happens I can't wait to return to my small apartment, to my backyard, where a couple of my dogs will greet me squealing with joy. I can't remember my long dried up rose. Only a dog's eyes can make me feel true sadness" (Merlinka, 2013, 146). Dogs and plants are also sources of comfort at a time of great danger, just before the beginning of the NATO campaign: "When I was waiting for the bombing to start, I did not fear death. I feared mutilation, poverty. I feared losing what I had gained thanks to other people's orgasms. I watched for hours what I owned in the place where I lived. I caressed my paintings, the bed I slept on, I hugged my dogs, fondled my roses and firs I had planted" (Merlinka, 2013, 195). Her dogs were also sources of comfort to her when s\_he felt lonely: "I had been alone for months with my two dogs, Karamela and Dženika, who never let me down, who happily wagged their tails at every word I said" (Merlinka, 2013, 409). The relationship with a non-human animal can be a source of joy also in prison, as was the case when Merlinka was sentenced to a short stay at prison for prostitution: "When the time to leave came, I caressed the dog Gara, who had been willingly serving the sentence for several years. That good, joyful and sympathetic dog was everyone's favorite in the prison" (Merlinka, 2013, 187).

Merlinka dedicates almost two full pages to her companion dog Teri, who died in 1999 after a fight with another dog. She writes:

After the fight, my old, one-eyed dog was apparently fatally wounded, and instead of returning home, he went to die somewhere else. Dogs die

alone. In those moments, they do not respond to those who call them. Late in the afternoon it started snowing. In tears and with a sore throat from yelling, I looked for him the whole night and days later with the help of some friends, without any luck (Merlinka, 2013, 311).

A friend of Merlinka's accidentally found him in upper Kalemegdan. Merlinka went to him with a blanket, but as s\_he writes, s\_he "did not have the strength to remove the snow from his head, wanting to remember him like the last time I saw him. I buried him in Kalemegdan, in Donji Grad. The candle I lit for him burned throughout the whole night. It didn't go out though the wind was blowing" (Merlinka, 2013, 311). In the final passage Merlinka reflects on her relationship with dogs and other animals:

I have buried all of my dogs, nine of them so far, in Kalemegdan. None of them was buried without being wrapped in a blanket or a sheet beforehand. The place where they are buried is holy for me. When I'm at my saddest, I sit by their graves and, smoking a cigarette, remember countless beautiful moments spent with them. My wish is to one day, when my time comes, join them, to be buried beside them. Beside the dogs, near them, my two cats and two crows are also buried (Merlinka, 2013, 311).

While (re)productive heterosexuality builds a world for itself through infrastructural intimacy, it also creates "straight lines" as Sara Ahmed (2006) puts it. The rectilinear movement of bodies that assumes setting and traversing certain spatio-temporal points in order for a particular life to be deemed worth living. It also makes certain objects closer and more readily near-to-hand to certain bodies rather than to those that, for various reasons, move sideways to the straight line. By moving along a straight line, these bodies enable closeness to the objects and, thus, create a common world for themselves from the environment in which they live. Queer bodies, by moving sideways, are rendered unrecognizable given that they do not traverse the same points. More importantly, queer bodies are denied the closeness to the objects through micro-aggressions, bursts of violence, and other violent technologies, so as to prevent them from partaking in the creation of the world. With this

sort of queer phenomenology in mind, cis-heteronormative (re)productive heterosexuality and queerness are worlds apart. In this world dominated by the cis-heteronormative (re)productive heterosexual individuals and their built environment, Merlinka and her dogs are indeed companion species (v. Haraway, 2004; Haraway, 2008), but this companionship also entails plants—roses and firs—that Merlinka cares for. By extending the concept of companionship, Merlinka encompasses the multispecies multitude, her companions—her dogs are both animals and humans, however, they are neither animalized nor humanized, but rather loved and looked after. However, this ethics of multispecies care does not preclude the so-called negative affects, especially when some companions are hurt or lost, but it does aim to ease the pain as much as it is possible given the limited potential for the actualization of queer affectivity in Belgrade's urban ecology.

This multispecies relationality that appears in Merlinka's fictionalized autobiography is complicating queer ethics when it comes to relations between humans and non-humans. While Merlinka does care about her human and non-human companions, her non-human companions suffer equally if not more in the tight grip of the cis-normative (re)productively heterosexual socius. Animals appear as property, as in the situation involving the Roma family (v. Francione, 2009), while plants, as could be argued, are approached in a strictly unidirectional way, as they provide comfort to Merlinka and are maintained only for that purpose. The further un-entangling of this queer relationality within urban ecology would lead to considering relationality as something that should be absolutely abolished (v. MacCormack, 2020). Non-human beings—animals, plants, and other—would then and only then become subjects in their own right, with/out queers and most definitely without (re)productive heterosexuality.

#### 4. Conclusion

The built environment of Belgrade and various infrastructures that constitute it are experienced by queer bodies and their non-human companions in Vjeron Miladinović Merlinka's *Terezin sin* in a very particular

way. The usual spatial arrangements as done in cultural studies do not quite overlap with Merlinka's and her companions' experiences. They—as queer sex workers—are not spatially marginalized. They do not live, move, and work in a space that is somewhere outside or alongside the urban space. The exact opposite is depicted in Merlinka's autobiography: the queer characters are in the busy streets and around the trains and bus stations bustling with people. They are in the very midst of the space that is created by the infrastructures of Belgrade's built environment.

However, their experience of transportation and other infrastructures is markedly different compared to the cis heterosexual men and women. As already noted, cis-heteronormative socius grounded in reproductive heterosexuality creates a particular kind of infrastructural intimacy for itself. All other forms of life can merely use the infrastructure, adapting some parts of it, and never actually feeling at home in it. Likewise, Merlinka and her companions are merely using the streets and stations and other infrastructural aspects of urban ecology, never actually being at home in the built environment of Belgrade. Such never-at-home affective atmosphere is produced also by incessant policing, both by the state apparatus and cis-heteronormative violence. Urban ecology for Merlinka and her (non)human companions is produced as shorn of full actualization of potential relationality. Urban ecology and queerness in *Terezin sin* are, then, related in such a way as to diminish potentiality for relationality, as urban ecology of Belgrade is thoroughly shaped by cis-heteronormative socius.

While urban ecology is strongly shaped by the violence of infrastructural intimacy, Merlinka and her human, animal and plant companions form another way of being and becoming within the built environment. Merlinka and her (non)human companions—Likana, Šeherzada, Teri, Karamela, Suzana, Sanela, Dženika—develop particular, *messy* ethics of care for each other, ethics that do not preclude negative affects and exploitative relations, but that aim to alleviate the burden of living amid the violent infrastructures of (re)productive heterosexuality. Such messy queer ecological ethics point to the need for an absolute abolishment of relationality between human and non-humans, the abolishment of cis-normative (re)productive heterosexuality, if the suffering is to end.



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