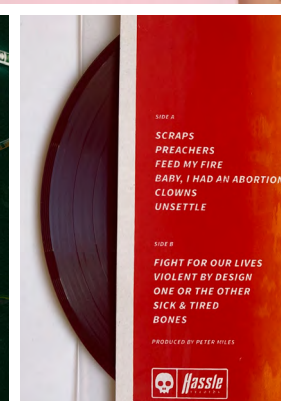
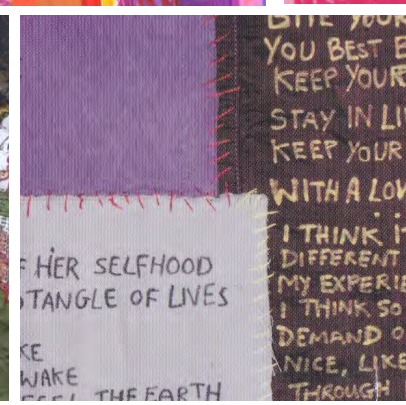
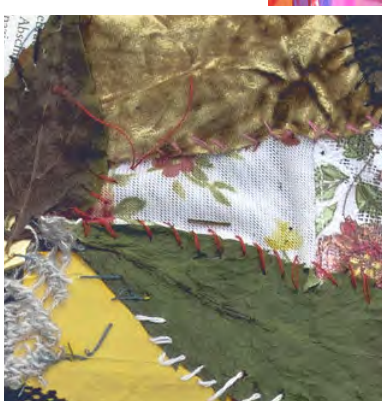


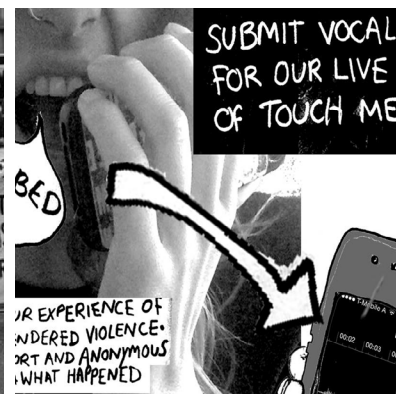
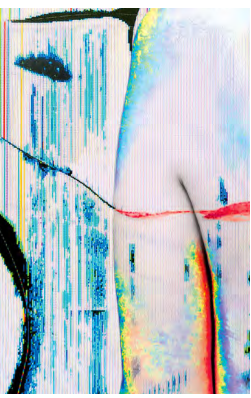
CULTURE
"Abortion ban is an all-out war on women and people with a uterus"



Petrol Girls vocalist Ren Aldridge weighs in



Cut & Stitch collects together the thoughts and afterthoughts of Petro Girls, all under the same name, from the perspective of the lyricist, Ren Aldridge. In a series of mini-episodes, she contextualises the ideas and feelings in and out of them, and makes them her own. Through a series of mini-episodes and stitching as a way of connecting with the community, the environment, the perfectionism, emotional



PRACTICE STATEMENT

Ren Aldridge (2023)

Punk is the way in which I understand the entanglement of my artistic and political practice, and is also a key site or community in which part of my practice takes place. Performing, writing, collaborating, designing and speaking as the vocalist for feminist punk band Petrol Girls has formed the core of my practice for the last ten years, but is now receding, as other aspects of my practice grow. Punk offers a site of convergence for radical politics, art and music, and is highly collaborative, encouraging the active participation of everyone involved through its DIY ethic. It is also through punk that I have come to consider culture as a necessary political battleground, as it is through hegemonic culture that oppressive structures such as the nation state and gender binary are upheld.

Alongside and often intersecting with the band, my practice includes writing (largely creative non-fiction), participatory projects, zine making, textile artworks, public installations and sculpture, print making, facilitating demonstrations, banner painting, public speaking, organising, poster and t-shirt design.

Collaboration

My practice is mostly collaborative. I collaborate with other activists to create demonstrations, campaigns and solidarity efforts. I collaborate with my bandmates to create our records and live shows, and we collaborate with our producer, record label, and booking agents as well as local promoters and sound technicians to make it all happen. I work with videographers, photographers, and graphic designers to create the band's visual output. I often create projects to involve our audience, inviting them to contribute to zines, music videos, and even our live show through voice recordings - an extension of the common punk gesture of passing the mic.

Translation across form

My practice centres on topics or questions which move through different forms or contexts. These are small acts of translation and generative ways of thinking-through. Cutting & stitching for example has been a recurring gesture and concept throughout my practice, beginning with a textile piece stitched from yellow sections of the German flag and evolving into a participatory project, a song lyric, an album concept, a pamphlet, a site specific installation, an essay, a music video, a practice of stitching banners together, a textile poem, another song...

Repetition

Many aspects of my practice are repetitive: print making; touring a live punk show, performing the songs and speaking between them in different locations every night; holding monthly femicide demonstrations and painting the banners. The physical forms of my practice are often multiples: albums, concerts, prints, posters, t-shirts, zines.

Visibility

I am often visible in my practice - as a performer, through writing in first person, as another participant, as a speaker. This is a political practice in making my position clear.

Language

Writing is a huge part of my practice. My essays and articles have been published in books, online and print magazines, an anarchist newspaper, the form of a pamphlet, and are regularly self-published in physical zines and online. I write lyrics, which I then vocalise - screaming, shouting, singing, speaking - on record and at live concerts. At live concerts, my body joins the words in creating language and I speak a lot in between songs. Many participatory parts of my practice are concerned with amplifying and collaborating with other voices. I also use language in other physical forms - a passing comment turned into public sculpture, flags reconstructed to make words float in a border river, lyrics turned into t-shirt designs, and back the other way - a poem made from punk patches, that then became a song.

Talking-with, making-with, chanting-with, singing-with, dancing-with, becoming-with.

TEDx TUWien Lecture (2022)

Written excerpt.

We cannot leave this up to governments. We certainly cannot leave this up to the police. We are also experts. We are experts in our own communities. And it is up to us: to challenge gender roles and inequalities, to challenge aggressive masculinity, to challenge male entitlement.

It is up to us to disconnect our idea of love from ownership and stop romanticising controlling and abusive behaviour. It is up to us to stick our noses in, and make the safety of our friends and neighbours our business. It is up to us to name femicide for what it is, and to demand better, from each other, from the media and the government.

We can't bring back the woman or girl who was likely murdered whilst you listened to me speak today. But we can start to make the kind of changes that I have suggested. And I believe that if we do, there will come a month, then 6 months, then a year, when I don't paint any banners. Where not one single woman, girl, person is murdered because of their gender.

Lets follow the lead of the colossal, radical Ni Una Menos movement fighting femicide in Latin America, the feminist revolution persisting against all odds in Rojava, the huge movement led by women and teenage girls rising up in Iran after the femicide of a Kurdish woman, Jina Mahsa Amini at the hands of the morality police, the women resisting the Taliban in Afghanistan. The feminist revolution is happening right now and it is up to us to bring that revolution into our own communities.

From Iran to Latin America.

