



# Artist Interview Casey Orr's Social Post-Documentary Practice The Power of the Photographic Image to Reconnect

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**Artist Interview**  
**Casey Orr's Social Post-Documentary Practice**  
**The Power of the Photographic Image to Reconnect**

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*"Photography pretends to be uncomplicated, to be simply a tool to document – but a photograph often has more relationship to metaphor, to shape shifting and to poetry than to reality. It is in this world of continually changing layered readings that I find meaning and self definition".*  
<http://www.caseyorr.com/>

Casey Orr is a photographer, researcher and Senior Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University. She is supported by Leeds City Council, Leeds Beckett University and Arts Council England. Her work has been shown in various galleries in the US (Jen Bekman's in New York, the University of the Arts in Philadelphia or San Antonio, Texas), as well as in galleries, museums and festivals in the UK (the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, the walls of the HM Prison Leeds).

Casey Orr's photographs engage with the changing experience of time and space, lines and borders, as her work travels back and forth across the Atlantic. In the 2007 narrative series *By Water*, the artist draws on her autobiographical oceanic experience as she took a cycling trip from her home in Leeds to Liverpool where she boarded a container ship, *The Independent Venture*, heading for Chester, Pennsylvania, her birthplace. Her story includes other people's stories, seascapes and portraiture, building a strong sense of interconnectedness between communities linked by water. Two years later, she chose to keep on exploring the idea that all things are linked in a threefold photographic series, *Comings and Goings*, based on the notion of migration in a northern industrial setting. Her blown up photographs were shown on the fortified walls of Armley jail in Leeds. They represented colourful migratory birds firmly held by gloved or bare human hands, migrants now living in the Armley community, and family portraits of the prison inmates, all strangely connecting in defiance of the prison walls, and bringing together the prison service, inmates, victims and the photographer around a shared artistic project which offered a

new reading of the systems of power in use in the prison. Making people visible is a recurrent concern of Orr's photographic project, as she uses photography to investigate the idea of a lost connection between human beings and their environment, questioning notions of identity and the self. *Saturday Girl* (2014) is a series of portraits of young women with a particular interest for their hairstyles and their cultural meanings in terms of counterculture or undercurrents in culture, creating visual codes and a sense of belonging to a tribe, as well as giving the young women a sense of power in being ostentatiously visible. In *Animality*, her ongoing project, Casey Orr considers the relationship that women have with animals as a way to contradict the alienation of contemporary life from the natural world. She keenly observes the sense of empowerment brought to women by the wearing of exuberant furs. She constantly ponders over her status as a producer of photographs i.e. cultural artifacts which are empowering images in the lives of women, and she seeks to document creative interactions and connections between communities and the world that surrounds them.

**Keywords:** Documentary photography, portraiture, women, community, wildness, animality, autobiography, interconnectedness, narrative.

**You have argued elsewhere that your work can be considered as “social post-documentary” practice in relation to American and British communities. Documentary photography’s status as a medium offering direct understanding of a true-to-life moment documenting the life of a community has been questioned from the start, even more so with the postmodern tendency to dissect the image emptying it of its meaning or creating new meanings (Rosler 2001). Could you expand on the notion that your work is socially or conceptually “post-documentary” and is this documentary dimension essential to create a powerful image?**

I am a documentary photographer. I use the autobiographical in my work. I start with my experience and expand outward. My enquiries started with the *By Water* series, with my desire to take a familiar and historic journey, unbroken by modern transportation. I wanted to understand the distance between my American home and myself and to experience the vastness of the ocean, the earth as an unbounded whole – a connected whole – as against the sectioned, partitioned world we have inherited. I have lived between the United States and the UK for over 20 years. My work partially stems from this – living away from my culture, family and the specific landscapes that feel internal to me. This led me to seek out the connections between myself and everything else, the connections between things, people, ideas and movements. And all the time, when I was seeing these connections, I was also aware that between where I was living, in Leeds, and where I was born, where I was from, there was a vast expanse of water, the Atlantic Ocean. I wondered about this ocean for the first time since I began living on both sides of it and this wondering lead me to seek out ways to connect the two continents, my two homes.



