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# Ces Enfants Bizarres: Exploring Music as a Space of Resistance for Queer Women in France

Rachael Walker  
*Hollins University*

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Ces Enfants Bizarres:

Exploring Music as a Space of Resistance for Queer Women in France

Rachael Walker

Global Politics and Societies Senior Thesis Seminar 480

Dr. Jon Bohland and Dr. Tanya Schwarz

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## Introduction

Art is resistance: a simple truth, reiterated in graffiti under bridges and just beyond the watchful eyes of London's CCTV or much more audacious on ancient brick in Le Marais. Art is resistance, scrawled into the margins of banned books. Art is resistance, created by musicians in underground bars or closed Metro stations. Creativity is the lifeblood of social movements, giving heart and soul to war of people, of ideas. Nina Simone offered her voice to the civil rights movement and to Black nationalism. People persecuted during the Holocaust sang songs reminding them of home before home was taken from them. Music was a force of solace and mobilization during the apartheid era of South Africa (*Amandala!*). Music, from its creation to performance, ushers in mobilization, resistance, movement.

Within the crooked cobblestoned streets of Paris or buried in the grassy, wine-stained fields of provincial France, certain venues of art attempt to destabilize hegemonic power structures: music by and for queer people, existing as a form of resistance against heteronormativity. Issues faced by queer people and especially queer women in France are: questions of heteronormativity; patriarchal and misogynistic power structures that penalize queer women more than heterosexual women; and a burgeoning development of alt-right sympathies and ideology in France and abroad. Heteronormativity, as defined in this thesis, is the cultural and societal reinforcement of heterosexuality, representing the hegemony of heterosexuality (Schilt and Westbrook 447). Heteronormativity is exemplified through both law and state regulations prizing heterosexuality over sexual minorities and through the more banal and everyday: heterosexual relationships depicted overwhelmingly in media, reinforcements through

language and discourse, and perhaps most importantly: heterosexual privilege, often invisible (Herz and Johansson 1009).

France, and particularly Paris, are imagined to be a queer haven without struggle and difficulty, including by queer people in provincial France but outside of Paris (Provencher 151). However, the reality of French culture and politics is that most queer space in Paris is for gay men exclusively. For example, in the article “Gay Paris: Language, Sexuality, and Space in the French Capital,” Denis Provencher explores the geographies of gender and sexuality in Paris, finding that the imaginings of Paris as a queer-friendly space is one for men, whereas women lack this space. Beneath the veneer of progressivism and openness in France lays several darker realities, particularly increasing far-right sentiment. While creating an idealistic vision of France and Paris as a queer city without issue is empowering to French people who struggle to find acceptance in their homes or meet other queer people, it is unrealistic and dangerous to assume that it is without fault.

Paris is known to be a city of art, from spray-painted murals in Belleville to the music echoing through the narrow streets. Within this tapestry of art and music lies independent music, unique in that it is not beholden to the whims and profit-driven desires of corporatized music, instead thriving on authenticity and honesty of flawed people living through real circumstances. Additionally, it gives musicians the venue to express political and social opinions without fear of losing their economic support, because the economic support was never part of the equation for these musicians. France is consistently painted as a country welcoming free speech and expression, and while this narrative is popular, the issue is more complicated than it is often made out to be.

Many see France as a haven for free speech and expression, known for genre-bending and envelope-pushing art broadcasted by the Centre Pompidou or protests marching down the cinquieme arrondissement of Paris for labor rights. However, France's approaches to free speech are far from perfect, and particularly in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks, the French government and society is left questioning if free speech and expression is worth the loss of life.

This thesis focuses on the French communities of queer women, defined as women existing outside of the heterosexual majority. I focus on musicians Christine and the Queens and SoKo. The question I explore in this thesis is: How does independent music act as a space of resistance for queer women in France?

My intention is to explore these spaces of resistance within French independent music and examine the importance of these delineations in a current turbulent time.

My findings are that independent music, using authenticity, creates an environment of openness to sharing experience and, within this feminized space of honesty, creates a space of resistance. I break down this analysis into three specific areas: femininity within music, music as an act of resistance, and constructing identity within music. Each includes discourse analysis of lyrics, interviews, and social media.

For the purposes of this research, I am defining authenticity as a quality and condition of realness (Vannini and Burgess 112) without influences of commodification -- a sense of honesty, especially when that honesty stirs the very deep, intimate self-destructive tendencies always in the backs of our heads. In many ways, this level of authenticity is difficult, difficult to look into the abyss within ourselves. The meaning this creates with the musicians is that the greatest sense of power comes from a space of honesty and vulnerability, and the honest space that comes with

it creation. The strength of independent music is that other people will hopefully resonate with this truth, and instead of relying upon commodified authenticity, can instead unite with actual authenticity. The musicians explored in this analysis use authenticity to express truth and unite with an audience, which spurs connection, community, resistance, and change.

### **Theory and Methodology**

The methodology I deploy in this thesis is discourse analysis of lyrics and surrounding media focusing on the musicians of relevance to this project. Within this discourse analysis is deep listening of lyrics. Some songs are originally in English, while one is in French; I translate this song myself and have achieved workplace proficiency in the French language, ensuring that these translations are as accurate as possible.

Discourse analysis is a “critical tradition of social analysis into language studies and contributes to critical social analysis a particular focus on discourse and on relations between discourse and other social elements (power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth)” (Fairclough 9). As my research focuses in many ways on social identities and in smaller ways on power and institutions, discourse analysis of lyrics and surrounding media such as interviews provide insight into this research. Looking qualitatively at this data will also offer a greater richness and depth than strictly quantitative methods would be able to offer.

Power is essential to analyzing discourse, and power is an essential piece of the music analyzed in this thesis. While power is most noticeably asserted through significant acts that garner media attention, most power comes from the small, the everyday, the banal. Interviews and social media show a personal connection and understanding of the musicians and how the music comes to be. Lyrics grapple with these banal assertions of power and showcase the

everyday occurrences of empowerment and disempowerment. While social analysis may not be the goal of most musicians writing songs, it is an implicit statement: every love story, every argument stated through music, is a method of punching up against established systems of power.

