

# KEEP IT SIM- PLE MAKE IT FAST!

AN APPROACH  
TO UNDERGROUND  
MUSIC SCENES (VOL. 4)  
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***Keep it Simple, Make it Fast!***

An approach to underground music scenes (vol. 4)

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### 3.3. Creating a magic world: Punk, DIY culture, and feminist ethics in contemporary Turkey

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**A b s t r a c t**

This essay offers an analysis of Istanbul based feminist punk acts. Through music, protest, art, and zines, feminist punks do not only seek to negate the prevalent misogyny sedimented in hardcore/punk culture and beyond, but they also seek to create new spaces where new values would take root. A feminist effort to “lead a good life in a bad life,” to borrow from Judith Butler, has repercussions that resonate well beyond the confines of an individual’s life. Acts of resistance undertaken collectively translate into acts of world-building and transformation. By drawing examples from the Turkish punk scene, this essay unpacks the work of feminist ethics in punk music, which is “to create a magic world,” where women and gender non-conforming individuals can exist and flourish.

**Keywords:** *Turkish punk scene, feminist punk, ethics and politics, Judith Butler, Valerie Solanas.*

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## 1. Introduction

*I believe in the radical possibilities of pleasure, babe!*

*I do. I do. I do.*

(Bikini Kill, *I Like Fucking*, 1998).

In her Adorno Prize lecture, Judith Butler (2012) asks: can one lead a good life in a bad life?. With this question, Butler seeks to demonstrate that the question of the good life is inseparable from larger political structures at work and that the very conditions of possibility for the individual life are dependent on power relations that go beyond the scope of the particular life of the individual in question. Thus, rather than attempting to answer this question once and for all –as Adorno did, when he proclaimed, “wrong life cannot be lived rightly” (2005, p.39)– detached from the particular situations in which the question becomes manifests, Butler points to various ways in which ethics and politics are interwoven.

Butler’s thinking here is much influenced by that of Foucault’s, whose genealogical analyses sought to lay bare that “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1998a, p.63) and therefore is diffused, pervasive, and productive rather than centralized and coercive. In his later work, Foucault attempts to think about resistance in terms of moral agency, where resisting power in creative and collective ways is bound up with the ethics and aesthetics of existence. If power is dispersed, so must resistance be. This essay is an attempt to rethink what it means to live a feminist life in pockets of resistance that make up the punk scene in Istanbul. As Sara Cohen notes, “the term ‘scene’ is commonly and loosely used by musicians and music fans, music writers and researchers to refer to a group of people who have something in common, such as a shared musical activity or taste” (1999, p. 239).

The term “scene” also denotes complex networks of cooperation and participation. Drawing from Nancy Fraser’s (1990) and Michael Warner’s (2005) groundbreaking writings on publics and counterpublics, this paper approaches Istanbul feminist punk scene as a form of counterpublic that marks a site of resistance. Given its current status, feminist punk could said to be a counterpublic within a counterpublic, having emerged as a response to both the cishet male-dominated punk scene that establishes itself as an anti-authoritarian counterculture and the heteronormative/patriarchal mainstream culture. The interviews I conducted in Turkish through email with artists, musicians, and organizers show that the local feminist punk scene in Istanbul operates as a counterpublic in at least three ways: first, individuals and collectives produce and circulate new discourses that seek to eradicate sexism in the scene and the larger public; secondly, feminist punks reclaim and transform public spaces that have historically been dominated by cishet men (such as the stage, bars, and venues); and lastly, the scene serves as a growing network that makes possible forging connections both on a local and global level.

Through these encounters that are the results of various creative acts, new possibilities of feminist solidarity emerge. The local feminist punk scene, in short, serves as a counterpublic constituted by a “diffuse network” where the participants’ “identities are formed and transformed” through these encounters and acts of cooperation (Warner 2005, p.56-57). I contend that

Butler's question "can one lead a good life in a bad life" is pertinent here as the feminist punk musicians and artists I interviewed describe their musical and artistic endeavors in terms of an attempt to live a good life in a bad life, highlighting the collective struggle of creating spaces for ourselves where we can exist, create, and flourish. I write "we" rather than "they" because I am not the disinterested observer of scientific positivism here, but instead actively involved in the scene I set out to study. While from the perspective of scientific positivism, one might suggest that my own involvement makes me biased, from the perspective of feminist epistemology, that grants me epistemic privilege (Fricker, 1999): I am both a researcher and a musician, both a thinker and an activist, whose perspective on the scene is informed both by lived experience and the theoretical frameworks that I bring to bear on that experience (See Guerra et al., 2018, 2019).