The notion that all things are linked, that everything somehow connects with everything else, and that all of nature, history, human and animal experience is ultimately linked and resonates from the same natural source, is a central concern of my work. Interconnectedness is a worldview that sees oneness in all things. It describes the idea that all things are of a single underlying substance and reality, and that there is no true separation deeper than appearances. We are used to thinking of the world as made up of discrete and separate things, distinct from each other like countries and races of people. This belief in our separateness leads us to think things are static. What I am interested in is the belief in our connectedness and through this an understanding that things change, people change, by our being connected. Politically this idea of change, and documenting change, is very important – boundaries are permeable, the world is changeable, we can act upon it. But first we have to recognise those basic connections between us as people, and between us and our planet, us and our landscape.

*By Water* is an exploration of these things. I did this work when I was living near the Leeds-Liverpool Canal in West Leeds, and subsequently continued to explore the area through conceptual documentary photography. I started to think of the canal as a connection to the world, through the forgotten and invisible histories there. There is a direct link from the beginning of the canal, Armley Mills, to Chester, Pennsylvania, where I was born, from a canal in West Leeds to the port in Liverpool, and by shipping route to Pennsylvania. I rode my bicycle from my home in Leeds, 127 miles along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal where I boarded *The Independent Venture*, a container ship. Ten days and 3500 miles later we docked in Chester, Pennsylvania, my birthplace. The Leeds-Liverpool canal is now used for leisure pursuits, boating and fishing, but along with the slow movement of water there are stories of migration, industry and the movement of people, animals, plants and culture.



The canal brought goods back and forth from Leeds, across the Pennines, through Lancashire and to the rest of the world throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The plantations in the US exported cotton that was brought through Liverpool into the mills of Lancashire and Yorkshire. A view of the town of Burnley in Lancashire used to be full of chimneys. There is one last remaining chimney in the town centre, symbolizing the loss of industry in the once powerful cotton mills of Northern England.



Liverpool was not only a trade centre for cotton, tobacco, and other American goods, but also where the ships used to fight the American Civil War were built and, of course, one of the main ports of the slave trade. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants from all over Europe left for America through Liverpool. Immigrants from Europe docked in Hull and traveled across England to Liverpool. Much of the cargo would have used the canal including the Leeds-Liverpool, Britain's longest canal. Photography, and specifically the *By Water* exhibition, led me into this world of ideas, histories and experiences; my role as an artist was determinedly connected with a role as someone who discovers and documents. This connection has informed, and continues to inform, all my work.

**An underlying theme of your work has to do with the power of technological advances to annihilate space and time, how technology affects our relationship to a fast-changing world and how photography – a product of technology itself – can capture our changing perception of time and the American or British landscape (Jolivet, 2009), reconnecting us to the past and the world around us. How does this coincide with your choice of photography as the most adequate medium to chronicle our changing relationship to space and time?**

For most of us in the West, air travel is now commonplace, and communication has become so sophisticated that real distance takes on a different meaning, so that distance too has become practically invisible. Our reliance on the modern world has changed our relationship to time and distance. “Ye Gods, annihilate both space and time”, first written by the 18<sup>th</sup> century English poet Alexander Pope, became a popular phrase when exploring the repercussions of the technological advances in the 19<sup>th</sup> century – the telegraph, the railways and photography. In terms of the railroad the concept was based on the speed that the new means of transport was able to achieve. The world in effect got smaller. These technologies changed the way people understood the world in the way they affected our experience of place. With the advent of photography happening in tandem with the railways, landscapes became framed through train windows or photographed as opposed to something we were in, the experience of what was around us. I track my feelings of disconnection to this time of shift in our consciousness in *The West*, in America specifically. It is thrilling to think of my medium, photography, as implicit in my shift in consciousness.