Pertaining especially to musical analysis, I analyze songs through deep listening, which involves both the poetic and lyrical developments of music but also the instrumentation, composition, sonic aesthetics, and scoring, as sound is just as significant in processing social geographies as the visual (Back 272). Lyrics and music are a form of discourse, making an argument through poetic elements and through use of musical techniques.

In this discourse, I search primarily for instances of authenticity used as a political means as well as calls to action, either subtle or direct. I analyze lyrics and discourse to better understand music as a method of resistance and how this question of resistance is approached differently by musical groups. I analyze how queer identity and femininity is negotiated within these spaces. I question femininity and queer femininity is a necessary space to express resistance. I explore why music is an important piece of this analysis: why is music so heavily dominated by men? How is identity of queer women constructed within and around independent music? How is music used as a tool of political action and resistance?

The musicians I write about in this thesis are Héloïse Letissier, whose stage name is Christine and the Queens, and Stéphanie Sokolinski, stage name SoKo. For the purposes of this discourse, I refer to Letissier as Christine or Christine and the Queens and Sokolinski as SoKo. Both musicians are queer women, Christine pansexual and SoKo bisexual. Christine and SoKo work under independent music labels, placing them outside of the main channels of music



production, creation, and distribution. They both are solo singer-songwriters, and they both are French. In regard to their music, the songs I am analyzing are, from Christine, “iT,” (Appendix A) “Tilted,” (Appendix C) and “Christine” (Appendix 1B, 2B). I analyze SoKo’s song “Who Wears the Pants??” (Appendix E) as well. Christine is more well-known, and the music she creates has a greater possibility of influencing others to a more significant degree, which is why Christine is more represented musically than SoKo in this analysis.

The theories I employ for this analysis are queer theory and feminist theory, particularly the intersection of queer feminist theory. This is applicable because queer theory frequently focuses on women. Intersectionality is important because as an act of resistance, creating intersectional space is essential to progress (Elliott 430).

Queer feminist theory focuses particularly on the lives, issues, and power structures working against non-heterosexual women. Queer theory is a part of the post-structuralist school of thought, meaning that much work done in this area is about social constructions. Here, the prevalent social constructions are about gender and sexuality. Queer feminist theory usually focuses on lesbian and bisexual women, but can also extend to other identities under the queer umbrella. This theory is essential to this project when analyzing queer space and culture as a method of gaining power and creating resistance (Elliott 428, Rich 347, Wittig 343).

Feminist theory is a longstanding critical lens, but the queer turn in it is where I find the niche for this project. Feminist theory focuses on gender inequality in its many forms, and when combined with queer theory, focuses on gender inequality for queer women (Knopp 150, Sullivan 15). Queer theory embraces the intersectional space within gender, sex, and systems of

power and oppression that dominate and control women and queer women in particular (Jagose 38).

## **Literature Review**

### *French Queer Spaces*

Queer space in France has been widely praised for being very open and present, particularly in Paris. Certain arrondissements, particularly the neighborhood of Le Marais, have a long and storied history of queer space (Provencher 160, Labruce 107). However, the spaces afforded to queer people have overwhelmingly been space for gay men, still reinforcing patriarchal ideologies while continuing to leave out people outside of binary imaginings of sexuality, including people falling into the umbrella of “queer.”

Paris exists as an imagined haven for queer people across France: many struggle to find acceptance or at the very least, fellow queer people, in their homes in provincial France. Paris then exists as a space of unique power in that it represents something greater than itself (Provencher 151). The media, including music, that people living in Paris but also in other parts of France put out into the world offers another type of imagined space, frequently shared by the ephemerality of the internet.

The internet has long been a space of solace for queer people in France and beyond. A predecessor of the internet, the Minitel, was especially important in sharing space for French lesbian women. This movement to online space, much more inclusive to women than physical space, was extremely significant in developing queer space including women and moving beyond space only inclusive of gay men (Chaplin 452). With the integration of the early iterations of the internet as well as the internet in its current form, queer space has become much

more open to women, to people who are younger, people who avoid alcohol, and people outside of large cities like Paris (Preston and Ustundag 231).

Queer spaces are anti-hegemonic in their very definition, acting as a force counter to the forces and ideologies in power. Theoretically, though not always in practice, queer space is also a space open to “others,” including racial minorities. Queer space is a space where conversation and resistance is built. (Binnie 186). A collection of people disenfranchised by groups in power is a virtual recipe to develop resistance and mobilization.

### *Music as Resistance*

Music is a uniquely significant force of mobilization and power in its ability to bring people together, as a form of storytelling, and as a form of art (Street 82). The performative aspect of music is a venue to express an anti-hegemonic force against heteronormativity and heterosexual hegemony (Taylor 42). The 1990s saw a significant increase in female musicians, though much of the spheres of music production, where much of the money is made, were still almost exclusively dominated by men. During the rise of female musicians, lesbian musicians also began to create music. A divide developed between lesbian musicians with the decision to either use their existence as queer women through their music to support their politics, while other musicians used their queerness as a subtle method of getting people more comfortable with the idea of queer women due to increased exposure to them (Garofalo 48, Frith 114). In some spheres, the very act of existence is a radical act, and celebrating that queer existence is impactful to both queer people looking for other queer people as well as those who have not been exposed to queerness in a meaningful way. Women had to force themselves into these space of

creating music after being ignored by the music industry due to a perceived lack of profitability, but independent music creates space for these women, less consumed by ideas of profitability.

Music as a vehicle for political action succeeds in ways that voting or writing to members of Congress, fail. Music is a personal event for most people, particularly devout listeners, and therefore creates a space where the personal becomes political, as well as developing a community of people that rally around either the type of music or the musicians themselves (Street 64, Barker 320). Punk, as a genre, is most famous for challenging regressive ideas, particular neo-Nazi sentiments, but political action in music is by no means limited to punk, though it does illustrate well the potential for music to spur movements (Lewin and Williams 72).

Alternative and independent music in France have a history of challenging hegemonic power structures: an example of this challenging is in the *radios libres* that were especially influential during economic downturns, which questioned the French government as well as French culture and norms. These *radios libres* also highlight an important aspect of French independent music: a reaction against capitalism (Hesmondhalgh 312). While independent music is a reaction against capitalism and a vehicle for minority groups to speak, it also faces government crackdown and a lack of support from the government.