From here in Vienna to wherever you are watching this:

JIN JIYAN ADAZI
NEHMT IHR UNS EINE
ANTWORTEN WIR ALLE
VIVAS NOS QUEREMOS
NI UNA MENOS



Photo by Oana Ianovici



Photo by Docuservice Steiermark

Femicide banners and demonstrations (2020 - Present)

Since we began demonstrating against femicide in June 2020, I have painted the majority of the banners marking each femicide, and more recently have begun facilitating group banner painting sessions, which are also useful for integrating new members of the group and improving group relationships.

I argued for us to change our strategy from trying to react directly to each femicide that took place, to holding a regular monthly demonstration. In 2021 I began stitching the banners together and developing an end of demonstration ritual. After marching with the banners for that month, we then lie out all of the banners from the year so far, and hold a minutes silence. We also use this tactic on the 25 November - the International Day against Violence Against Women, and on 8 March - International Women's Day.

The banners are an effective way of taking up public space and making femicide visible, whilst underlining our political demands. I use bedsheets for the banners because of the symbolism of turning something from the private sphere, where the majority of these murders take place, into a political statement, echoing the sentiment that the private is political.

Photos by Dokuservice Steiermark



Fight For Our Lives (2022)

Single from *Baby*, by Petrol Girls

Lyrics & vocals: Ren Aldridge & Janey Starling



Still from Fight For Our Lives music video
Produced/ directed by Ren Aldridge
Shot by Bernhard Wimmer
Edited by Joe York

Listen/ watch online [here.](#)

Excerpt from Fight For Our Lives Press Release

This International Women's Day we are releasing Fight For Our Lives in honour of the global fight back against the systemic murder of women and marginalised genders. This bandcamp-only release features Janey Starling on guest vocals, and is raising funds for Level Up - a feminist campaigning group co-founded by Janey - who are developing a trans-inclusive virtual femicide database.

As Janey has written, International Women's Day gets coopted and watered down but its radical origins are in a garment worker's strike in New York, and in recent years this idea of strike has developed beyond just wage labour, and erupted into the global women's strike movement. 'WE WANT TO LIVE' is this years slogan from Women's Strike UK, echoing the slogan VIVAS NOS QUEREMOS - NI UNA MENOS from Latin America, where the women's strike movement began in order to fight back against relentless femicides and gender based violence, by withdrawing women's labour - unwaged, waged, domestic, care work, ect. - because when we stop, the world stops with us!

The feminist group I'm part of here in Austria is based on this principle, and this song was written because of the regular femicide demos that we've been running here in Graz since June 2020, to make sure not a single femicide in Austria goes unanswered. NEHMT IHR UNS EINE - ANTWORTEN WIR ALLE! The intro lyrics describe these demos. We have painted the deaths of so many women and even young girls onto bed sheets to carry through the streets. This IWD, we will spread out all of the bed-sheet banners that mark each murder since last IWD in the main square, to make visible the scale of this violence. Austria is one of the European countries with the highest rate of femicide for the size of its population. We now hold our demos once a month because we know that unless there is systemic change, there will continue to be femicides every month. Some of our demands are in the lyrics to this track. We need safe housing for all, unconditional universal basic income, more domestic violence shelters and specialist services. We need better sex and relationship education in schools and the same rolled out across every workplace. We need responsible media reporting - and since these demos began we have seen a tangible shift in the way femicide is reported in Austria!

Lyrics

***We're on the streets again
Another bed sheet painted with the blood of a sister
the hands of violent men
the hands of a society that doesn't believe us***

***Power and control
Power and control***

***We will reclaim the night and our minds and
our bodies and our homes
our bodies and our homes***

***We will fight for all of us to have the means to be free
the means to be free***

YOU DON'T OWN US

WE FIGHT FOR OUR LIVES

***Power and control
Power and control***

***We demand that the media stops perpetuating the narratives
that kill us, and robbing dead women of dignity
robbing dead women of dignity***

***We mourn every sibling stolen by male violence
trans, sex workers, undocumented
Our murders are systemic***

YOU DON'T OWN US

WE FIGHT FOR OUR LIVES



Petrol Girls (2013 - present)

Live performance

I formed Petrol Girls in 2013 for an International Women's Day DIY punk gig that I hosted in my kitchen. Over the last ten years we have played countless shows and festivals. These are the key aspects of my live performance that have developed:

- My vocal style and stage presence is very aggressive and I've enjoyed playing with gender stereotypes, movement and clothing in this context.
- I am committed to holding the space at the front of our shows for women and marginalised genders. This practice is constantly developing and site specific to each show. We play heavy music and if I don't hold the space then cis-men take over the front of the show with mosh pits that exclude most others. and replicate the gender norms I'm singing against.
- Speaking between songs on stage has become a large part of live performances. I speak to politically articulate the songs and connect them to current political campaigns and movements.
- Passing the microphone into the crowd is a common gesture in punk performances. I wrote my masters thesis on how to expand this practice and amplify other voices.
- After the show we sell merchandise, which is key to how the band can be sustained financially and gives an opportunity to connect directly with the audience. Because of the issues I address lyrically, I speak with a lot of survivors of gender-based violence, and have learnt how to engage whilst holding strong boundaries.





Baby (2022)

Tracklist:

1. Scraps
2. Preachers
3. Feed My Fire
4. Baby, I Had an Abortion
5. Clowns
6. Unsettle
7. Fight for Our Lives
8. Violent by Design
9. One or the Other
10. Sick & Tired
11. Bones

Written & performed by Petrol Girls
Ren Aldridge, Joe York, Robin Gatt, Manfred Herzog.

Produced, mixed & mastered by Peter Miles
Released 24 June 2022 on Hassle Records

Artwork by Ren Aldridge
Layout by Matt Stevenson

Listen [here.](#)

Baby Special edition vinyl covers (2022)

Designed and silkscreen printed by Ren Aldridge.

Edition of 500



Behind the Scenes at Middle Farm (2022)

Self published zine about the process of recording Baby.

Photos by Martyna Wisniewska

Design, layout and text by Ren Aldridge



THE GANG:
ELIO EVANGELOU
MARTHA NASH
ANGÉLIQUE KERGOSIEN
VICKY BUTTERFIELD
IONA CAIRNS
MARTIN
RACHAEL HIPKIN

REN

Gang vocals are always a highlight of recording for me! Singing, belting, chanting and screaming with other women and non binary babes is the deepest kind of catharsis and so much fun.



CUFFED

My feed is full of it and I can't stop scrolling, skimming, sharing, typing. I'm a broken kettle screaming. I get up I sit down I stomp up the hill, I message, I voice-note, I turn it face down on the table and look at my hands, think about her hands, cuffed.

"So women, first of all, need to be streetwise about when they can be arrested and when they can't be arrested. She should never have been arrested and submitted to that." [1]

Women need to be.
She should never.
Women need to.
She should.

Street wise, walk in the light, don't go out alone at night.
Hold your keys tight in your fist,
go for the eyes, groin, shins, bite, kick, scream,
scream as loud as you can.

