

Assignment 4; Critical Review, Landscape

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Raymond Moore

Introduction

Raymond Moore's late photographs have an ambiguous quality that have always intrigued me. Although I know that different people will always have different ways of seeing photographic work, Moore's work does seem peculiarly open to this. In this critical review I will examine some varying perspectives on Moore's work and try to reconcile apparently contradictory viewpoints.

Literature review

(Dumfriesshire 1985 (Moore, 1985) A copy of this photograph can be found at - http://3.bp.blogspot.com/_QTolmJZ1PM/SziTejmiYul/AAAAAAAAAIQ/1LlxHVRAPtg/s1600-h/Galloway.jpg)

Many writers place Moore's work firmly in the context of British landscape photographic history. Seen as part of a move, which began in the 1970s, and which questioned romantic ideas about the landscape. Clarke regards Moore as a central figure in landscape photography at this time, he praises Moore's landscapes for their subtlety and open meanings. He remarks on the way that his work moves between the sublime and the banal, making the commonplace both recognised and mysterious (Clarke, 1997)

Wells sees Moore's work as a move away from modernism and towards 'more recent critical engagement with land seated in particular cultural histories'. Wells remarks that Moore's work is not journalistic; but offers a unique documentary record. She remarks on Moore's interest in geometry and space, using them to flatten or expand the relations between objects (Wells, 2011)

Moore's work was recently included in a display on Romanticism at Tate Britain. An article about the exhibition spoke of him looking for sculptural objects in bleak places, using banal

subject matter and playing down the picturesque. ' instead of atmosphere, spirit of place, heightened moments of awareness and reflections on antiquity and ruin, we get an emphasis on the mundane, the overlooked, the nondescript...' (Alfrey, 2011, p. 2)

Moore remarks on his move away from photographing conventionally beautiful landscapes, it was motivated by a personal response which affected what he felt drawn to photograph:

....I soon exhausted myself. The places didn't seem to ring true to my complete self. I moved from the coastline to Milford Haven where there were more traces of man, and sometimes took pictures in the more run-down coastal area. I was drawn to the edge of civilization. (Moore 1981a)

Yet Moore isn't interested in the banal or nondescript for itself but in the mystery residing in it: 'For me, the no-man's land between the real and the fantasy – the mystery in the commonplace' (Moore, 1981b, p. 12)

Roberts analyses landscape photography in the light of Lefebvre's theories of the production of space. (Roberts, 2010) He draws a critical thread running from Ansel Adams to Gursky, Casebere and Demand. Along with the New Topographics, and Ed Ruscha, he sees Moore's work at a pivotal point between these poles. Moore's concern with human traces and peripheral places is said to exemplify one approach in the move away from romanticising tendency of landscape photography; 'the rural landscape becomes a trace or memorial element – that which had been left behind by the encroachments of the urban' (Roberts, 2010, p. 145).

(Allonby 1981 (Moore, 1981c) A copy of this photograph can be found at

<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-1w3Zlpn0Uec/TZelGSxW->

<9I/AAAAAAAAALF8/6AEs6OBW3qg/s1600/e019-allonby1981.jpg>)

Roberts finds Moore's late photographs invoke a desire to escape from 'the (Thatcherite) derelections (sic) of politics and the environment' (Roberts, 2010, p. 149)' along with a sense of anger at those forces and an acknowledgement of that damage . Spatial abstraction¹ accompanies Moore as part of photography's 'assimilation and adaptation' of abstract space. (Roberts, 2010, p. 145)

So Roberts draws together Moore's subject matter and his use of space and geometry and places it in a narrative that is part of a critique of power through his appropriation of spatial abstraction and move away from romanticism. This contextualises Moore's reasons for his interest in space and geometry and links those aesthetic choices with a form of critique² Yet its unclear whether this was Moore's intention and Roberts acknowledges that Moore was not known as a critical photographer (Roberts, 2010, p. 149) .³

Moore didn't see himself as a documentary photographer. He refers to criticism of his work for its lack of photojournalistic qualities and mentions documentary photographers' violent criticism towards people such as himself. (Moore, 1984). He says that the work he is making is

¹ There isn't room to discuss Lefebvre's theories of space here, but in brief (as I understand it) spatial abstraction refers to the production of space by a discourse of Power, it is geometrically represented and relates to abstract thought, it doesn't relate to lived space, memories, or embodied, concrete experience.