Through train travel, pre-industrialised consciousness was dramatically altered through the blurring of the foreground that resulted from the high speeds the trains travelled. Previously, “the foreground enabled the traveller to relate to the landscape through which he was moving. He saw himself as part of the foreground, and that perception joined him to the landscape, included him in it, regardless of all further views that the landscape presented” (Schivelbusch, 1986, 63). As this foreground blurred and separated people further from natural rhythms, space, and time, it also set up a panoramic perception. The traveller saw objects and landscapes through the framed window. The framed train windows mirrored the new landscape photography, the landscape as other, not a part of our experience, but something we are separated from. The idea of fast movement, born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became a fixture in the American myth, one that continues today.

Born into this world of efficiency and standardization, clocks, fast cars and photography, I mistook myself for something other than animal, other than part of nature, a distinct being, away from the flows, processes and cyclical ways of Earth. Through my work I am questioning and exploring this disconnection. Industrialisation, mechanised travel and the technical advances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century seemingly removed people from their connection to the world around them. We could then move so fast that we could “disconnect” from nature.

Technology and our relationship to the natural world are closely linked with photography and



would change with its innovations. From its beginnings as calotypes and wet plate negatives, landscape photography reflected (and still reflects) our changing relationship to nature and our understanding of ourselves in the natural world. In the course of the nineteenth century, time ceased to be a phenomenon that linked humans to the cosmos and became one administered by technicians to link industrial activities to each other” (Solnit, 2004, 61). David Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity* argues that our relationship with time and nature began to change with the orderly conduct of business which “created a new ‘chronological net’ in which daily life was caught” (Harvey, 1990, 229). Our experience with space, according to Harvey, has a similar beginning.

The incentive to create the world market, to reduce spatial barriers, and to annihilate space through time is omnipresent, as is the incentive to rationalise spatial organisation into effective configurations of production (serial organisation of the detail division of labour, and agglomeration in large towns), circulation networks (transport and communication systems), and consumption (household and domestic layout, community organisation, and residential differentiations, collective consumption in cities). Innovations dedicated to the removal of spatial barriers in all of these respects have been of immense significance in the history of capitalism, turning that history into a very geographical affair. (Harvey, 1990, 231)

Photography changed our perception of time and space. It gave access to visual information that, before its invention, was limited to what the eye could see. It also gave us a way to see into the past, something that we take for granted now. It became integral to record keeping and cataloguing, brought places to us instead of us having to travel. It facilitated a change that was happening through the Industrial Revolution, through the mechanisation of processes, through a new ease of travel and standardisation of the measurement of time. As a reaction to technological life, I have explored and questioned this through one of the original tools of the space-time shift, photography. I am both witness and accomplice to the continuing annihilation of time and space. That’s why, when making *By Water*, I chose to travel by sea – the oceans, which have always kept nature’s time with its ebbs and flows, were also the first space to require exact clock time – so that Britain could gain control of the sea channels. The sea is a contradiction that can seemingly straddle the “natural” old and the controlled new, and I wanted to experience this.

**In the summer of 2006, you sailed for ten days on board *The Independent Venture*, a container ship headed to America. This trip is pictured in the *By Water* series, which seems to have several possible layers of readings – an inner voyage back to your birth country, a reflection on how the ocean inspired your creative spurs to explore the modern perception of time and space, a questioning of the globalized trajectories of economic goods and a hidden labour force. How do you achieve such a coherent and powerful whole in the series?**