It's not even likely to be a stranger. It's nearly always the partner or ex [2], sometimes the son. Where I live, in Austria, the femicide rate for the size of the population is one of the highest [3] in all of Europe. We march through the streets every other week, carrying bed sheets painted with the latest town, date and number, bed sheets painted with the blood of our sisters. One woman every three days [4] in the UK. One every ten minutes [5] globally.

"She should never have been arrested and submitted to that."

Submitted.

I want to call my younger sisters, tell them I'll find a way to pay their fines because they must always resist arrest but then

I think of K, now a philosophy professor, her flaming hair and heart, arrested and strip searched for handing a Know Your Rights card to a fifteen year old being subjected to stop and search. The police never thought she'd challenge it. Took seven years for them to disclose the CCTV footage from inside the station.

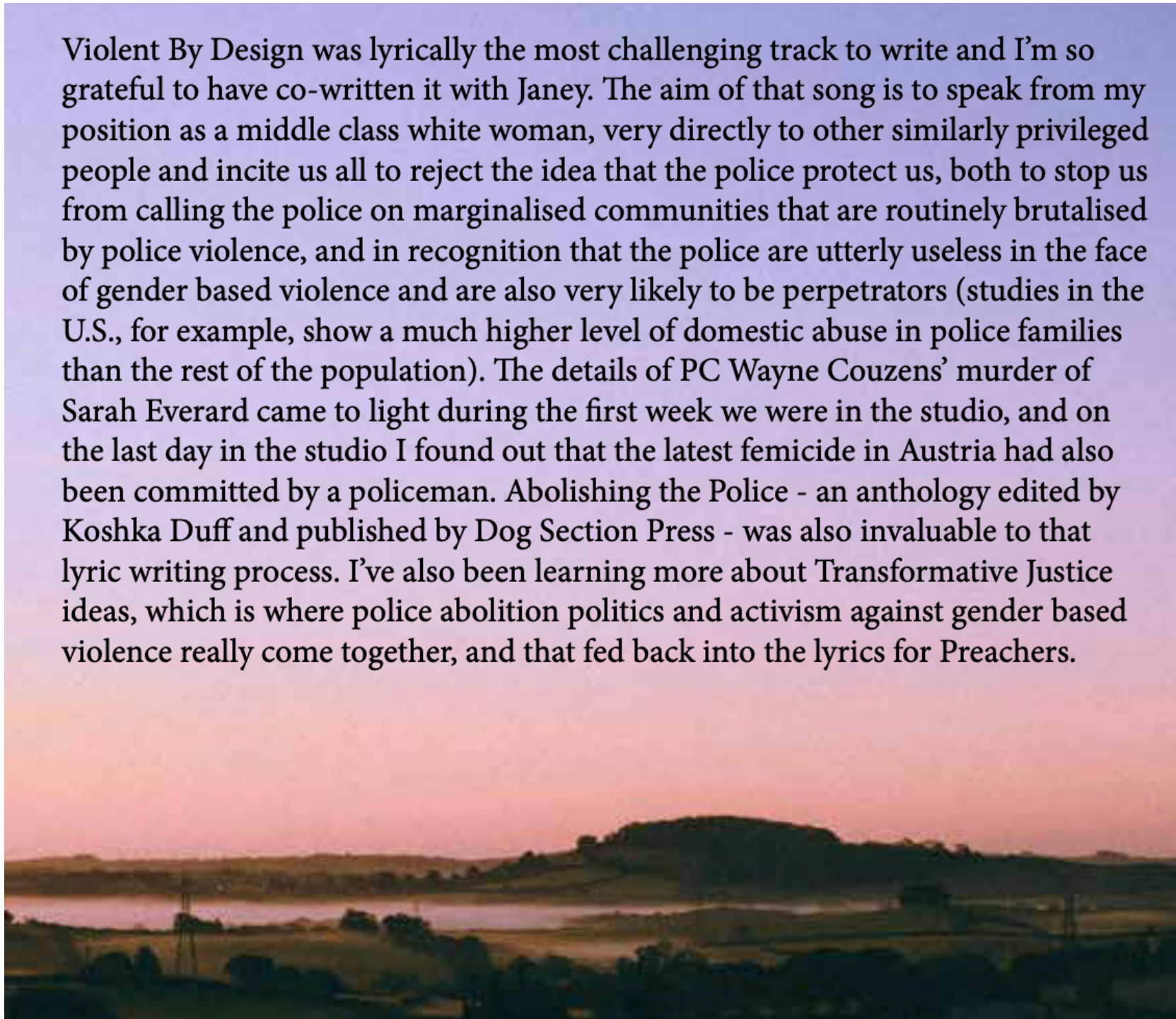
"Bend her arm then...Do I have to come down there and do it? If she's resisting, resistance is futile. By any means necessary, treat her like a terrorist, I don't care..." [6]

They cuffed her hands behind her back, tied her legs together and cut her clothes off with scissors. Touched her stomach, breasts, genitals. Said they did it because of mental health concerns. [7]

She fought them for years, jumped every bureaucratic hoop protecting them from justice but they got away with it. She got PTSD.

I think of Sarah Reed, accused of shop lifting. I re-watch that footage [8] of Officer James Kiddie grabbing her hair, dragging her across the floor, on top of her, punching her and punching her. I watch her mum, Marilyn, recount it all with that same haunted composure we have seen in too many grieving Black families. How the assault compounded Sarah's mental health problems. How afterwards Sarah would sleep in her mums bed. How she was in and out of institutions until they put her in Holloway Prison where she begged for her meds, begged for release, begged for help until she took her own life.

Violent By Design was lyrically the most challenging track to write and I'm so grateful to have co-written it with Janey. The aim of that song is to speak from my position as a middle class white woman, very directly to other similarly privileged people and incite us all to reject the idea that the police protect us, both to stop us from calling the police on marginalised communities that are routinely brutalised by police violence, and in recognition that the police are utterly useless in the face of gender based violence and are also very likely to be perpetrators (studies in the U.S., for example, show a much higher level of domestic abuse in police families than the rest of the population). The details of PC Wayne Couzens' murder of Sarah Everard came to light during the first week we were in the studio, and on the last day in the studio I found out that the latest femicide in Austria had also been committed by a policeman. Abolishing the Police - an anthology edited by Koshka Duff and published by Dog Section Press - was also invaluable to that lyric writing process. I've also been learning more about Transformative Justice ideas, which is where police abolition politics and activism against gender based violence really come together, and that fed back into the lyrics for Preachers.



Violent By Design (2022)

Single from *Baby*, by Petrol Girls

Lyrics by Ren Aldridge & Janey Starling

Listen [here](#).