The gaps in this literature do not go over all the intersections I look at in this thesis: navigating femininity and queerness, particularly in an era where the very definitions of gender are being rewritten, changes daily. The internet and virtual space plays into the intersections and movements as well, but because this is a fairly new development, there has not been much academic work written about it, and especially so in such a niche field. Another gap within the

research is on sexualities other than heterosexuality and homosexuality: while there has been a recent push for “queer” as an umbrella term to cover bisexual, pansexual, or other sexual minorities, women who are sexual minorities other than lesbians have a tendency to be overlooked, fetishized, or both.

### *Authenticity*

A key question in the search for authenticity within music is where the money comes from, and to what degree money influences the art being developed (Vannini and Williams 105). There is a degree of reflexivity in authenticity: being authentic means being honest, down to the broken and frayed edges, and recognizing the broken parts as important aspects of a person anyway, and this living of uncomfortable truths is, in itself, a radical act (Vannini and Williams 24; Weigart 112). Within authenticity comes a knowledge and awareness of oneself, including the good and bad -- being authentic and real also incorporates a great deal of realization of self-destruction, looking into the voids within ourselves (Vannini, Williams 64; Lindholm 25).

A serious issue that comes up with authenticity is the commodification of it (Vannini, Williams 105); this is seen in examples such as boy bands (Lindham 33) where meaningless love songs top the charts because they are seen by some to be an authentic expression of emotion, but in reality mean very little.

Where the research leaves off and what I pick up is how authenticity is navigated through the construction of different identities: does creating a new identity with which an artist shares music make that music more or less authentic, if it changes the authenticity of it at all?

### **Sections for Analysis**

#### *Femininity in Music*

The theoretical framework used in this section derive from Taylor, Garafolo, and Firth, where the intersections between queerness, femininity, and music are written. Music is a very male-dominated industry, but art gives the ability for people to resist, join together, and overcome -- even if fighting for it is inevitable. The strongest part of music is the connection formed between musicians and audience, and because of that, women are more successful in their authentic selves while existing in a space that is created by women and for women. Feminist theory from Wittig and Rich exploring the intersection between queerness and femininity is also important within this section and understanding the negotiation of self.

Most of the popular ideas of musicians, and bands in particular, are focused around men. The legendary greats, here listed in *Rolling Stone* as the 100 greatest musicians of all time, are overwhelmingly male. The only eight women making appearances in the list are household names: Diana Ross, the Shirelles, Tina Turner, Joni Mitchell, Patti Smith, Janis Joplin, Madonna, and the sole woman cracking the top ten: Aretha Franklin (Rolling Stone). Music connects to its audience in a particularly intimate way where even in a packed stadium of 20,000 people, every person in the audience feels completely, uniquely, and singularly at one with the music, men and women, teenagers and adults. Music transcends boundaries, and that is why it is such an important part of the human experience -- but the creation of music is a very gendered practice, through execution, production, creation, and consumption.

As discussed in the theories written about by Taylor, Garofalo, and Frith, music as a performative genre of art has a more significant price on the performance and appearance of the artists. This is true of music more so than most venues of art; visual art, symphonic music, writing, and other forms of art are much less focused on appearance, while music this connected

to the performers necessitates seeing the face of the person producing it, and because of the connection to the musicians and the music, aspects such as gender and sexuality inevitably come up. As both Taylor and Firth write, the more people are exposed to people of differing sexualities, the more accepting people become toward those different sexualities. Performers must fall into this category: people feel as if they know the musicians they listen to, even if they've never met.

Héloïse Letissier, the frontwoman of the band Christine and the Queens, builds this question of femininity and its intersection with music into the very fabric of her musical creation, identity performance, and musical performance. Her performance character, Christine, was born from a difficult breakup and a bus trip to London, where she was welcomed by drag queens who helped her pick herself back up (Harris). While Christine and the Queens is a solo project, she calls to the drag queens who made her who she is. Empowering women, and self-empowerment through femininity, is an important aspect of her transformation into Christine.

In a Rolling Stone interview with Christine, she speaks candidly about the truth versus the imaginings of French femininity:

It's like French people don't really want to see that we are still misogynistic and the patriarchy is still there – “The French woman is free! She's empowered and she's free!” and you're like, “No she's not because she has to be skinny and perfect.” Some people are like, “But we had Simone de Beauvoir – it's *fine!*” And it's like, “She's dead and we still have problems that Simone de Beauvoir would be upset with” (Harris).

Christine confronts these persistent inequalities head-on, unapologetically: both the stagnancy of progress and people's blindness to this stagnancy. Even if one person cannot fix all the problems

facing women in France or the world over, Christine channels the same concept as Taylor; the more the world sees women fighting, breaking boundaries, and righting the wrongs that women have faced for centuries, the more acceptable it will be for women in the future to do nothing more or less than exactly what they want. Ignoring the voices of women in music is ignoring stories upon stories that will otherwise never be heard.

In a Vice interview, Christine speaks about her decision to perform within the constraints of a character she created: “I didn't have to compromise with this character I've created... No hiding anything or softening, which you often have to as a woman” (Ewens). Femininity and womanhood is often associated with a need for softness and warmth, informed by centuries of women being painted as only mothers, sisters, and wives. Christine as the alter-ego, can deflect stereotypes and expectations more easily. Christine and the Queens is not the first musician to use an alter-ego for the purposes of circumnavigating the limitations both self-imposed and societally imposed that cut so deeply they are difficult, if not impossible, to shake off. Because of the need to slip into a different persona, several other musicians have also used alter-egos for their art. A significant example of this adoption of alter-ego is David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust, himself an influence on Christine and the Queens (Brekke). I discuss this complexity of identity further in a later section of this thesis, but in this section the key aspect is femininity: creating an alter-ego allows herself to be herself, but also act as a form of liberation. Christine wears exclusively suits, jeans, t-shirts, and other androgynous clothes on stage: no overt sexuality, no low-cut shirts (Sykes). Her ankles, peeking out from the hems of her tailored jeans, are all that is exposed, a small space of tribute to another star who utilized gender fluidity: Michael Jackson. Through her clothing choices, she is able to express the liminal space between gendered



expectations; she does not have to conform to the gendered expectations foisted upon her, and perhaps this longing was somewhere within her all along, and therefore did not have to force herself to become this character. Instead, she can embrace Christine; become her on stage, and even among her friends.