The sea is often experienced as if it has escaped the repositioning of time and space that technology brought to the world. The sea is a contradiction – a space underpinned by the power relations inherent in the ownership of the ocean vessels of globalisation and its invisible labour

force and at the same time wild and unpredictable, a place of depth, “simultaneously in time, beyond time and in its own time” (Steinberg, 2015, 79-92). The *Independent Venture* is part of a fleet of ships that sail weekly. Container ships transport 90% of the world’s non-bulk cargo and some 18 million containers make over 200 million trips every year, yet ocean journeys are a thing of the past for most people. Typically of Western, modern culture, we are generally unaware of how goods are moved around the world. The invisibility of long distances is apparent in the impersonal nature of the containers – even the crew on board these freighters, the sailors explained to me, have little idea what is inside them. The invisibility is also structural: containerisation changed the culture of port cities. Waterfront workers and their communities were replaced by high-speed cranes as containers revolutionised the way cargo was shipped, as goods and labour became anonymous and impersonal.



The American photographer, writer and critic Allan Sekula who made numerous films and photo series about the abstract processes of global capitalism argued in his book *Fish Story* for a sea full of contradictions in terms of modern political thought. The sea is all about slow time – things move slowly, there is a lot of waiting – and as such it contradicts all the mythologies of the instantaneous, perpetuated by technology. *By Water* made me feel connected to my American home through the flows of the canal and the sea, and paradoxically renewed my interest in the industrial area of Leeds that was my home. I felt the presence of the local mill, heard the hum of plants and animals as once grand parks became overgrown urban wildness, saw the movement of people on trains, waterways and buses, marked the influx of people settling in the area from Eastern Europe and watched history being reinvented as its buildings were transformed from their original purpose into carpet shops, cafes and charity shops – the constant movements of culture transforming everything left standing. This was happening all around me, where I lived.



**After the open space of the ocean you chose the enclosed space of Armley jail to question forms of power inherited from the Victorian era and how the jail was connected to the outside world. You tried to represent the invisibility of power with the idea of the panopticon in mind. How does the fact that the prisoners could not see the pictures on these walls – even though they had smaller scale reproductions of them in the visiting room – affect the whole project?**

My explorations in my neighbourhood, watching the flows, seeking out the way everything linked together, seemed to abruptly stop at the Victorian, stone walls around the huge and notorious Armley Prison close to my house. I wondered where the flow was here, how it got through the walls, how this place could be connected to everything, to the world and to the community outside.



My work in Armley Jail again looks at invisibility and references the forms of power explored by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. The geometric design of the prison – the buildings in a “ring” shape surrounding an open space dominated by a watchtower – is known as a panopticon. The panopticon is a type of prison building designed by English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in 1785. The concept of the design is to allow an observer to observe (opticon) all (pan) prisoners without the prisoners being able to tell whether they are being watched.

The form of power known as discipline is linked to the development of military training, the development of prisons as reforming institutions and the development of the factory. All the different buildings resemble each other in form. That form to which they all conform, the sort of master diagram that the operation of barracks, prisons, and factories conform to is the panopticon. The prisoner internalises the power. He can never know when he is being watched. This form of power becomes invisible. The systems of power associated with the panopticon are still firmly in use in the prison. This is a building specially built so that prisoners could be observed at all times, whilst being invisible to the densely-packed housing and community beyond the walls. Those walls, inside my community, seemed to be impenetrable, and enclosed a community of thousands of prisoners and workers. My interest was in the walls and how to find the connection into the prison, how to link the people inside with all of the flows of life going on outside.

I found that connection through families, through children. Hundreds of families visit their fathers, sons and brothers every week. The families and loved ones are a direct link with the communities outside. I wanted to exhibit the family portraits on the outside walls of the prison because the prison walls are such an architectural staple of this community they can become invisible, people can forget about them and the people behind them. The exhibition was also, importantly, shown on the interior walls as well, in the visiting room – so that the prisoners inside were seeing the same thing, the same ideas were being shared, walls penetrated by ideas and by art. This became part of *Comings & Goings*, a photographic series in three parts.

**Could you explain how all stories are linked in this threefold photographic series and how they offer various representations of power related to the notions of migration, the natural world and social relationships?**

My series *Migrant Women in Comings & Goings* mixes text with environmental portraiture of women who have settled in West Leeds from other countries. These women, not atypically, move, put down roots, and, like plants and animals, evolve and acclimatize. Their culture, customs and faiths become hybrids.