This endeavor provided me with the opportunity to reflect on the practices that I undertake alongside others, which exceed the confines of academia, yet nonetheless, deserve academic scrutiny. This project thereby seeks to bridge two worlds that may sometimes reveal themselves to be quite separate and perhaps even irreconcilable: the unruly world of punk and the orderly world of academia. Performing what Donna Haraway (1988) calls situated knowledge, my analysis is both a reflection of my own situatedness in the scene as well as the distance I take from it by virtue of my status as a researcher. Throughout the essay, the switches between "we" and "they" attest to this dynamic of being both an insider (i.e. a participant) and an outsider (i.e. a researcher).

In line with Butler's paradoxical question, this essay is comprised of two parts and a short conclusion. The first part, "The Bad Life," is about oppressive norms that envelop women and non-binary individuals in the punk scene and beyond, which make up the conditions of possibility for moral agency and resistance. The second part, "The Good Life," is about the struggle to create pockets of resistance in the form of counterpublics, through various practices including developing and disseminating a new language and aesthetics through blogs, zines, online and offline groups and forums; sharing vital information and consciousness raising in workshops; organizing other events such as concerts and exhibitions to provide the opportunity to showcase and celebrate each other's work. As Fraser puts it, there is a "dual character" to feminist counterpublics: "On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics" (Fraser 1990, p.68).

That is to say, while spaces created by feminist punks provide refuge to women, femmes, and trans, queer, and non-binary individuals who identify with the counterculture, these spaces are not merely escapist. On the contrary, they provide empowerment that is not limited to these spaces but rather has a wider resonance. Providing a space for self-expression and self-transformation, nurturing a culture of support, cooperation, and solidarity, the feminist punk scene as a counterpublic seeks to provide tools that would in turn help dismantle systems of oppression that feed on individualistic culture of competition as well as the self-doubt and silence of women and non-binary individuals. Further, many technical skills that people attain in these do-it-yourself spaces (including design, print, writing, and public speaking) translate into their professional lives.

My analysis is informed by the responses I received from four women (Gizem

from the band Crudez, Aybike from the band Reptilians from Andromeda, and Sare and Ipek who are artists and co-founders of queer feminist punk collectives Queer-A and Chaos, I Am Your Mistress, respectively) along with my own experience in the scene, playing with the feminist punk band Secondhand Underpants and co-running Chaos, I Am Your Mistress (CIAYM). I asked these women to reflect on the gender dynamics in the local punk scene, state what they feel is missing or could be improved upon, what they do to address these issues, how they situate their own work within the dynamics in the scene (in terms of their own contribution and impact), if and how they see their work as political, and lastly, what they are inspired by, along with some more personalized questions regarding their work. While their answers varied, there were some important common grounds in the ways in which they talked about the problems within the scene as well as how they thought about their actions aiming to combat those problems. These interviews laid bare that feminist punks undertook practices that are transformative, which one could characterize in terms of “collective world building” (Arendt 1998, p.95).

While there is extensive literature on third-wave feminist practices and countercultures in relation to punk and DIY scenes, which this project at hand is situated within and builds upon (Clark-Parsons 2017, Downes 2012, Sandoval & Fuchs 2010, Zobl 2009, Kearney 2006, 1997, Sowards & Renegard 2004, Harris 2003, 2004), there is little to no academic work that specifically focuses on the Istanbul punk scene, let alone the local feminist punk scene. Nonetheless, the punk scene in Istanbul (feminist and otherwise) serves as a counterpublic that bears importance to examine as a site of resistance precisely because it is out of the radar of the current government, whose acts of repression have thus far mostly targeted dissenting politicians, journalists, academics, and public employees.