The very root of the music industry is still dominated by men: the upper executive levels, producers, composers, mixers, managers, are all by and large, men (Leonard 9). Independent music, to an extent, can navigate around these patriarchal institutions by having the musician take on all these roles: songwriter, producer, composer, publicist, manager, and self-executive. However, having one person take on all of these operations is no small task, and therefore is inaccessible in the simple fact that the person in question must have skill, ability, desire, and most importantly, time to fulfill all of these responsibilities. In addition to these logistical issues, the patriarchy of the music industry is so ingrained that it is impossible to escape, even as an independent musician: Christine says of being a woman in the music industry:

People have started to tell me to worry. “Because of your career, you can’t have children.” I don’t give a fuck! I can’t wait to be old and wrinkled with grey hair and lots of charisma and rings on my fingers, like Keith Richards. I’ll enjoy doing interviews like that: an old woman, sitting, waiting. Stroking a cat” (Manning).

Even though Christine has a career and interests of her own, the persistent “what about the kids?” question still makes an appearance, though the male musicians never get the same question. Mentioning herself as an old woman is still a persistent taboo: even while Keith Richards and Mick Jagger can perform into their seventies, women are not represented, even as a minority, in music spaces into their older years. Going back to Taylor’s theory about exposure to

queer women through music, perhaps a significant barrier that women in music can attempt to break down is the barrier of age: if audiences continue to see women who are fantastic, evocative musicians into their seventies, perhaps it would cease to be such a taboo.

Within the industry, pervasive stereotypes and gendered beliefs remain, and if women collaborate with other artists it is seen as the other, male, musicians doing the work for her instead of pure collaboration. While musicians such as Kanye West can collaborate on music for a significant portion of the album -- such as seven out of ten songs on the critically and commercially successful *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy* (2010) -- this is not true for women in the industry: as a female producer, musician, and songwriter, Christine says:

I can relate to what Grimes [another independent female musician] says about having to explain to people five times over that you produce your own shit, that you know how to use a computer, that you don't need help with the technical stuff, because it happens to me as well. I know in advance if I work with other musicians, people are going to say, 'The musicians did it all for her' (Nicholson).

As music becomes more connected to technology, especially within genres deriving from electronica like Christine and the Queens' music, the gender stereotypes follow from technology; not only do women in a production capacity have to contend with patriarchy entrenched into the very heartlines of the industry, but also the sexism and chauvinism affiliated with technology, as we see even within the gender disparities within technological fields of employment. While Kanye West and other musicians can collaborate and have the reception reflect that the collaboration was for the benefit of the music, female musicians must contend with the public opinion that if she collaborates with other musicians, it must be those other musicians mixing

beats and creating soundscapes. This double expectation creates a more difficult environment for women to engage in the musical conversation.

At the very least, one plus seems to come from this gender disparity: women supporting women. In an interview with Antidote, SoKo says:

I love women. And they just seem to find me. I don't seek them out. It just so happened that women like to surround themselves with other strong women. And I am very outspoken about being a feminist. And in this industry in particular, I think that men have the comfy seat and women are still on the eject seat, so they need to fight more. And I like fighters. I like people that have a need to make something happen. Like if they don't do it they'll die (Michault).

The women who are able to “make it” in an industry as gendered as the music industry have to be, as SoKo terms, fighters. These women have to contend with entrenched patriarchy from all levels of production: record companies, music production, media surrounding music. The most effective solution to battle against this patriarchy is for women to support and uplift each other. While Christine paints herself as mostly a soloist, SoKo relates herself as more of a collaborator: women resisting patriarchy in music through working together, fueling each others' passions. Because of the entrenched patriarchy, it is difficult for women to find validity in their collaboration: as Sharp writes, collaborative women's work faces significantly more scrutiny in order to find its validity (205).

### *Music as an act of resistance*

The theories used in this section are developed by Street, Hesmondhalgh, and LeBrun. These theories state that music is used as a space of resistance by music being used as a voice of

the proletariat, the downtrodden, the forgotten and the mistreated. Audiences rally around the musicians they listen to as a sort of cult of personality, listeners feeling as if they truly know and understand the musicians they listen to. Because of that, musicians are given something of an elevated political stance that allows them to give their audiences more sway over their audiences because of this connection, either perceived or real, between musicians and audiences.

Music has the capacity to challenge, change, and influence. As art, it transcends; music is a very approachable form of art. Independent music, especially, does not demand a level of education or buy-in to the industry as visual art or modern dance does; it does not require access or command over language the way literature and writing does; music is accessible from cell phones, from YouTube, from Twitter. It is alive. Its adaptability, its vibrancy, its accessibility, all make it an ideal space for resistance. In this section, I look first at what the artists say for themselves about music as a space of resistance, but then into the lyrical and musical evidence: what they say in their songs and how this translates into resistance and movement.

In interviews with SoKo, her prerogative is clear: her personal brand of resistance is not to push an agenda, but to live authentically: living out the beliefs she espouses in her music. About the movements for queerness, she says: “everyone is all about fighting homophobia, but then homosexuals are straight-o-phobic, or bi-o-phobic. It’s like, stop being a fucking hypocrite about it! ...You can’t march for equal rights and then not tolerate someone who isn’t like you” (Manders). Within queer movements, there is a significant amount of in-fighting; people who are bisexual are frequently seen as “not queer enough” and are ostracized from both homosexual and heterosexual communities. The obvious solution, for SoKo, is to create a more inclusive queer community that appreciates all people under the umbrella, not just lesbians and gay men. The

fight against homophobia, in SoKo's perspective, is one faced against all queer-identifying people, not just gay men and lesbians, and band together to fight against homophobia instead of succumbing to in-fighting: as previously mentioned, sexualities beyond homosexual and heterosexual are largely ignored and invalidated.