In these portraits, eight women who have migrated from other countries (Madagascar, Finland, Canada, Lithuania, Belarus, Iraq, China and Ireland) were photographed with plants and animals that, like them, are not indigenous, but tell stories of migration – through our history and ever-expanding global world. This series has text that tells the women's story along with the stories of animal and plant migration. The portrait subjects are women because I am interested in the experiences of women and specifically, that of the migrant and the way in which they echo my own movements. Women leave their mothers, their motherland and their mother tongue, and have their children away from what was home. Like birds, they nest in foreign lands. Their children in turn grow up in what may always seem a partly alien place, and they effectively become multicultural (often multilingual) hybrids, belonging to more than one culture. Some of the subjects are themselves children, daughters of immigrants, finding their own place in the community. They are both party to and part of how communities change.

In my series *Birds*, I photographed birds in Armley. Most of them had been purposely imported, unable to migrate naturally or to fly freely. They were all photographed being held to reinforce their unnatural state of being – caged, cooped, clipped, ultimately captive and forcibly domesticated.



And as birds are ultimately symbols of freedom, they are all the more caged because of it. A caged bird is a true captive, especially so since free birds fly above the walls and boundaries that land-bound creatures are forced to acknowledge. The *Birds* photographs are linked semantically and conceptually to the other series in *Comings & Goings* – the women are “birds”, prisoners are known as “jail birds”, and people – like birds – migrate and nest.

The third section was about portraits of prisoners with their families. The walls here are both a physical and a social/cultural border or barrier, one which the prisoners somehow breach with each family visiting time. My *Prison Families* series looked at that connection – through the walls, connecting with partners, parents and children.



The family portraits, taken in Leeds Prison during the prisoners' visiting time, showed that although there are very real walls, bars and locked doors, there was still that real connection to the outside, to the family, to the world outside the walls.

The three parts of the work are trying to show the shared purpose of living things; our desire to be wild, to be free, our instinct to nest, to seed, to move and be alive. And from the standpoint of the

northern industrial community where the photographs were taken, *Comings & Goings* also tells the story of our constantly moving and changing world. Along with research, writing and my photographic processes, my most important methodology is in making space in my life to be aware enough to notice signs and follow my intuition into whatever project I am led to next. I feel this bodily, through curiosity, to follow the right thread of enquiry.

The next “thread” you chose to follow has to do with hair and the way it participates in the construction of young women’s identities and a sense of identification to a community or subculture, “the challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent [not being] issued directly by them [but being] expressed obliquely, in style” (Hebdige, 1979, 2) – style which can also be appropriated by commercial culture, a reassessment made by Hebdige a few years later. It is also a reflection on the “emergence of an aesthetic of subjectivity”, the selfie being often presented as subculture “a photographic practice most representative of contemporary visual expression” in its relation between “autonomy of shooting and participation in the action” (Gunther, 2015). How does *Saturday Girl* question the photographic language you are using to tackle notions of power and women?

In 2014 I started *Saturday Girl*, a series of portraits of young women; specifically as seen through their hairstyles. The book and exhibition is an exploration of hair and its cultural meaning for young women. It is a playful celebration of young women and an exploration of how we experience and use the power inherent in becoming visible as women.



*Saturday Girl* was conceived after seeing so many young women in Leeds with “big hair”; teased and back-combed, resolute rat’s nests, extensions, hairpieces and wigs. I wondered what it meant, what it said about the undercurrents in culture, the unspoken signs that tell of our values and tribe identities and how these things burst forth (whether we intend them to or not) in self-expression.