The underground art and music scenes, on the other hand, continue to provide safe havens for many dissenting groups and individuals. Unlike the mainstream feminist movement, the feminist punk scene’s transformational and empowering activities including counterdiscourse production, community-building, and the transformation of space have been persevering without interruption and with no attention or interference from the government. If we were to think counterpublics as “spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” (Fraser 1990, p.68), we could also think it in terms of “lines of flight” à la Deleuze & Guattari, namely, as creative trajectories that push to move beyond what is readily available and that seek to create the world anew. Underlying the efforts of feminist punks, is the desire for collective world building. In this way, counterpublics do not simply organize *against* mainstream public, but orientates *away* from it. It fathoms and builds a new world, which could potentially undermine the old one. As Foucault once stated in an interview, “Not only do we have to defend ourselves, not only affirm ourselves, as an identity but as a creative force.” (Foucault 1998b, p.164) The feminist punk scene operates as a counterpublic in this way through the affirmation of the works of women and gender non-conforming individuals “as a creative force.”

## 2. The Bad Life

The *bad life* in which one seeks to lead a good life refers here, in a word, to sexism. During our interview, Aybike noted that even though the punk scene purports itself to be radical and critical, it continues to be laden with

misogyny. She noted the prevalence of (physical and verbal) violence against women, but also against men, perpetrated by other men in punk bands. She sees this situation to be a reflection of the patriarchal culture in which we live. Sare noted that many (male) bands embrace a kind of machismo as part of their aesthetics and stage performance. She stated that “their defense of machismo and our subjection to it is justified in this man’s world,” where women who object by saying “we do not want to listen to your sexist curses” would be seen as feminist killjoys. She also noted that while some of the male musicians playing in these bands are known to have committed numerous homophobic and misogynistic acts of violence and harassment, they continue to take an active part in the scene. “This is something that everybody silently ignores,” she said. Sare also noted a paradox in the way in which some male musicians showcase themselves. She said: “Yes, it is quite a provoking act to insult a political leader right now and we like these acts, but as long as we fail to face the hate crimes and hate speech within our scene, these words do not mean a thing. Because after I listen to all those bands that get me all riled up, I witness one of those musicians, who was playing that music that got me all riled up just moments ago, getting violent with his girlfriend outside the venue, for instance.”

While this culture of violence and harassment is deeply rooted and much normalized in the scene, feminists are fighting back. For instance, CIAYM, designed as an online and offline community for women and gender non-conforming individuals involved in punk and metal scenes, has come up with ways to look out and care for one another, seeking to replace the culture of violence with that of nurturing and support. The first issue of the CIAYM zine, which was released on October 31, 2017, focused on the problem of reclaiming pleasure as a survivor of assault. The issue featured various essays, poems, lists and aphorisms about surviving sexual violence, responding to street harassment, and learning to self-love and self-care. It not only sought to serve as a survival manual, but also to coin a new language through which women can affirm and empower themselves.

Other strategies feminist punks have employed in combatting gendered violence is through whistleblowing. There have been numerous cases where a woman would come forth as a survivor of assault and where legal mechanisms don’t work, women would expose the perpetrator online in an effort to inform and warn others, and also to publicly shame the perpetrator. Such acts let the men in the scene know that they are not going to get away with their violent acts. This strategy serves to hold men accountable for their actions. It lets them know that toxic masculinity will not be tolerated. It tells them, “your jig is up.”

While the culture of violence is a major problem against which feminists are fighting, another problem associated with the local punk scene is male domination simply by virtue of numbers. Aybike and Gizem both expressed a desire for there to be a higher number of women and queer/non-binary/gender non-conforming individuals actively making music, taking up space, and being more visible. Sare stated that in the past few years, she noticed that more women pick up a guitar and that makes her “happy and excited.” She added: “I believe that in time, we will grow in numbers and become more powerful.” Aybike noted that she finds it problematic that bands are also fetishized as “all-girl bands” or “female fronted bands,” whereas all-male bands are simply just “bands.” Fetishization misses the mark and places women in an uncomfortable position within the scene. It stems from a place that renders

women the Other, presupposing that the default musician is male. If omission constitutes one pole of marginalization, fetishization makes up the other. Many women in the scene express simply desiring to make music and hoping that their music will be appreciated, and not the fact that they are *women* making music, as if that were an anomaly. When sensationalized as such, women feel unheard and misunderstood.