*You gotta lotta trust in thugs in uniform
So who is it that you think that they protect you from?
Who do you see when you see them?
Model-village citizen.*

*Just a slap on our wrists and we know it
We breathe easy [breathe] sleep easy*

*Our shock shows our distance
Shows we've not been listening*

*There to make us safe
Keep us in our place
Criminals must pay
So do what they say*

*Who's law? who's order?
Who's law? who's order?
Why address need when they can protect greed?
The P.I.C.'s expanding*

*What kind of peace do they keep?
I see no justice*

*You think they make us safe?
Are they a friendly face?
Keep us all in our place
Hey it's a pretty nice place you got there*

*Oh are they the good guys?
Are they the nations pride?
Always on the right side
The thin blue line is violent by design*

*Invented to protect property
Value statues more than our bodies
They humiliate and disbelieve
They protect their own*

*Just a domestic
She had it coming*

*Just a wrong'un in a "just system"
Can't even deliver on its own outcomes
They get access to the vulnerable
There's rapists and killers in uniform*

*But why, didn't she
Call up, the police?*

*You take their advice?
Do you stay home at night
We're more likely to die
In our homes at the hands of a man we know*

*Oh are they the good guys?
Are they the nation's pride?
Always on the right side
The thin blue line is violent by design*

*How many bad apples
Til we look at the tree
Pull at its roots
Confront our history*

*ACAB!
They don't protect me!*

KERRANG!

CULTURE

“Abortion bans are an all-out war on women and anyone with a uterus”

Petrol Girls vocalist Ren Aldridge weighs in on the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision to overturn Roe v. Wade and why the world needs to address its abortion laws.



Article on the overturning of Roe vs Wade for Kerrang! Music magazine (2022)



Baby, I Support Abortion merch designs (2022)
Slogan by Petrol Girls, design by Ren Aldridge

Part 2

Since writing part 1 and that experience of shouting 'I had an abortion and I'm not sorry!' at the pro-lifers in Graz, there have been some developments. Notably, said shouting has evolved into Petrol Girls' pro-abortion party banger, 'Baby, I Had An Abortion' which in turn lead to this zine and other efforts to fund raise for Abortion Without Borders.

I continued to encounter the pro-lifers at local counter demos but once my initial fury subsided, felt frustrated by the seriousness of the encounter. It was as if I was allowing their opinions about mine and others' decisions over our bodies, some sort of legitimacy in reacting with such emotion. It would appear as a clash of equal anger, when actually, I wanted to undermine them and their ridiculous view. I wanted to express more pride and defiance, to say look, in spite of people like you, I did it anyway and I'm not sorry! I bought a slutty devil costume from Claire's Accessories, with a plan to spice up the demos, but the pandemic brought everything to a halt. This idea and intention however, grew into our song Baby, I Had An Abortion - a defiant pro-abortion party banger, attacking the shame and stigma surrounding abortion, and ripping the piss out of the anti-abortion position.

**SHAME! SHAME! SHAME! Point your finger and cry SHAME!
SHAME! SHAME! Oh I feel it deep inside!**

I believe we must fight for abortion on all fronts, and one of those fronts is culture. Culture maintains and (re)produces oppressive structures from the gender binary to the nation state, and I therefore see it as a useful political battleground. If we can infest culture with representations of abortion that are unapologetic and shameless, or even just banal and normal, then we can chip away at the archaic ideas that maintain it in our society as some sort of terrible secret that we should feel guilty about. If the majority of people saw abortion as just perfectly normal, and a very common form of

healthcare, then those in power would have a much harder time changing laws or ignoring access needs.

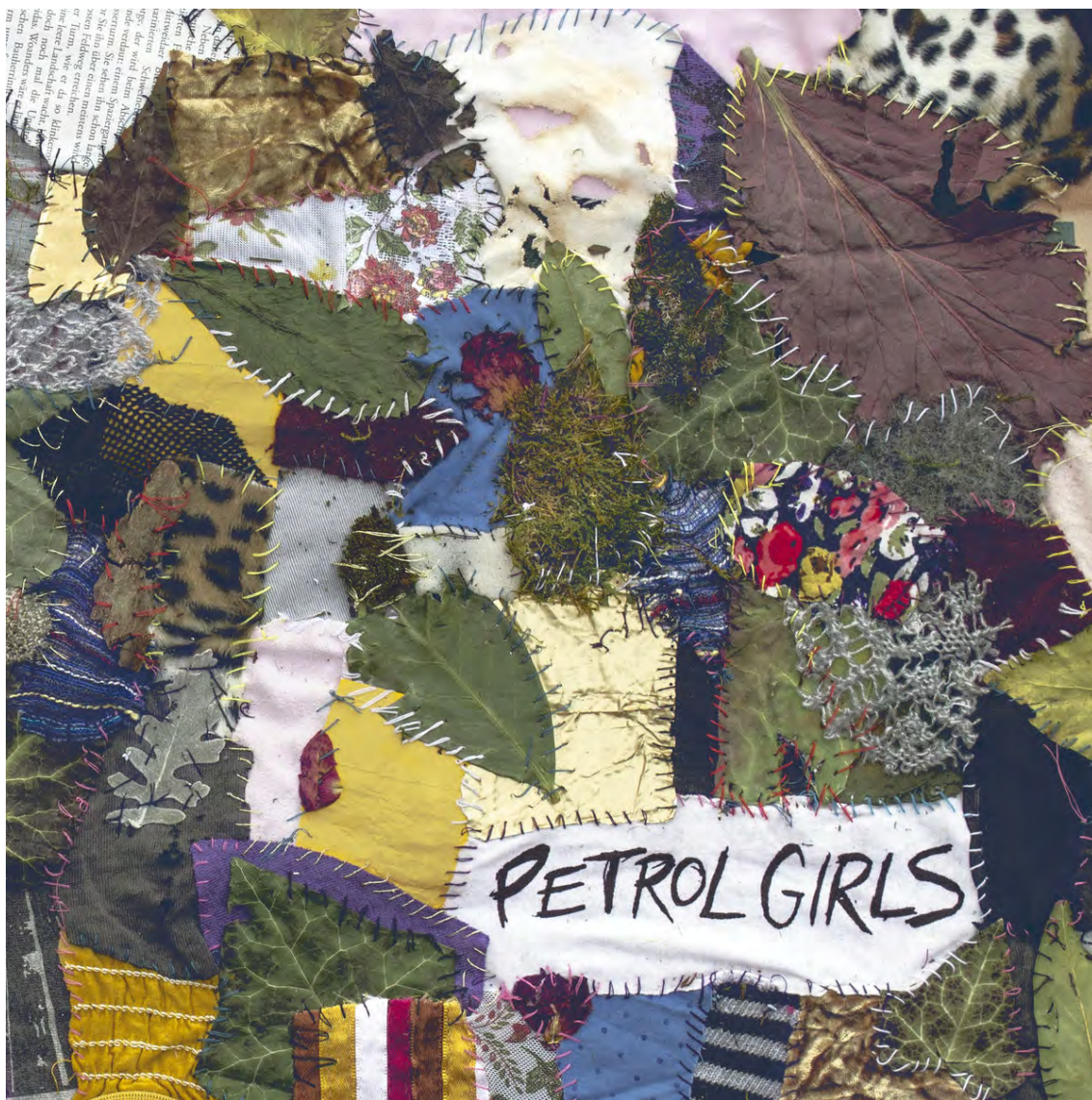
Since writing part one and indeed since having my own abortion, I discovered that abortion is not legal in the UK without the permission of 2 doctors! Had I known, I might have been a bit less blasé about my reasons for wanting one. It also goes some way to explaining the amount of hoops I had to jump through to get it. Various organisations are currently pushing for abortion to be decriminalised in the UK, including Level Up and Abortion Rights UK. We must support these efforts in whatever way that we are able to.