While in an interview, SoKo says that she "doesn't have an agenda," (Manders) but still works to promote her method of authentic life and honesty through music: "But I can write songs about it [homophobia and intra-queer community conflict] and tell people to stop being hypocrites, though" (Manders). The method she uses for resistance is, in some ways, more passive than resistance like marching in the streets or throwing rocks through Starbucks windows, but not necessarily less influential. Her method of resistance is very banal and personal, connected to living her own authentic life; she also speaks in an interview with Paper about encouraging her male friends to wear her dresses (Moran), creating a space to embrace gender fluidity: living this truth, truth of resistance, which is evidenced in her music as well as in her life.

Christine embraces her queerness as part of both her alter-ego and her real identity, so naturally it comes across in her music as well. She wrote her first song, "iT," after being expelled from drama school in Lyon after challenging gender-based rules at the school, which stated that boys could stage and direct plays, while girls couldn't and had to learn to act first (Erizanu): "My first song "iT" was about wanting to have a dick just in order to have an easier life" (Erizanu). It is notable that her musical career was born out of this disillusionment with patriarchy, but also a desire to become part of it instead of fighting; in retrospect, she says: "I wrote that song four years ago. Now I would choose to be a woman and fight for every woman to have the same

rights as a man” (Stern). Many women have felt this same bitterness and disillusionment, watching mediocre men soar past talented and hardworking women, simply because of their gender. Christine’s resistance in her music is born from this bitterness and disillusionment, but goes to that essential next step. Through growing as a person and getting older, instead of sighing at the patriarchy, she actively decides to work against this in both her music and in her life.

The song “iT” is backed with a thick, dark electronic beat: small points of light, simple major chords with the lyrics “I’m a man now” in the chorus, and back to mostly minor and a strict beat during the verses. She creates a harmony with herself with the lyrics “it’s a fake, it’s a fake, it’s a fake.” Christine adds a small electric guitar riff in the last chorus with “She’s a man now.” The end of the song is much more layered and complex than the beginning: the thick beat under, electric guitar, and a harmonized chord, Christine singing all the vocals, for the chorus, along with the same simple major chords from the beginning chorus. This chord progression signals a sense of completion and one-ness: if the entire song is about accepting gender fluidity, here is the acceptance.

At the very forefront of the song is the stylizing of the title: “iT” is intentionally provocative, flipping standards of capitalization -- societal norms, in a sense -- to their opposites, just as Christine’s persona does in the song. In addition, the letter “T” “...looks a bit like a dick, so it's quite phallic, actually!” (Stern) says Christine in an interview, and the symbolism in the title is entirely intentional.

Lyrically, she sings in the first chorus: “I’ve got it/I’m a man now/and I won’t let you steal it.” Christine asserts herself as a man: for the three minutes of this song, she is a man and declares herself as one, just to escape into a space where she will not be oppressed and walked

over because of her gender. While it may be, in some ways, less authentic for Christine to give up on her gender for the ease of moving up in the social world, in reality it is an authentic sentiment: many women feel the same way, seeing men with connections and money shoot up past talented, passionate women.

She will not let “them,” the patriarchal systems of power and the people who assert it, take away what she has to say: if she has to be a man to say what she needs to say, she will embrace the fluidity of gender. In terms of authenticity, this is a bit of a point of tension: her authentic self is not transgender, but embracing the difficulties of gender and the spaces in between the gender binary allows her to express her truth, only through stating “I’m a man now.”

In the third verse, Christine sings:

She wants to be a man  
But she lies  
She wants to be born again  
But she’ll lose  
She draws her own crotch by herself  
But she’ll lose because it’s a fake  
It’s a fake, it’s a fake, it’s a fake

In this verse, Christine takes on the voice of the people who have turned her down because of her gender, because of her acceptance of gender fluidity. They state that she will never be able to transcend the perceived limitations of her gender or liminal space between binary genders. Here, Christine allows herself to express her frustration with the patriarchal power structure: impossible to win. Losing feels inevitable, and while these detractors were negative to Christine as a woman, they are also negative to Christine as a man, which leaves a disillusioned, frustrated person stopped from fulfilling their true potential, achieving success, or moving beyond prescribed gender roles.

In the final chorus and outro, Christine sings “I’ve got it/I’m a man now” and in the outro: “she’s a man now/and there’s nothing we can do to change her mind” combining the two themes throughout the song, tying back to the sense of musical cohesion and oneness. While gender fluidity is the clear objective of this song, the bitterness Christine feels toward the patriarchy’s valuing of men and masculine-presenting people over femme-presenting people: she wants the power of manhood over the societally perceived weakness of femininity, because everything she wants would be easier to attain. While not entirely feminist, the significance of this song is to point out the inequalities and the unfairness dealt towards women. As stated in interviews referenced above, “iT” was born out a space of anger and frustration, a sentiment with which many women resonate. Here, too, she embraces her queerness: a space of empowerment rather than a space of absence.

Christine and the Queens’ most well-known song is “Christine” as well as its English-language counterpart, “Tilted.” These two songs are not twins, but more like sisters: they share the same genetic backbone of rhyme scheme and instrumentals, but the lyrics differ somewhat. For the significance of the titles, “Christine” refers to the alter-ego she created for her stage persona, fully embracing all the ways she does not fit into socially prescribed boxes, be that her queerness, her love of Michael Jackson, or all the other small and significant ways she deviates from the expected, the prescribed, the norm. The title of “Tilted” is similarly significant; as she explained to an audience, “The world wants us to be straight, but I’m tilted” (Villarreal). Clearly the straight/queer differentiation is written bluntly here, but also how she is tilted in other ways, just as the way the persona of Christine has allowed her to accept and embrace her differences, her tilted-ness.



A significant part of Christine and the Queens' performance is through dance: during live shows, she performs the same choreography as in the official video, which shows that the dancing is an essential part of the music (Appendix D). Her dancing echoes with the ghost of Michael Jackson, himself a man enraptured by weirdness, and features many worm's-eye perspectives; here, Christine is queen, championing over those who would rather belittle her for her weirdness.

Lyrically, the most significant part of this song is the same in both songs, originally in French. Translated into English, it goes:

These weird kids  
Spat out as if by chance  
Hiding their effort in the scratching post  
And a creepy song and banner that goes:  
"I do all my make-up with mercurochrome<sup>1</sup>"  
Against the pop-ups that assure me the throne

There is a small difference between English and French translations; In English, the last two lines move out of French and are instead: "I'm doing my face with magic marker."