Yet the growing number of women taking the stage changes the course of the conversation and undermines macho presence by virtue of using a different language; a feminist language. Political criticism is no longer the prerogative of men to assert toxic masculinity, but it serves as a tool for women and non-binary individuals to centralize our concerns, make ourselves heard, and build bonds amongst each other. In this way, we reclaim the stage and create spaces for ourselves to exist, play, and enjoy. We are no longer nothing but “feminist killjoys” who ruin the “fun” by standing up to sexist language and culture of violence, but we assert ourselves in new ways through creative acts whereby we seek to build a new world for ourselves.

There are, of course, a number of obstacles that render the visibility of women on stage difficult to attain. One obstacle is the sheer disregard of women as musicians, creators, and leaders in punk. Even though Aybike is the frontwoman and the songwriter for the band Reptilians from Andromeda, the music writers continue to refer to her band as “founded by Tolga Özbey and his wife.” She does not think it is fair that just because her partner has a longer history in the punk scene that she is pushed aside as simply “the wife of the guitar player.” Our competence is challenged even when there are no male musicians in our bands. In one show we played as Secondhand Underpants, one of the sound engineers said that he could not hear the guitar and asked a staff member to check the amplifier. When he came up on stage, he told me that my guitar was inaudible, because I did not turn the sound on (even though I had). He mansplained to me that if I do not turn the sound on on my guitar, there would be no sound. I told him I was aware of that and I had been playing for over fifteen years at that point. He did not care and did not check the amplifier. During the first song we played on our set, there was no guitar sound at all for the audience (although there was guitar sound on stage, so we were not aware that the audience could not hear the guitar). The same staff member came up on stage to replace the amplifier in the midst of that first song, interrupting our performance and causing a distraction for everyone.

Not only is our competence questioned by male professionals, who are supposedly there to cooperate with us to ensure a smooth performance (even though they often wittingly or unwittingly sabotage us), our work can also be underrated and undersupported within the punk scene. We are sometimes subjected to aesthetic standards that are external or unrelated to our work. Secondhand Underpants received several reviews written in international zines by men with a patronizing, orientalist undertone, who talked about how the music was not really for them but they thought it was “cool” that women were playing music in Turkey –such an “oppressive country.” We organized a Ladyfest in Istanbul for the first time in June 2018, which had little attendance (65 tickets sold, whereas a punk show with local and predominantly male bands the previous week sold over 100 tickets) that covered only the two third of the expenses.

The local punk scene is small, comprised mainly of men, who are for the most part comfortable and compliant with patriarchal norms and male

privilege. Many of them do not realize the importance of supporting women's work and having a more radical, diverse scene. In fact, they may sometimes feel threatened by our existence and choose to either mock us or ignore us altogether. (That is not to say, of course, that there are no male allies in the scene –their presence and support is much appreciated). There are only a few venues that allow punk shows and even fewer venues that feel safe to play as women and gender non-conforming individuals. Even though grrrl collectives expose perpetrators online and call for banishment, intimate partner violence continues to be prevalent and normalized in heterosexual relationships and the perpetrators continue to be supported by their friends, fans, and bandmates who “know” that they are “good guys who just did a mistake” (sometimes over and over again, as most perpetrators are serial perpetrators).

Lastly, making music is expensive and time consuming and many of us have demanding full time jobs, very little free time, and not enough funds. We receive little monetary compensation for our musical efforts that for the most part will not even cover the expenses. It can feel like what we do is in vain and that feeling is more constant in some occasions than others. This is “the bad life” in which we try to live well and create room for ourselves. “The good life” that we seek to build within this bad life comes from this struggle.

### 3. The Good Life

In her infamous SCUM Manifesto, Valerie Solanas writes: “In actual fact, the female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems, crack jokes, make music - all with love...in other words, create a magic world” (1996, p.14). Taking this suggestion to heart, the first issue of the zine by the feminist punk collective CIAYM opened with Solanas's words. The zine itself was a product of the struggle to create a magic world. This epigraph created controversy because of Solanas's history and the collective soon thereafter came to be misrepresented as a bunch of “man-hating feminists.” While it never ceases to amaze us how a movement about women and gender non-conforming individuals can constantly be misconstrued to be about cishet men, what I would like to highlight here instead is *the creative impulse*, which is a critical component in the movement. To use a Nietzschean terminology, it is not with reactive values or *ressentiment* does one take a stance against men and lock themselves in a polar opposition. It is with action, and not reaction, do we create new values and ways of being, seeing, feeling, thinking, and speaking. That kind of transformation is not simply about saying “no” to sexism, but rather about actively building the world anew by saying “yes” to ourselves.