Performing Baby, I Had An Abortion live has brought me so much joy! I have loved bouncing around to that chorus with everyone. It has also lead me to have so many conversations with people close to me, some of whom have even disclosed their own abortions. I hope this song can keep provoking conversations, upsetting anti-abortion activists, and undermining the shame surrounding abortion. I hope we can keep doing projects like this zine to support Abortion Without Borders and similar organisations. And if you ever play it at a pro-abortion demo, please send Petrol Girls a video - I would LOVE to see!

Reproductive Justice (2022)

Collaborative zine.

Editing, design, layout by Ren Aldridge
Writing on this spread by Ren Aldridge



Cut & Stitch (2019)

Tracklist

1. Intro
2. The Sound
3. Tangle of Lives
4. Interlude (Q&A)
5. Big Mouth
6. Interlude (Looming)
7. Monstrous
8. No Love For A Nation
9. Skye
10. Burn
11. Talk In Tongues
12. Interlude (They Say)
13. Rootless
14. Weather Warning
15. Naive

by Petrol Girls:

Ren Aldridge, Liepa Kuraite, Joe York,
Manfred Herzog.

Produced, recorded, mixed and mastered
by Peter Miles at Middle Farm Studios.
Released May 24, 2019 on Hassle Records.

Artwork by Ren Aldridge.
Layout by Liepa Kuraite.

Listen [here.](#)

IS IS THE SOUND
IS IS THE SOUND
IS IS THE SOUND
IS IS THE SOUND

GATHERING
RESONATING
GROWING

HE SOUND DOES NOT ARRIVE
HE SOUND DOES NOT REST
HE SOUND CANNOT BE OWNED
HE SOUND CAN'T BE IMPRISONED
HE SOUND CAN'T BE BURIED
HE SOUND NEVER ENDS

IS IS THE SOUND
AKE IT
AKE YOUR OWN NOISE
SSEMINATE
IS IS THE SOUND
AKE IT
ISE YOUR OWN VOICE
SSEMINATE
SSEMINATE

TRIPPING THE EARTH OF HER SELFHOOD
D TO THE BALANCE AND TANGLE OF LIVES
V FEEL THE EARTH SHAKE
INSIDE OF ME AS I WAKE
I FEEL THE EARTH
ATED SKULLS WITH EMPTY SOCKETS
ACRYLIC TEETH INTO PROJECTED PROFIT
I THINK THEY'RE OWED OUR LABOUR
Y THINK THEY'RE OWED OUR BODIES
EY THINK THEY'RE OWED THE EARTH
EY THINK THEY OWN THE EARTH
AN FEEL THE EARTH IS SHAKING
HE IS GRIEVING
HE IS SEETHING
AN FEEL THE EARTH IS QUAKING
SHE IS GRIEVING
SHE IS SEETHING

TANGLE OF LIVES

VOICES OF THE MARGINALISED
TOLERATED IF WE REMAIN QUIET
BODIES OF THE MARGINALISED
TOLERATED UNDER THEIR CONTROL

BIG MOUTH

I'M RAISING MY VOICE LOUDER
IT CARRIES ME BEYOND THEIR WALLS
OUR SILENCE WILL NOT SAVE US
THEY CAN'T CONTAIN
THEY CAN'T CONTROL

"SOME PEOPLE THINK LITTLE GIRLS
SHOULD BE SEEN AND NOT HEARD
BUT I THINK.. UP YOURS, 1,2,3,4!"

KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN
KNOW YOUR PLACE
BITE YOUR TONGUE
YOU BEST BEHAVE
KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN
STAY IN LINE
KEEP YOUR MOUTH SHUT
WITH A LOVELY SMILE

I THINK IT HAPPENS TO DIFFERENT GROUPS IN
DIFFERENT WAYS, AND I CAN ONLY SPEAK ABOUT
MY EXPERIENCE AS A WOMAN, BUT THE POINT THAT
I THINK SO MANY OF US HAVE IN COMMON IS THIS
DEMAND ON US TO BE QUIET AND POLITE AND
NICE, LIKE YOU'RE MEANT TO JUST SMILE
THROUGH IT AND FUCKING GET ON WITH IT.
LIKE WHEN YOU SAY NO OR FIGHT BACK OR
EVEN JUST DISAGREE, YOU'RE THE ONE
WITH THE FUCKING PROBLEM

I CANNOT REMAIN CRESCENT
A CHEWED FINGERNAIL
SPAT INTO THE DARKNESS
A SLIVER OF LIGHT
IN SOMEONE ELSE'S DEPICTION
OF NIGHT
I AM LOOMING
MONSTROUS

LOOMING

THANKS SO MUCH TO

IM NOT SO TOUGH I'M JUST GOOD AT PRETENDING
AND MOST OF MY WOUNDS ARE INFECTED
AND LEAKING I KNOW THAT I'M LOST
AND MY ENERGYS DRAINING
I THINK I'LL BE DEAD
BEFORE I CAN EXPLAIN IT
I CAN'T GIVE YOU ANYMORE
I CAN'T GIVE YOU WHAT YOU WANT

NOTION OF NATION STARTS TO LEAK
NOTION OF NATION
THE CENTRES WARM
THE EDGES BLEED
NOTION OF NATION

CUT THE SHAPES
OUT OF THE FLAG
SWAP THEM SWITCH THEM
PATCH AND STITCH THEM
HOIST THAT RAG

NO LOVE FOR
A NATION

I CAN'T KEEP UP
I CAN'T GET AWAY
I CAN'T MAKE SENSE
OR LET GO OF IT
I CAN'T REACH THEM
I CAN'T GET AWAY
I CAN'T MAKE SENSE
OR LET GO OF IT

WAKE UP FROM A BEAUTIFUL DREAM
THATS ALL YOU'VE EVER KNOWN
CANT SHAKE AWAY THE FEELING
THAT TELLS YOU SOMETHING'S WRONG

NO NO NOTION OF NATION
NO NO LOVE FOR A NATION

I MISS THE W
I MISS THE W
YOU

HOW CAN YOU M
HOW CAN YOU P
HOW ARE YOU NOT
AT THE DOOR W
WHERE ARE YO
I SMELT YOU IM
YOU WERE WITH
YOU WERE REAL
BUT EVER SINCE
BUILD A PUPPI
YOU WITHOUT YO
YOUR EARNEST E
EXPRESSIVE EA
YOUR NOBLE P
AND THERE ARE
RACING THROUGH
YOU TEARING A
YOU CHARGING
BUT I WISH THAT
WISH I COULD P
PRESS MY NOS
JUST BEHIND Y
OR RUB IT ON

YOU WERE TH
THE ONLY HAL
MY FINGERS L
AS YOU EXHAL
I MISS THE W
I MISS THE W
I
I MISS THE
SKY

Section of the insert for the vinyl version of Cut & Stitch
Lyrics and Artwork by Ren Aldridge
Layout by Liepa Kuraite

Cut & Stitch collects together some of the in-betweens and afterthoughts of Petrol Girls' latest record of the same name, from the perspective of lead vocalist and lyricist, Ren Aldridge. In a similar process to speaking between songs on stage, Aldridge develops and contextualises the ideas and lyrics on the record, writing in and out of them, and making links between them. Through a series of mini-essays, she explores cutting and stitching as a way of thinking about topics such as community, the environment, building solidarity, resisting perfectionism, emotional labour, gender and craft.