With a knowledge of Christine's personal motives and goals, "these weird kids" can easily mean queer kids -- "spat out as if by chance," rejected for no other reason than sexuality, spat out for a reason that is given so much weight only by chance, only by the pushes and pulls of society. Something may be lost in the translation between "Cachant l'effort dans le griffoir" and "Hiding their effort in the scratching post," but the sentiment remains: desperation, hard work left unrecognized, and the image of scratching is one that echoes of both self-sabotage and small, methodical movements. Queer kids are, after a lifetime of both small and large reminders that the world is a cruel place to people who are different, leave their effort into something small,

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<sup>1</sup> Mercurochrome is a now-unused topical antiseptic used for minor cuts and bruises.

something precise, something scratching. The idea of “I do all my make-up with mercurochrome” and “I’m doing my face with magic marker” both have something off-putting about them. Not only is there a connotation between makeup and hiding something, as well as makeup and a connection to femininity, but the particular aspect of mercurochrome and magic marker is something off, different, and weird. Not only is Christine professing makeup as a significant point -- paired with her more masculine on-stage persona, always in suits -- but the strangeness of it, that even while trying to disguise an aspect of herself, some strange aspect will bleed through no matter what. Both songs, however, have the same uplifting note at the end: in “Christine,” these kids are assured the throne. Despite difficulty, despite people who hate others for no reason other than their queerness, these “enfants bizarres” will overcome. In “Tilted,” the message is simple; “I’m in my right place/don’t be a downer,” meaning that she and the people like her are in a place where they can accept themselves and be better for it, not having the time or patience for negativity. The power, for Christine, is in authenticity; owning and being stronger because of queerness, embracing parts of humanity that society, that heteronormativity, that patriarchy discourage.

SoKo’s music is, for the most part, self-referential. She writes often about mental illness, love, mermaids, and aliens -- the last two usually as metaphor. Despite being French, all of her songs are in English. While, as an openly bisexual woman, she has not embraced the queer community as brightly as Christine and the Queens has, she still uses her experiences and perspectives as a queer woman for the purposes of her songwriting, which immediately gives her music a very intimate type of authenticity. A significant point to make about her music is that in love songs, the referential pronoun is not third person but second person, so without knowing her

own personal background, a listener could easily assume heterosexuality. SoKo's most significant song relative to resistance is "Who Wears the Pants??" [sic] (Appendix E) addressing the common question posed to queer couples about who is the "man" and who is the "woman," which is a constant source of annoyance for queer couples.

This song takes its cues from the three-chord punk tradition, more so than many of SoKo's folk or 80's new-wave influenced songs, which reflects the annoyance she feels on this particular topic. She opens the song with these lyrics:

Have you ever thought of being a man?  
Do you think it would ease your pain?  
Who put this idea in your head  
That you're gonna rot in hell?

Here, SoKo takes on two constant comments on lesbian relationships: that all lesbians really want to be men, and that all gay people are damned to hell. These are two comments that queer women hear frequently and are almost always unsolicited. While male-to-female transgender lesbians exist, the population of queer women who were assigned female at birth are not necessarily in a crisis of gender because of their sexuality. SoKo mentions the popular rhetoric of queerness as a sin, which brings up the also-problematic notion of "love the sinner, hate the sin," which is a way for people to act as if they are accepting but, in fact, are still invalidating a part of someone's identity. Assuming someone is "in pain" because of their sexuality is also fairly offensive, but common to hear. SoKo addresses these common phrases she hears and bites back at them, expressing the emotional weight this carries. Emotional labor is a heavy burden queer people, and queer women especially, carry every day but rarely have the venue to express: speaking this truth, a painful and banal truth, is a small but significant act of resistance.

In a later verse, SoKo states:

You think that two boys is a sin  
And two girls is somehow sexy  
In the eyes of God, no matter what,  
It's "a disgrace!"  
(That's what they say...)

Here, Soko addresses another common theme and prejudice of queerness: the gender divide of relationships, where relationships with two women are fetishized while with two men, they are “wrong.” This divide also contributes to issues within the queer community: queer men sometimes feel that queer women are more accepted, though in reality fetishization is not the same as acceptance, and creates yet another hurdle for queer women to jump over. While straight couples can exist in public space and not have to defend their existence, queer couples lack that luxury. Be it positive or negative, queer couples get commentary on their relationships by complete strangers. This is another instance of emotional labor sustained by queer people, and there is power in expressing this reality, power in telling the story, power in relating it to other people who have had the same experiences. Resistance, here, comes from sharing the truth, sharing emotion, sharing frustration.

While SoKo and Christine claim their queerness and musicianship into the same space, they do so differently, and with a different tone to each. At the core, however, they want the same thing: acceptance, movement, and hope for queer people, themselves included. Resistance comes from an authentic space of sharing the weirdness, expressing the feelings of being left out and different, a piece of the puzzle that doesn't quite fit where others say it's supposed to. In creating this music, Christine and SoKo both create a place where it is okay not to fit in to the prescribed norms, to be something more, to be something real.

*Identity in Music*

The theory and analysis in this section is informed by the work of Provencher, Chaplin, and LaBruce. Queer space and identity are tied together inexorably; in spaces where identity, space, and expression are so closely linked, a reconciliation of the three must take place. While space has become more internet-based, identity and expression have also become more accessible and open to being heard and expressed by people throughout the world: identity being expressed through music can be heard, understood, and appreciated by people the world over. Barker, Lamla, and Weigart also inform the analysis in this section with an understanding of how authenticity, identity, and mobilization all spur change and movement within music.

A notable point for analysis for both Christine and the Queens and SoKo is that they both perform with names different than their own. They are given freedom by becoming someone other than themselves, transcending the barriers of their upbringing, their school, their family, their religion. Through becoming someone other than themselves, they are able to express themselves, express realities, express resistance, in a more honest way. Within this is something of a crisis of authenticity: these artists can be themselves by creating a new identity, an identity devoted to music, expression, and resistance by sidestepping their realities of smaller things. SoKo performing is different than Stéphanie buying groceries at Monoprix, Christine and the Queens on stage is different than Héloïse in her Paris apartment, petting her cat. Perhaps this diverging of identities is a way to stay sane, projecting the performance aspects of personality into a stage persona, but not having that stage persona control all of one's life.