Such praxis, I suggest, is the work of feminist ethics, which in reality could never be separated from feminist politics. Going back to Butler's question in the beginning, inasmuch as we attempt to live good lives in bad ones, the conditions of possibility of those lives are set up beforehand by forces that are beyond our making. Yet within those conditions possibility we struggle to create new ways to be, that is, to create a magic world. Feminist praxis, in that sense, is about creating and implementing new values that are life affirming.

As Sare talked about how the queer anarchist punk collective Queer-A came to be, she explained that as they were trying to articulate some “queer feelings” in their own communities that were supposed to be safe (“anarchist, leftist, feminist communities,” as she put it), they were made to feel like “freaks,” on top of the marginalization that they were subjected to as women

and/or LGBTQ+ individuals in the larger society. "As a few of us freaks came together, we organically and horizontally became organized," she states. They organized a "queer week" featuring various talks, panels, workshops, and discussion groups. "We realized that there was a lot to talk about," she says. Adding that the collective continues to organize events and continues to exist by "taking the streets, living our best lives, and through various creations we make," Queer-A combats "homophobia, transphobia, slutphobia, violence that punishes anti-normative acts, and all kinds of oppressions." "We need to stand together as a first step," she notes, "yet we also know that each one of us is strong."

Building safe communities where individuals can exist, create, and flourish is one strategy whereby the feminist punk scene establishes itself as a counterpublic. Collectives like Queer-A and CIAYM provide a haven for those who experience oppression in various ways, where they can gather and grow stronger together. Supporting the works of queer and feminist artists, musicians, and writers, these collectives also facilitate various kinds of creations, which in turn motivate and inspire others. Countless times when I would get off the stage after playing a set, young women would come up to me and tell me how much courage and motivation our performance has given them. It is these types of acts that break the spell of masculine valorization and monopoly over the scene, creating spaces for others to partake and transform. Self-empowerment, that is to say, serves in turn to empower others.

In line with research on feminist community building through zines and blogs (Clark-Parsons, 2017; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010; Kearney, 2006; Harris, 1999), the scene as a counterpublic relies on and promotes the circulation of useful, empowering information, counterdiscourses around body positivity, sex positivity, self-love, and self-care, and playful, provocative aesthetics that draw young women in and help bind them together. Referring to her own creative endeavors, Sare states that writing and drawing have always served as outlets for her through which she could express her traumas, heartbreaks, joys, and desires. "In time, painting those things that bother me has become a kind of responsibility for me. I usually paint about sexual pressures, abuses, pleasures, and sorrows that keep me preoccupied and that I've lived through. That devolves into my political struggle. My zines, paintings, poems...everything I create is shaped around my fears, dreams, and goals."

Music, writing, and art provide means for self-articulation whereby its creator can reflect on and draw from their own experiences in ways that resonate with others. Supporting and showcasing these works moves and motivates others to reflect on their own experiences and explore their own ways of self-expression. It also helps forge lasting connections that are both local (between women, queer, non-binary and gender non-conforming individuals within the local scene) and transnational. Sare stated that Queer-A has made connections and keeps in contact with queer collectives and individuals from various cities and countries. Online communities in particular have facilitated these kinds of international connections. As Zobl (2009, p.1) suggests, zines (and we may add blogs and other venues in cyberspace) "function as a heterogenous, 'culturally productive, politicized counterpublic' (Nguyen, 2000) for feminist networking and critical reflection by young women in different parts of the world". Many of the followers of CIAYM's Facebook page, whose content is mostly in English, are from outside of Turkey. Such connections also make possible some international collaborations. CIAYM, for instance, released a split album called

HERESY comprised of feminist bands from various parts of the world.

Ladyfest Istanbul 2018 featured Dream Nails from the United Kingdom as the headliner. Some feminist punks in Istanbul occasionally write for London based organization Loud Women's ezine and CIAYM interviewed Cassie, who runs Loud Women, for the upcoming issue of their zine. Spanish grrrl collective Furor Uteri also interviewed CIAYM for their zine. These kinds of connections and interactions make possible for sharing vital information and strategies, whereby individuals and collectives learn from one another and grow together. They extend solidarity beyond the confines of the local scene. By reaching out, feminist punks seek to bridge the local and the global.