Rough Trade Editions is a series of pamphlets bringing together the very highest calibre of artists, writers, poets, musicians, photographers, illustrators and thinkers to tell the stories of why counter-culture matters, has mattered, and will always matter.

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|---------------------------------|
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| 28 | Emma Warren | Steam Down, or How Things Begin |
| 29 | Patrick Jones | My Bright Shadow |
| 30 | Ren Aldridge | Cut & Stitch |



roughtradebooks.com



Reading informs unborn babies.

Cut & Stitch

Ren Aldridge

Rough Trade Editions – No.30

First published in 2019 by Rough Trade Books

ISBN 978-1-912722-33-4

Printed in the UK ©Ren Aldridge 2019

Stitching Our Stories Together: Threads of Solidarity

Returning to the topic of quilts and stories, *The Monument Quilt* (which I came across via War on Women's music video for *Say It*) is an ongoing collection of stories by survivors of sexual and intimate partner violence and our allies, written, painted, and stitched onto red fabric.

Drawing on the communal aspects of quilting—which Guggenheim's Artistic Director, Nancy Spector, defines as 'a traditional American craft associated with women's communal work'—the quilt physically manifests the power of bringing our stories of sexual violence together: 'By stitching our stories together, we are creating and demanding public space to heal.' It's a collaborative work that keeps going—the creative process itself creates change through raising consciousness, and helping survivors to feel less alone.

The Monument Quilt does physically what #MeToo did electronically across the world. Begun by Tarana Burke and catalysed by various celebrities in Autumn 2017 as allegations of Harvey Weinstein's abuse came to light, #MeToo has created a monumental shift in society's understanding, and challenging, of sexual violence across much of the world. It has been liberating and deeply painful all at once. There's a lot to be reflected on in the wake of #MeToo, and Verso's 2018 free Ebook *Where Freedom Starts: Sex Power Violence* #MeToo gives a wide and intersectional critique.

#MeToo stitches lines of solidarity where our differing experiences of sexual violence intersect, without obliterating those differences. When we stitch our stories together, common patterns across those differences are revealed—made visible, tangible: changeable. I think about other projects I've been lucky enough to take part in, that touch on but swell beyond the exhausting topic of sexual violence: 404Ink's award winning anthology *Nasty Women*, Suzy Harrison's incredible documentary, *So Which Band Is Your Boyfriend In?* What

I've loved about being part of each is the sense of mutuality and common ground—that despite our different perspectives and experiences, no, *in celebration* of our different perspectives and experiences, we also share something, and can learn from and support each other. Long live the coven of Nasty Women!

It has already lived for a long time.

Women have always brought our stories together, it is the herstory of feminist consciousness-raising, but it goes back much further, as does the accompanying backlash. In *Witches, Witch-hunting and Women*, for example, Silvia Federici plots the change in the meaning of the word 'gossip' from a term commonly indicating 'a close female friend' to 'one signifying idle, backbiting talk' and attributes this to the destruction of the strong female sociality centred around collective activities in the middle ages—a transformation that 'went hand in hand with the strengthening patriarchal authority in the family.' She describes various punishments for women that were deemed rebellious following this transformation, including the 'gossip bridle'—a sadistic contraption made of metal and leather that would tear the woman's tongue if she attempted to talk. Federici underlines that 'it was also used to control slaves, in Virginia until the eighteenth century.'

VOICES OF THE MARGINALISED
TOLERATED IF WE REMAIN QUIET
BODIES OF THE MARGINALISED
TOLERATED UNDER THEIR CONTROL

During a trip to Berlin, my friend Clémence Roudil (an incredible artist who I've been so lucky to collaborate with) and I took the patchwork yellow flag around the city, to various locations with national significance. We didn't really have a plan—in different places it felt funny, pointless, poignant, inappropriate and wrong. I documented it with photos.

Since those six months in Germany, I started collecting flags from other countries to form patchwork monochromes in other colours. A Union Jack is cut up and a red patchwork stitched, in our music video for *Slug* (2016). We used the idea for a band photoshoot around the same time—it works well for us, as we come from three different countries and have lived in even more.

There are a lot of flags that I personally feel like I can't cut—not as a white British person. There are plenty of flags that I wouldn't even be able to name. It was through thinking about my relationship to different flags that I turned Nation Fucking into a group activity and gave it its current name. Fucking is a versatile word—it implies a passion that can be lust, love, violence and hate—through sex, through bodies. I've nation fucked with a fair few people over the years, and documented the conversations in a few ways. I became less interested in the patchwork monochromes themselves and more interested in the action of cutting and stitching, particularly the way in which it can keep going. I don't mean this just in terms of a patchwork constantly expanding outwards (able to fold and spread out as space allows). I am more interested in the way that stitches are easily undone, with minimal damage to the fabric so that patches may continually be moved.

THE SOUND
DOES NOT ARRIVE

I see the process of cutting and stitching as enabling a temporary or impermanent kind of collage. The term collage itself comes from the French '*coller*'—to glue. I would argue that the intention of gluing is to fix something permanently, whereas stitching holds the potential for the materials being stitched to be unstitched, disconnected and moved, with minimal damage to the fabric itself. Stitches can be undone, everything can be re-arranged.

At this point the patchwork monochromes are more like temporary holding shapes—one place for the scraps of flags to go. The outcomes of Nation Fucking don't have to be monochromes anymore. Banners feel more necessary.



Yellow flag (2014)

Yellow flag, made from yellow sections of the German flag

Photographed in Berlin at various locations including The Holocaust Memorial, The Reichstag and The Berlin Wall.



No Love For A Nation (2019)

Song by Petrol Girls - lyrics and vocals by Ren Aldridge.

Video produced by Ren Aldridge and directed by Martyna Wisniewska.

Listen and watch online [here](#).





CONTAIN / CONTROL (2019)

Made from Austrian and Slovenian flags.

Site specific installation on the River Mur at the point where it forms the border between Austria and Slovenia, for Transborders Festival.

Still from video documentation

Watch online [here](#).