Navigating identity is an essential part of growing up, and the way Christine and the Queens and SoKo have determined their identity before becoming musicians and living in the

public eye determines much of how their identity as performers is developed. Much of this also comes from queerness; queer people navigate identity with queerness as part of their identity, trying to figure out what it means to be queer and how much of an impact that has on themselves and their life. In this section, I question what real authenticity with identity is for these musicians.

Upon realizing she was queer at the age of seventeen, Christine's reaction was not to fall into the stereotypes SoKo mentions in "Who Wears the Pants??" but rather was an extreme fall to the other side: "I censored myself a lot, trying to match expectations even when I knew that wasn't what I was about. For example, trying to be pretty: I ended up looking like Marie Antoinette, wearing puffy skirts and too much make-up..." (Nicholson). Identity exploration, while being an essential stepping stone into adulthood, can also be a feminist act. In a feminist tradition, learning and understanding one's place in the construction of gender is a way to reconcile identity within it, and either to embrace it or fight against it. Her immediate reaction, upon learning that she is something different, part of a marginalized group, is to overcompensate with hyper-femininity. While Christine clearly did not want to be a caricature of hyper-femininity, over-simplifying identity makes someone easier to understand: here, self-censorship and an ideation of beauty is easier to digest than embracing queerness and the difficulty it is married to. Even if no one explicitly says that beauty and hyper-femininity are the expectations, for women these traits become something of a baseline, an easier identity to latch onto while one's true identity is still in the midst of being developed.

As a recognizable queer figure in Paris, Christine says in an interview with Vice, "I'm loved for something I'm not sure I am [talented, noticeable, someone worth paying attention to],

and when you're already socially anxious, it's worse" (Ewens). Creating this persona of Christine and the Queens is a way to sidestep the limitations of social anxiety, channeling an identity without these limits, but when walking down the streets of Paris, Christine is not quite Christine, and has to negotiate the differences of people expecting her to always be Christine and not simply a person. Social anxiety makes this worse: questioning and worrying about identity, and not quite sure about who she really is.

For SoKo, also a shy and socially anxious person, the consolidation of authentic identity versus the expected identity people want from her. In an interview with Dazed, she says:

I know it's (part of) the job I chose to do, but I need to find a way so that it doesn't hurt my spirit." She adopts a lobotomised valley-girl accent: "Like, talking about me, what I do, what I like, what I wear, who I love, how I love people... What about gender fluidity?" She groans. "Can't we talk about something that means a little more?"

(Erizanu).

One of the difficulties that comes with being a "queer musician" is that audiences, writers, and other people in the industry only see the "queer" aspect of being a musician, missing out on the rest of someone's life. While queerness impacts identity, it is not all of it. SoKo mentioning the gender fluidity aspect, a question that she gets asked a lot, points to the fact that as a queer musician, people will point to her to answer questions and speak to a large, diverse, multifaceted community. Beyond that, most musicians are asked the same collection of vapid questions: clothing, sex, relationships, feuds, not going beyond the shiny veneer of celebrity to understand the complexities of the people making music, which as SoKo says, hurts her spirit.

Because of this method the music industry has of looking for authentic, meaningful music yet not adequately giving the musicians themselves space to express their own authentic identities. Prizing authentic music over the musicians making it creates a type of commodified authenticity: audiences wanting something that sounds like honesty, but not wanting the baggages of negativity that comes with failed relationships, with emotional openness, that comes from these created identities. Also because of this, audiences think they know everything about musicians because they've heard their music.

SoKo's perspective on musical authenticity comes into play during an interview with Antidote: "I was like 'everything I have to say is in the record, just listen to it.' I felt like a fucking whore by going out there and talking about things that I made so clear already in the songs" (Michault). Music is her method of expression, and having to hash and rehash painful emotions or difficult emotions for the benefit of people who only want the vapidness of questions like "what designer are you wearing this fall?" instead of looking at the music, looking into meaning, and the music industry forcing her to be something she isn't. She feels as if she is commodifying and making her own authenticity into something made consumable; like Vannini, Williams, Weigart, and Lindham wrote about authenticity, being authentic involves looking into the voids within ourselves. While very important and intimate art can result from these voids within ourselves, realizing the darkness and complexity of being human can be damaging to have to face again and again, day in and out, while this realization of humanity and this very tender, authentic emotion is laid out and bare on the table, ready to be dissected.



## Conclusion

In a time of changing attitudes toward sexuality and gender, even places that seem at first receptive to gender and sexual minorities still have issues within them to face, especially with a growing right-wing sentiment in France. Resistance to issues such as heteronormativity and oppression of sexualities takes many forms, and art is one of them: sharing music, expressing realities of queer sexuality, and the everyday tribulations and heartbreak, victories and moments, expressed both in music and as musicians are small, but significant, acts of resistance. Within these spaces of resistance, authenticity is paramount; being honest, being real, being upfront about challenges and difficulties, loss and sorrow, and even the small act of a queer love song is an act of resistance.

Music has long been a site of male dominance: men on stage, men given the opportunities to learn instruments, men dominating the means of music production, men at every level of management with a long history of abusing this power to women who want to break into the industry. In 2017, this feels especially pertinent, though this unfortunate truth has prevailed many industries for a very long time. Women are able to circumvent this male-dominated industry by creating independent music as singer-songwriters, producing their own music and diving into the development of music from beginning to end.

Music as a space of resistance also has a long history of being used to create awareness or incite movements. The spaces of resistance in the music analyzed here are less dramatic than the movements associated with the Sex Pistols or Stiff Little Fingers, but even if they are smaller, they are not less significant. Music allows people to tap into the reality of queer women, experience their perspective, share perspective, share frustrations.

Identity constructed within and around music is fraught with its own complications. Even while people rally around authentic music that can become a point of resistance, the musicians themselves are often left out of the equation and feel a type of distance and disillusionment with their art. Their art is what they want to say and express, but the industry tied to music is much more focused on appearance, vapidness, and image -- which the musicians who are focused on reality and meaning, their own authenticity, fall out of love with.