Along with *By Water* and *Comings & Goings*, *Saturday Girl* is about interconnectedness (through shared forms of self expression), visibility (and its relationship to the coming of age rituals of bodily self expression) and the constant ebb and flow of non-verbal language and the passing down of cultural ideology through generations. Here it refers to women and hair and the way



hairstyles are reinterpreted and react to the generations before. It is also again about autobiography. My daughter, now 12, was growing up, leaving childhood and changing into an adolescent. These years usher in an awareness of the way in which she is seen and is a time of rapid growth and self-discovery. This phase is punctuated with a new visibility. I watch us both change and move through our lives and this leads me to watch other women and girls negotiate similar changes. This is *Saturday Girl*.



Hair, this human string, is available for us to sculpt and shape, the perfect medium, ever-changing and moving with growth. My intention with *Saturday Girl* is to show these experimentations as signs of pure human vitality and playful expressions of self.

Throughout human history, the presentation and manipulation of human hair, wherever it grows, has functioned as a visible definition of what it is to be human. [...] It is a language of the self and is loaded with cultural meaning because it signifies a very human capacity for self-conscious manipulation, management and display. (Biddle-Perry & Cheang, 2008, 5, 10)

The women photographed were using hair to enhance their visibility, playing with the hyper-visibility inherent in being a young woman. We have always dyed and cut, woven and braided, sprayed and shaved, as a way of both stating our individuality and belonging to a tribe.

Hair is a performance, one that happens at the boundaries of self-expression and social identity, of creativity and conformity, of production and consumption. Hair lends itself particularly well to self-fashioning performance because, it is liminal, on the threshold, 'betwixt and between', not only of nature and culture, but also of life and death. (Powell and Roach, 2004, 77)

*Saturday Girl* is about young women but also about photography itself. The portraits join the debates surrounding images of young women and the ubiquitous selfie culture. The sophisticated continual editing of self that is played out in social media. My hope for the *Saturday Girl* portraits is that they offer a different perspective from much of the aesthetic and habit that we have inherited. So, I am consciously trying to use photography in ways that break from my heritage as a surveyed female, someone who watches myself being watched, and trying to bring something celebratory to the digitized abundance of imagery of women.

I am always surprised and exhilarated by the continual unearthing of photography as not just my medium but also my subject. I see photography as a powerful shape-shifter. A photograph has the ability to continually change meaning, to move from one function to another as it speaks and resonates with whatever it is contextualized with. Its power is in its ubiquitous nature. Through a constant companionship with photography we construct who we are, our presentation and our image. That powerful relationship between photography and self is always present. Through selfies and so many images of ourselves on social media along with a bombardment of altered, edited, photoshopped idealized images of women we define ourselves, watch ourselves being watched and self-objectified.

What are we doing when we have our picture taken? Our collective camera-face preens and poses, mirroring a version of us that photography itself has created. And yet whatever we try to conceal, to invent for the camera, a photograph holds more information than the subject intends, coded, and revealing of other truths; other clues to self. Photographs expose other stuff. With *Saturday Girl* I am using the language of photography to question the language of photography. And the *Saturday Girl* portraits are trying to do this, to show an alternative version of what it is to be female. I think the portraits capture young women being powerful and playful in their public faces, creative and transformative in the world, but also vulnerable, funny and youthful. And hopefully these photographs, unlike so many images we see of young women, refuse to become the clichéd portraits of advertising, the self-surveyor and editor, the porn-mimicking aesthetic we have been handed, endlessly on offer, too often used to sell stuff.

Your work in progress, *Animality*, explores the ways in which many women share an instinctive connection to animals – through their pets, their work in farming or by wearing animal prints or furs – that communicates something of what and who they are. Some use clothes and the tactility of fur and feathers as “performance”. They build their personality as cultural beings who sometimes dare to go back to their animal selves, questioning the idea of beauty. How does photography give voice to the women that you shot and to yourself as a woman photographer?