² There are also ideas of a similar nature regarding art photography in "Unmapping the City, Perspectives of Flatness", ed Alfredo Cramerotti (Cramerotti, 2010)

³ Abigail Solomon Godeau also sheds some light on this matter in an essay on Harry Callahan's Street photography (Solomon-Godeau, 2007) In this she considers photography as social practise, she is interested in 'how such photography might be read in terms that exceed the individual intentions or subjectivity of the photographer' (Solomon-Godeau, 2007)

more personal, that the areas he photographs spark a recognition in him, and that importantly he is not looking for a social point.

Moore, (1981a):

In recent photographs I have been making some kind of a return to Wallasey ... where I grew up in the 1930s. Whole tracts of the Cumbrian coast where I work nowadays remind me of those childhood areas. They also provide me with structures and images which allow me to comment on life in general. But really I'm a loner, a reflective pessimist, and I look for signs of finality and the end of time, impending departure and desperation ... But I'm not looking for a social point, even though I'm drawn to these often melancholic areas

His approach is to be receptive, 'I'm violently against self-expressionI'm just a go-between, things discover me, I don't discover them. But in them I can find myself and grow....its a kind of recognition.' (Moore, 1977a)

(Maryport 1977 (Moore, 1977c); There is a copy of this photograph here...it's the one with the graffiti 'Billy'

<http://www.fine-photographs.co.uk/index.php/display-as-list/53-moore-published-photographs?showall=&start=3>)

Ideas about photography change over time; writing in 1985, Haworth-Booth stresses the subjectivity of Moore's work although he again talks of it as belonging to 'the phase of 'aftermath; ideas of loss, poetic reconstruction....' (Haworth-Booth, 1985, p. 115)

In 1979 Moore's work was included in an exhibition at the Hayward, Hill, writing in the accompanying catalogue, believes the most important properties of a photograph are its ambiguity and the surreal aspects of the process, (Hill, 1979, p. 10). His interest is in the use of photography as personal expression and as a means of discovery, an also accepts that we are all conditioned by social, economic and cultural factors. But he is not interested in

'socially concerned' photography, rather in a more introspective approach that is concerned with the human condition, seeking to understand rather than judge (Hill, 1979, p. 14).

The ideas of Haworth-Booth and Hill from around the time that Moore was working seem most in line with Moore's own.

These differing points of view may seem contradictory; but we are all part of the world and this must effect us. In many ways the internal and external factors are mutually dependent. Moore shares this view: 'I think what you see results in what you feel and what you feel probably results in what you see, or choose to see' (Moore, 1977a). This may be one explanation for the varying perspectives people have on Moore's work, and it also suggests a way in which one person's 'personal response' can become emblematic of a wider situation so that the work comes to be accepted as an important part of the histories of landscape photography and as a critique.

The final two writers I look at discuss Moore's work from art historical perspectives. Neil Shirreff looks at *Flechertown 1977* from a psychoanalytic point of view. He believes that a sense of ambivalence in Moore's photographs is caused by the uncanny as described by Freud.⁴ This has its roots in childhood and other, more primitive areas of the brain. For Shirreff there is a possible link with Moore's childhood memories (Shirreff, 2002, p. 26)

He also discusses Laura Marks' theories about haptic visuality with regard to the textural quality of the traces of activity on the road's surface. The theory suggests that this draws a viewer in to engage directly and relate to those marks using personal, intimate experiences.

(Marks, 2000)

⁴ The uncanny, as discussed by Freud, is something long ago familiar, that has become alien to us due to repression, a harbinger of death. (Freud, 1919)

He suggests that Moore is at home with the transitory moment, rather than the place itself. And that the moment depicts a 'rhythmic unity' (Shirreff, 2002, p. 32) ⁵

(*Fletchertown 1977* (Moore, 1977b) - A copy of this photograph is available here

<http://visualarts.britishcouncil.org/exhibitions/exhibition/homelands-a-21st-century-story-of-home-away-and-all-the-places-in-between-2013/object/fletchertown-moore-1977-murmurs-at-every-turn-p5017/page/10>)

Simon Stahli's PhD thesis looks at links between Moore's late work and eastern philosophy. Stahli believes that Moore's late images resist definitive interpretation (Stahli, 2009, p. 13). He remarks on the difficulty in easily categorising Moore's work and suggests that the different ways of seeing Moore's work arise from the nature of the work itself. 'the peculiar way in which Moore's work destabilizes the art/documentary divide makes it quite appropriate to think of its different strands as not mutually exclusive' (Stahli, 2009, pp. 23-24)