Diverging from the strategies of the mainstream feminist movement in Turkey that centers protest, the kind of political action in which feminist punks engage is not only about building a better future, but heavily relies on the transformation of the present. As Sowards & Renegard (2004, p. 63) write with regards to young feminists, "[T]hird wave feminists employ rhetorical activism through enjoyment of their lives in the present, rather than, or in addition to, the use of resistance". Humor here serves as a rhetorical tool for resistance (Billingsley, 2013). Humorous, playful language and attitude, the use of feminist jokes, colorful and powerful presence, high energy music have become tenets of the feminist punk scene, from zines and blogs to stage performance and Instagram stories. As Sowards and Renegar (2004, p. 63) write, "Excitement and humor is...a part of third wave feminist activism. Humor becomes an outlet for addressing oppression and discrimination". Humor can also serve as a subversive tool insofar as it can help play with and disrupt gender norms. Through these rhetorical strategies, the stereotypical figure of the angry feminist is replaced by the witty, sarcastic feminist who pokes fun at norms and chooses to perform joy, overcoming feelings of hopelessness or desperation. When used in radical ways, humor can be very empowering for women and gender non-conforming individuals who are left feeling powerless. It becomes a tool whereby we can empower ourselves, perform critical resistances, and subvert norms.

In an interview, Silvia Federici (2018) states: "I am a strong believer that either your politics is liberating and that gives you joy, or there's something wrong with them." Joyful militancy, she suggests, is about "being fully present to [your] life" and recognizing "the transformative possibilities inherent to [your] work," as opposed to the Nietzschean image of the camel in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, who is overburdened by work that needs to get done, where "the outcome is always out of reach, always projected into the future, and you feel continuously defeated." She states: "Joyful politics is politics that change your life for the better already in the present. This is not to deny that political engagement often involves suffering. In fact our political involvement often is born of suffering. But the joy is knowing and deciding that we can do something about it, it is recognizing that we share our pain with other people, is feeling the solidarity of those around us." The kind of work I see feminist punks to be doing is tied to this idea of joyful politics. It is not that we are unburdened by the weight of the "bad lives" we are expected to suffer through as well as the tenacity of the norms, prejudices, and preconceptions we run up against even as we attempt to transform them, but our work seeks to bring joy into the world not in some distant future, but right now, in the present.

Gizem from Crudez states: "Punk is feminist, punk is queer...you realize that punk is not just music and with all those deconstructive feelings and

thoughts you have, you set out to reconstruct something new. You recreate yourself and explore yourself.” It is this creative impulse, the drive to put forth a new discourse, aesthetic sense, a new language, values that are the seeds of change, which makes feminist punk formations a kind of joyful militancy. Ipek, the co-founder of the grrrl collective CIAYM, states: “I see CIAYM’s position to be located in the happiness shared by those who cannot help but fight for something, who are wholeheartedly committed to the DIY culture. Spreading this happiness through sharing is the point.”

When Ipek and I prepared the first issue for the zine CIAYM, we wanted to use glitter as part of the material for the covers because we thought that glitter is pretty, shiny, joyful, and very annoying for a lot of people at the same time because it will spread all over and it is almost impossible to get completely rid of it. That seemed to us like a good metaphor for feminist tenacity. When I took the covers for the zine to the copy shop for binding, a stern looking middle aged man, who was helping me out, ended up being covered in glitter from head to toe as he was binding the issues one by one. His friend who stopped by to say hi commented sarcastically, “Oh how lucky, you’ll be shining like a star for the rest of the day.” He gave his friend a death stare, clearly irritated with the entire situation. This encounter made me think of glitter in terms of another metaphor: a tool to dismantle patriarchy with contagious femme joy. Secondhand Underpants entitled one of our records “Joy Puke,” because it was precisely the effect we wanted it to create: the uncontrollable multiplication of joy. The audacity to laugh in the face of patriarchy, in a context where politicians claim women ought not to laugh in public.