The particular power of independent music as a space of resistance for queer women is that they can create their music and their musical experience from top to bottom. While the experience of creating independent music is much more involved and requires many levels of skill to work effectively, the end product is one more honest, more raw, and more accessible than mainstream music. This is true especially for women seeking to escape the deeply patriarchal institutions of music production, and queer women creating space for themselves.

Appendix A: "iT," Christine and the Queens

With iT  
I become the death Dickinson feared  
With iT  
I'm the red admiral on his ship  
And I raise  
Wet infants for my coronation  
I'll rule over my all my dead impersonations

I've got iT  
I'm a man now  
And I won't let you steal iT  
I bought iT for myself  
I'm a man now

I hit  
The Bird-dogs who are pulling my hair  
Because  
Their teeth should ravage a golden beard  
I've lost  
Some eyeless friends whose blood runs cold  
My new people  
On silent heels pretends to be old

Cause I won  
I'm a man now  
Cause I've got iT  
I'm a man now  
And I won't let you steal iT  
I bought it for myself  
I'm a man now  
Oh lord

She wants to be a man  
But she lies  
She wants to be born again  
But she'll lose  
She draws her own crotch by herself  
But she'll lose because it's a fake  
It's a fake, it's a fake, it's a fake

No ! I've got iT  
I'm a man now  
And there's nothing you can do to make me change my mind

I'm a man now

She's a man now

And there's nothing we can do to make her change her mind

She's a man now

Appendix 1B: Christine and the Queens, "Christine" in French

Je commence les livres par la fin  
Et j'ai le menton haut pour un rien  
Mon œil qui pleur c'est à cause du vent  
Mes absences c'est du sentiment

Je ne tiens pas debout  
Le ciel coule sur mes mains  
Je ne tiens pas debout  
Le ciel coule sur...  
Ca ne tient pas debout  
Le ciel coule sur mes mains  
Ca ne tient pas debout  
Sous mes pieds le ciel revient

Ils sourient rouge et me parlent gris  
Je fais semblant d'avoir tout compris Il y a un type qui pleure dehors  
Sur mon visage de la poudre d'or

Nous et la man on est de sortie  
Piere qu'une simple moitié on compte à demi-demi  
Le bras tendu paraît cassé tout n'est qu'épis et éclis  
Ces enfants bizarres  
Crachés dehors comme par hasard  
Cachant l'effort dans le griffoir  
Et une creepy song et étendard qui fait :  
J'fais tout mon make-up au mercurochrome  
Contre les pop-ups qui m'assurent le trône

Appendix 2B: Christine and the Queens, "Christine," translated into English by Rachael Walker

I start books at the end  
And I lift my chin easily  
When I cry, it's because of the wind  
My absences are from emotion

I can't stand up  
The sky curls under my hands  
I can't stand up  
The sky curls under...  
I can't stand up  
The sky curls under my hands  
I can't stand up  
Under my feet, the sky returns

They smile red and speak grey  
I pretend like I understand, there is a man crying outside  
Powdered gold on my face

The man and I are out on the town  
Worse than a simple half, we are half-half  
Piled on the side of the road like origami  
Open arms break, all pinecones and pine needles  
These weird kids  
Spat out as if by chance  
Hiding their effort in the scratching post  
And a creepy song and banner that goes:  
"I do all my make-up with mercurochrome"  
Against the pop-ups that assure me the throne

Appendix C: Christine and the Queens, "Tilted"

I die way before Methuselah  
So I'll fight sleep with Ammonia  
And every morning with eyes all red  
I'll miss them for the tears they shed

But I'm actually good  
Can't help it if we're tilted  
I am actually good  
Can't help it if we  
I am actually good  
Can't help it if we're tilted  
I am actually good  
Can't help it if we're tilted

I miss prosthesis and mended souls  
Trample over beauty while singing their thoughts  
I match them with my euphoria  
When they said, "Je suis plus folle que toi."<sup>2</sup>

[chorus]

Nous et la man on est de sortie  
Pire qu'une simple moitié on compte à demi-demi  
Pile sur un des bas côtés comme des origamis  
Le bras tendu paraît cassé tout n'est qu'épis et éclis  
Ces enfants bizarres  
Crachés dehors comme par hasard  
Cachant l'effort dans le griffoir  
Et une creepy song en étendard qui fait:<sup>3</sup>

I'm doing my face  
With magic marker  
I'm in my right place  
Don't be a downer  
I'm doing my face  
With magic marker  
I'm in my right place  
Don't be a downer

I am actually good  
Can't help it if we're tilted [rep. X3]

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<sup>2</sup> "I am crazier than you;" "folle" also a term for an effeminate man

<sup>3</sup> Translation here is the same as in the bridge of "Christine."

Appendix D: “Tilted” and “Christine” music video

“Christine,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rs40yxHjTxQ>

“Tilted,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RBzsjga73s>



Appendix E: SoKo, "Who Wears the Pants??"

Have you ever thought of being a man?  
Do you think it would ease your pain?  
Who put this idea in your head  
That you're gonna rot in hell?

Now who wears the pants?  
And who's gonna water the plants?  
Who's the woman?  
Who's the man?  
Well, you just gotta live to tell

You burnt all the bridges in the neon light  
Oh you're lost baby, yeah you're lost  
You burnt all the bridges in the neon light  
And you won't be able to come back

You think that two boys is a sin  
And two girls is somehow sexy  
In the eyes of God, no matter what,  
It's "a disgrace!"  
(That's what they say...)

So now, who wears the pants?  
And how does it all make sense?  
Can it be love and don't you miss another man?  
Well you don't even seem to care!

You burnt all the bridges in the neon light  
And you're lost baby, yeah you're lost  
You burnt all the bridges in the neon light  
And you want me to come back

Christianity, Insanity [x3]  
Insanity, Insanity

Now who wears the pants?  
And who's gonna water the plants?  
Who's the woman?  
Who's the man?  
Well, you just gotta live to tell

You burned all the bridges in the neon light  
And you're lost baby, yeah you're lost

You burned all the bridges in the neon light  
And you want me to come back

You burned all the bridges in the neon light  
And you're lost baby, yeah you're lost  
You burned all the bridges in the neon light  
And you want me to come back

Oh, you don't even need to come back

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