Shortly after taking my last Leeds *Saturday Girl* portrait I began thinking about the other ways in which women communicate. The thick abundance of hair I explored in *Saturday Girl* led me into an exploration of our relationship to animals and the ways this is lived and expressed. Hair and fur are signs of a sexual potency and a powerful allure, a visibility that can be borrowed by wearing animal prints and fur or by a glossy mane of hair (grown or bought by the wearer). Hair also symbolizes our wildness. When grown natural and wild on the body it has become a cultural taboo. So we are buying it, gluing it to our scalps, weaving it into our own hair, wrapping ourselves in it but also having it removed as pubic and body hair, the untamed becoming the unwanted.





I am interested in exploring the way that women communicate. Our non-human communications might be consciously forgotten, but still powerfully present and visible. There is a language beyond words that we are still using and I am trying to photograph this language. Often we are communicating in response to our visibility or a lack thereof. The written word, gracefully carrying our stories and myths, shopping lists and junk mail, is full of coded symbols which stand in front of bodily, animal communication. Words have come to represent all communication, clouding out anything that isn't written word expression. We might not be conscious of what we are saying non-verbally, but our body language still communicates our powers; playfully, evocatively, creatively.

*Animality*, my new series, is an exploration of the different relationships women have with animals. These range from women who align themselves with animals and their inherent powers through the wearing of fur, animal print and leather to women who, through animal husbandry and farm work, have a daily commitment to animals. These women live and work with animals, know the rhythms inherent in farm life and perhaps have a more visceral understanding of non-human nature than someone like myself who works with ideas and technology under city lights. It is this visceral, unspoken understanding I am interested in.



For other women, they simply share their life's rhythms with animals. The species/gender boundary dissolves and pets become companion, family. The women and animal lives intertwine in traditionally domestic settings. My interest is in showing many different expressions of animality, and in that, to see our relationship to non-human nature. *Saturday Girl* was about this

too, a passing down of cultural constructs through generations of women playing with different versions of becoming visible and expressions of self because the Saturday Girls aren't doing something new but recontextualising forms they inherited from their mothers, grandmothers and back into our shared past. This is an example of how we use non-verbal communication and respond to history of women and self-expression, nature and culture coming together perfectly. Our artistic outputs are seen as a way of elevating us into a cultural sphere, away from nature and the environment and they become another barrier between us and our animal selves. In the culture I was brought up in, Western society, nature and culture are conceptualized as distinctly separate. Not all cultures make this distinction between nature and culture. For some being natural can mean something more than not cultural. This is something I am exploring in my work.

This idea references feminist anthropological thought that emerged in the early 1970s, specifically Sherry Ortner's paper *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* (1974). The paper is concerned with the devaluation of women, that women are universally seen as inferior to men and are aligned with nature and natural processes while men are perceived and perceive themselves as aligned to culture. With *Animality* I am consciously aligning woman to nature, and saying, yes, perhaps through menstruation and childbirth, hormones and cycles, women, untamable, wild, are aligned more to their bodies, to nature. And it is not to say men aren't organic beings as well but maybe it is harder for us as women to forget our innate wildness because our bodies are always acting in untamed ways.

I am a woman engaged in these cycles and also engaged in culture, the making of cultural artifacts and in the discourses of cultural meanings. I make photographic series and use metaphor and the relationship between images to try and articulate and form my own questions about the meaning of life and the wonder of being. These cultural activities are seen as going beyond engagement with the limitations of lifespan and the functions of the physical body – making stuff that continues to be a part of the ongoing swirl of culture. But surely our constructions are temporary in relation to the lifespan of the earth and the processes of nature.

So, again, my subject is intertwined with my medium. My understanding of myself as a human being evolves through my explorations with the language of photography, pictures and metaphor, which question and explore the powerful role technology and specifically photography plays in the most basic understanding I have of my life on this earth. This is what I am exploring as an artist, my own relationship to culture and nature which I am told is a dichotomy but doesn't feel that way – and my own interconnectedness with the animate world and the ways we all communicate and live our forgotten selves.

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