CONTAIN / CONTROL (2019)
Video still

The following slide is an excerpt from an essay
published in Das Magazin Der Sloweninnen
und Slowenen in der Steiermark 2020

CONTAIN/CONTROL so sestavljale avstrijske in slovenske zastave, ki so bile začasno nameščene tako, da so plavale na gladini reke Mure (ali Mur v nemščini), točno na mestu, kjer poteka meja med državama. To intervencijo je naročil festival Transborders, ki je obeležil stoletnico meje med Avstrijo in Slovenijo, in različne načine njenega (i) legalnega prestopanja. **CONTAIN/CONTROL** ima stičišča z mojimi drugimi deli, vključno z aktualnim projektom, osredotočenim na rezanje nacionalnih zastav v ločene barve in njihovo šivanje v nove oblike, kot tudi s skladbo *Big Mouth* (Velika usta), z besedilom v prevodu *ne morejo omejiti, ne morejo nadzirati*, ki je objavljena na zadnjem albumu moje glasbene skupine Petrol Girls, z naslovom *Cut & Stitch*. Album *Cut & Stitch* pa je po drugi strani dobil ime po procesu rezanja in šivanja zastav, opisanem v besedilu druge skladbe na tem albumu, *No Love for a Nation* (Brez ljubezni za narod), ki raziskuje narod kot »abstraktno in zamišljeno kategorijo«: *Cut the shapes, out of the flag, swap them, switch them, patch and stitch them, hoist that rag.* (Izreži oblike, iz zastave, zamenjaj jih, sestavi zaplate in jih sešij, dvigni te cape v zrak.) Kmalu po festivalu Transborders sem so-režirala glasbeni videospot za ta komad, ki temelji na istem procesu rezanja in šivanja zastav. Petrol Girls smo prav tako nastopale na festivalu Transborders, igrale smo tako *Big Mouth* kot tudi *No Love for a Nation*, poleg številnih drugih komadov z albuma *Cut & Stitch*.

Zdaj, šest mesecev po festivalu, nadaljujem premislek o zamisli koncepta **CONTAIN/CONTROL** z razpiranjem in nadaljnjim raziskovanjem vidikov iz treh različnih gledišč. Kot prvo, tema »lebdenja na gladini« me usmeri v nadaljnje opazovanje hitrosti reke, ki je za kratek čas omogočila lebdenje dela na površini, in je obenem tudi simptomatski

CONTAIN / CONTROL, was made from Austrian and Slovenian flags and temporarily installed to float on the surface of the River Mur (or Mura in Slovenian) at a point where it forms the border between the two countries. This intervention was commissioned by Transborders Festival, which marked 100 years of the border being drawn between Austria and Slovenia, and the various ways it has been transgressed. **CONTAIN / CONTROL** intersects with other pieces that I've made, including an ongoing project centred on cutting up national flags into their separate colours and stitching them into new forms, and a song called *Big Mouth*, with the lyrics *they can't contain they can't control*, which appears on my band, Petrol Girls', latest album *Cut & Stitch*. *Cut & Stitch* is, in turn, named after the process of cutting and stitching the flags, which is described in lyrics to another track on the record, *No Love for a Nation*, which explores the nation as "abstract and imagined": *Cut the shapes, out of the flag, swap them, switch them, patch and stitch them, hoist that rag.* I co-directed a music video for this track shortly after Transborders festival, based on this same process of cutting and stitching flags. Petrol Girls also performed at Transborders festival, and included both *Big Mouth* and *No Love for a Nation*, in our set along with numerous other songs from *Cut & Stitch*.

Here, six months on from the festival, I am thinking through the idea of containment and control, by exploring and further researching **CONTAIN / CONTROL** from three angles. Firstly, the theme of 'afloatness' draws me to further investigate the speed of the river, which enabled the piece to float for a short while on its surface,

CONTAIN / CONTROL wurde aus österreichischen und slowenischen Flaggen angefertigt und temporär als schwimmende Installation auf der Mur (*Mura* auf Slowenisch) installiert, wo sie die Grenze zwischen den beiden Ländern markiert. Diese Intervention wurde vom Transborders Festival in Auftrag gegeben, das anlässlich des hundertjährigen Jahrestages der Grenzziehung zwischen Österreich und Slowenien veranstaltet wurde und sich mit den verschiedenen Arten auseinandersetzt, auf welche diese überschritten wurde. **CONTAIN / CONTROL** spielt mit einigen meiner anderen Werke zusammen, wie etwa einem laufenden Projekt, das sich damit befasst, Nationalflaggen in ihre einzelnen Farben zu zerschneiden und sie anschließend in neue Formen zusammenzunähen, und einem Lied namens *Big Mouth*, das die Zeilen *they can't contain they can't control* („sie können nicht eindämmen, sie können nicht kontrollieren“) enthält und auf *Cut & Stitch*, dem neuesten Album meiner Band Petrol Girls zu finden ist. Der Titel *Cut & Stitch* geht wiederum auf den Prozess des Zerschneidens und Zusammennähens der Flaggen zurück, der im Liedtext eines anderen Titels auf dem Album namens *No Love for a Nation* beschrieben wird, in dem die Nation als etwas „Abstraktes und Imaginäres“ behandelt wird: *Cut the shapes, out of the flag, swap them, switch them, patch and stitch them, hoist that rag* („Schneide die Formen, aus der Flagge, tausche sie aus, wechsele sie, flicke sie und nähe sie zusammen, hisse den Fetzen“). Kurz nach dem Transborders Festival war ich Co-Regisseurin eines Musikvideos zu diesem Lied, das auf demselben Prozess des Zerschneidens und Zusammennähens basiert. Petrol Girls traten auch am Transborders Festival auf und wir nahmen dabei gemeinsam mit zahlreichen anderen Liedern aus dem Album *Cut & Stitch* sowohl *Big Mouth* als auch *No Love for a Nation* in unser Set auf.

Sechs Monate nach dem Festival denke ich nun hier über die Idee von Eindämmung und Kontrolle nach, indem ich **CONTAIN / CONTROL** aus drei Blinkwinkeln weiter erkunde und erforsche. Erstens bringt mich das Motiv von *Afloatness* („Über-Wasser-Halten“) dazu, die Geschwindigkeit des Flusses weiter zu untersuchen, die es dem Werk ermöglichte, für eine kurze Zeit auf der Wasseroberfläche zu treiben, und die ein Symptom menschlicher Versuche ist, den Fluss einzudämmen und zu kontrollieren. Zweitens beziehen



Image: Greenbeanz Photography

SPARE GENDER REVOLUTION

Ren Aldridge

This textile poem was then developed into a song in collaboration with producer Peter Miles. Spare Gender Revolution (2016) is currently unreleased.

Listen online [here](#).





Talk Of Violence (2016)

Track list

1. False Peace 2.
2. Clay
3. Fang
4. Treading Water
5. Touch Me Again
6. Harpy
7. Restless
8. Phallogentric
9. Deflate
10. Rewild

by Petrol Girls:

Ren Aldridge, Liepa Kuraite, Joe York,
Manfred Herzog.

Released Nov 18, 2016 on Bomber Records
Artwork by Ren Aldridge & Liepa Kuraite

Listen [here](#).

Touch Me Again (2016)

Single from *Talk of Violence*

This song has transformed into different forms including a t-shirt design and an essay for 404 ink's book *Nasty Women* (2017) pictured on this page, and two participatory projects pictured on the following pages.