That is not to say that feminist punks are naive or happy-go-lucky or that we do not take anything seriously. On quite the contrary, the kind of aesthetic put forth by Chaos, I Am Your Mistress (as one could tell by the name) is dark and chaotic. During our interview, when I asked Ipek why she chooses to use the figures of dead, rotting women in her artwork, she talked about how women are often used in art as figures of beauty and perfection (which she sees to be linked to “reproductive futurism,” to borrow from Lee Edelman) and how death expresses “the sad exuberance of the duality in the creation and death of a terrific beauty, thereby multiplying with that which femininity is imbued as part of an amazing cycle.” She said that the multiplicity of meaning that we get from this duality embodies the vulnerability and power of being a feeling-thinking being on this planet. She proclaimed that she was inspired by “how the world glows like a pearl, yet is rotting from inside out. We are together in this.” She names this “glow of femme energy” a “grrrl hell” [*kızlık cehennemi*]. CIAYM is inspired by and enveloped in this grrrl hell and seeks to bring its wrath to shatter your boy clubs.

“Grrrl hell” is also about reclaiming space. Dive bars, dark alleys, testosterone filled concert venues are being reclaimed by a growing number of women and gender non-conforming individuals. When we organized a Ladyfest in Istanbul, we held it at a venue that is much supportive of the local punk and metal scenes, yet precisely because of this reason, a venue that has hosted many events with all male lineups. When that stage and the front of the stage became occupied by outspoken, talented women, femmes, butches, androgynous, fluid, genderqueer individuals, flamboyant men, trans individuals, that space was transformed from a cis masculine/heteropatriarchal space to a diverse space where we feel at home. As Travers writes:

*A key tactic for creating more inclusive public spaces in general and cyber spaces in particular involves following in the footsteps of the civil rights activists in their lunch counter campaigns and contesting the space by literally claiming the space...[and] feminists are already doing just that. Simply using the space as if it were yours subverts traditional and exclusive assumptions about public space. It contests its exclusive character and begins the transformative process* (Travers, 2003, p. 233).

That is to say, while these venues are supposedly “neutral” as public spaces, they have historically been dominated by men. The presence of a female/queer/non-binary/gender non-conforming majority claiming that space for ourselves is disruptive and transformational. Over and over we were asked why we were organizing a “Ladyfest” and whether that was not “reverse discrimination.” Yet it is seldom that any of these individuals who were questioning our choices would pause to think why 90% of all punk shows feature all male lineups and the impact that has on the scene at large. Are not all those shows Boyfests, only without the name? Why is it we assume that music cishet men create stands for the taste and expression of all? When women are invited to play in one of those shows, often times we feel our presence there as a token. After our performance at Ladyfest Istanbul, a male musician mentioned that I spoke much longer in between songs than I did during our previous shows. I told him that it was not a conscious decision, but I just felt more comfortable speaking out in that space where I felt I belonged. It is time we realize that male self-expression and the spaces where that unfolds are not ungended or unmarked. It is time we mark hegemonic masculinity in our scenes for what it is and recognize other possibilities for art and music that can be life affirming and life enhancing: *the fires of grrrl hell are burning.*

#### **4. Conclusion: The Good, the Bad, and the Feminist Life**

With regards to the question of social transformation, when I asked Gizem what she is doing to bring about the change she wants to see in the punk scene, she said that she “tries to be [herself] the best way she can and not stay quiet.” The good life in the bad life comes about when we find ways to manifest our reality that has been distorted or dismissed. The reality presented to us as “the reality” is marked by the (sub)cultural constructions of masculinity that stand for neutrality. Feminist punk is ultimately about collectively reworking and transforming that reality. Taking place at the intersection of ethics and politics, the work of feminist punk is tied to the struggle to live a good life in a bad one, to the attempts to create a magic world for ourselves and others where we can exist, become, transform, and flourish. It is the work of collective world building, the work of establishing counterpublics, of creating new languages, aesthetics, values that facilitate a practice of freedom.

As a new erotic culture is emerging out of the feminist punk movement in Istanbul, which seeks to replace rape culture and heteropatriarchal norms around intimacy and sexuality, women and queer, non-binary, gender non-conforming individuals continue to create together and support one another.

It is a culture of care, nurturance, pleasure, friendship, community, self-reliance, and joyful experimentation that they cultivate. They are playful and subversive; powerful and empowering. Creating, claiming, and proliferating spaces for themselves, they bring feminism home.

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