This song is our most popular and remains in our live set list. My politics around consent have developed considerably since this song and essay were written, and I try to reflect these changes when I speak on stage before we play the song.



'TOUCH ME AGAIN AND I WILL FUCKING KILL YOU': CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO GENDERED VIOLENCE IN THE PUNK ROCK COMMUNITY

Ren Aldridge

Content note: Some non-descriptive examples of sexual violence.

Every time Petrol Girls play a show I try to use the opportunity of having the mic to speak about consent; about not trying to fuck people when they're sleeping or wasted or frozen up and silent; about asking first, and making sure everyone involved in a sexual activity actually wants to do it. This is basic shit, but the countless conversations I have with women*¹ and other survivors at gigs confirm my feeling that it's something we have to keep talking about.

This essay is not a professional or academic piece of research, but my attempt to weave those conversations together with my own observations, to form my interpretation of how gendered violence operates in the punk community; and how we're fighting back. I will not go into detail or sensationalise those experiences here. Not only do I want to avoid endangering other people who have entrusted me with their stories; but it's also a political decision to move the focus away from us and on to the context that this gendered violence happens in.

I refuse to write inwards, to scrape out my personal experiences for inspection, or entertain the idea that I have to somehow

¹ Where I put a little * next to 'woman', I emphasise that it's an open definition - it's up to you how you relate to that gender category.

Touch Me Again voice samples project (2016-2017)

For this project, I invited our audience to submit voice recordings of their experiences of sexual violence and harassment at specific festivals that we were due to play. I then compiled the submissions into soundscapes for each specific festival, and played them right before we played Touch Me Again live at the festivals.

SUBMIT VOCAL SAMPLES
FOR OUR LIVE VERSION
OF TOUCH ME AGAIN

HE GRABBED
MY...

RECORD YOUR EXPERIENCE OF
SEXUAL/GENDERED VIOLENCE.
KEEP IT SHORT AND ANONYMOUS
SAY WHERE +WHAT HAPPENED

EMAIL IT TO US AT
PETROLGIRLSVIDEO@GMAIL.COM

WE WILL COMPILE A SOUNDSCAPE
OF SUBMISSIONS TO PLAY BEFORE
TOUCH ME AGAIN

We aim to make different soundscapes for each festival we play, made from vocal recordings of people's past experiences of sexual/ gendered violence at that specific festival. Hopefully this could be a powerful way to literally amplify the voices of people who receive this violence, and fight back against the culture of silencing and victim blaming which is still a problem in the music community. So if you have been harassed/ assaulted/ raped/ made to feel uncomfortable at a festival or gig in the past, and you feel this project would be empowering for you, then email us a short vocal recording, describing your experience (around 20 seconds). Email us with any questions!

HE GRABBED MY...

Touch Me Again music video (2017)

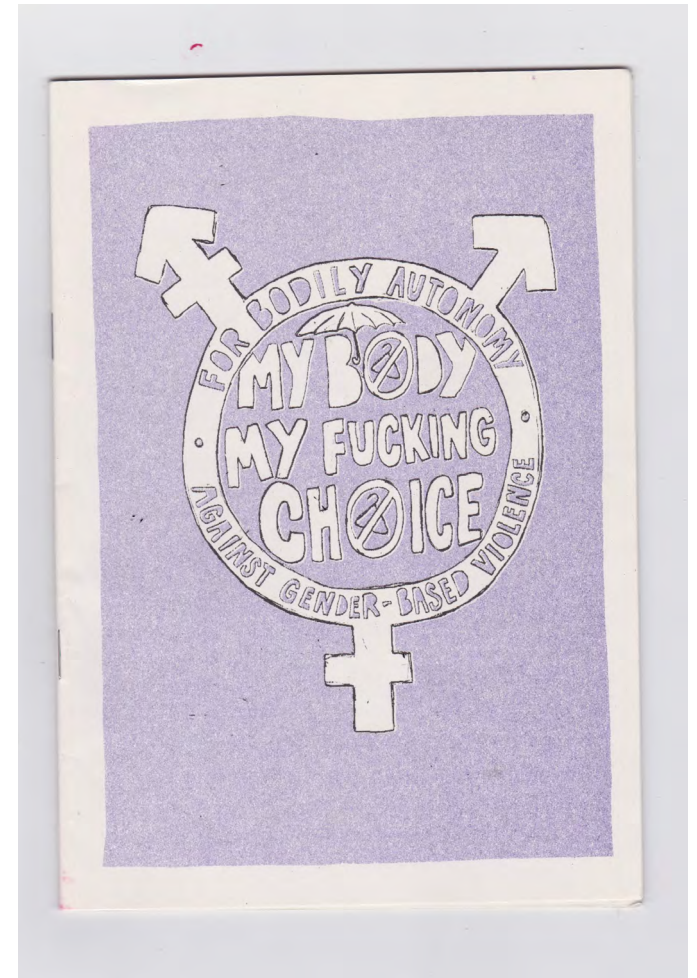
For the music video for Touch Me Again, I invited our audience to contribute video footage responding to the lyrics. I then collaborated with videographer Sammi Whitaker to build the music video from these submissions.

The video is available online [here](#).



My Body My Fucking Choice (2020)

Merchandise Design and Zine



This is a more recent merch design and zine based on another lyric from Touch Me Again: "It's my body, my fucking choice" which echoes the popular demo chant. This merch and zine were created to raise money for the Solidarity Not Silence campaign (the legal defence of myself and two other women).

Exerpts from the zine:

INTRO

This MY BODY MY FUCKING CHOICE merch idea and zine grew out of something I've been saying on stage recently. Before we play Touch Me Again, which uses MY BODY MY FUCKING CHOICE as the chorus lyric, I've been trying to explain how my understanding of this slogan has grown in the years since we wrote the song, through both my own experiences and conversations I've had with others: I now understand it as being about the right to choose how we want to name or change our bodies, including deciding whether or not we get or stay pregnant if that's something our body does, as well as the right to choose who touches our bodies and how and when. The MY BODY MY FUCKING CHOICE merch I've designed combines the symbols for trans rights, abortion rights and sex workers rights with the slogan, and this zine expands on why.

TRANSFORMING THE CONDITIONS IN WHICH
OUR CHOICES ARE MADE MATTERS
INFINITELY MORE THAN BICKERING AND
MORALISING OVER THE INDIVIDUAL CHOICES
THAT EACH OF US MAKE

TRANS
PEOPLE
ARE NOT A
BURDEN OR
A THREAT:
THEIR STRUGGLE
BENEFITS
US ALL.

Give Us A Smile Love (2013)

Wood and metal, installed on scaffolding that was already attached to the building.

This sculpture went on to be exhibited at a number of art fairs in London and an exhibition in Liverpool.

Where possible, it was combined with a street harassment mapping project and feminist meetings.



Give Us A Smile (2016, Unreleased)

Song created in collaboration with Peter Miles through our art punk project, Paste.

This track is a development from the sculpture and surrounding projects. The verses are constructed from crowd-sourced voice recordings of participants recounting their experiences of street harassment.

Listen online [here.](#)