Throughout the thesis he returns to mention the difficulty in pinning down the meanings of Moore's work due to its indeterminacy – the openness of meaning that allows the work to operate in more than one way: 'Faced with Moore's images, one is never quite certain whether they are dealing in sober fact or in subjective moments of experience....the distinction between objective and subjective is destabilised and ultimately obliterated' (Stahli, 2009, p. 192). Through this obliteration the interrelationship of self and the other is shown. (Stahli, 2009, p. 199) . The viewer becomes aware of the effect Moore's photographs have perceptually; how we project ourselves into them and impose our own shifting interpretations, and the interpretative process becomes conscious. (Stahli, 2009, p. 210)

⁵ Shirreff links this with the automatism of the Surrealists.

These writer's together shed most light onto Moore's work for me, while Moore's words are most helpful about his approach to photography in terms of what motivated the work; that sense of a recognition.

Selected photographs

Ayr 1979

(Ayr 1979 (Moore, 1979) – A copy of this photograph can be seen here -

<http://azurebumble.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/rm5.jpg>)

There are multiple layers of reflections which are hard to make a fixed interpretation of. It's unclear if the space we are looking into is an exterior or interior space, and our point of view is also unclear. The space is empty, apart from a grid of cracks on the floor formed by laid concrete, some water stains and drainpipes, it evokes memories of bungalows found in out of fashion seaside areas, where people retire to look at the view as they gradually age and become less able to maintain their property.

There's also a sense of a transient moment superimposed onto this space, it's as though watching the inner world of feelings and emotions changing fluidly like the air carrying the clouds, and the sun casting rays of light. Maybe this space is a psychic space, it feels as though it might be the inside of the photographer's head.

In *The poetics of space* Bachelard looks at the archetype of shelter through its various guises, finding in it a correspondence between the spatial concepts of inner and outer at its formation in our psyche. Memories of this formation can be activated with a sense of recognition that resonates deeply (Bachelard, 1994, p. xvi). This could relate to the sense of recognition that Moore has spoken of.

Ayr 1979 could be described as a corner. For Bachelard the corner 'is a symbol of solitude for the imagination, that is to say it is the germ of a room, or of a house' (Bachelard, 1994, p. 136). Seen this way we're looking at a form of shelter. One that we are outside of.

Allonby 1983

(*Allonby 1983* (Moore , 1983) - A copy of this photograph is available here

<http://www.fine-photographs.co.uk/index.php/display-as-list/53-moore-published-photographs?showall=&start=4>)

As a place of shelter Allonby 1983 seems very precarious, it is squeezed into a space between the rough sea, heavy clouds and the narrow strip of land. The dark strip on the caravan splits it into two and echos the land/sky/sky divides. The carpark seems to be a witness of past comings and goings, stripped back, worn away by time and the wind. We stand back in our own space, distant enough to contemplate what we are seeing.

One window of the caravan has a strange pale shape, drawing the attention as though it was a light . There is something uncanny about it; a feeling of familiarity that has become alien. The other windows are dark, the caravan seems to be empty. You wonder if bad things have happened in there. You don't want to approach. The caravan seems caught there in a network of lines forming thresholds between areas of space. There's a white bottle behind the caravan which echos its shape as though it was a miniature version of it.

For me it evokes a memory of caravan holidays in bad weather, the wind howling and rain pouring down, feeling you may get blown away by the elements. One of the aspects of Moore's work is its propensity to spark involuntary memories in the viewer.

Silloth 1982

(*Silloth 1982* (Moore, 1982a) Photograph can be seen at

http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_Vj3c5G0jZV0/TQf5gTMfO-

[/AAAAAAAAAg4/NzgwmtYFhZl/s1600/Raymond+Moore+2.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_Vj3c5G0jZV0/TQf5gTMfO-/AAAAAAAAAg4/NzgwmtYFhZl/s1600/Raymond+Moore+2.jpg))

The snow gives strong graphic qualities, like an abstract drawing. A clump of bushy vegetation appears to be held at bay by the fenced area, although it is not enclosed by it. The enclosure seems empty. The drain covers connect us with what lies under the ground, they read 'non-rocking/self-hinging' (National Galleries of Scotland, 1995, p. 50) ⁶ When connected with the angle of the horizon this reads as a surreal visual humour, summarised by Moore's words: 'the world has an Alice in Wonderland quality'. Although this is not the whole story; in the same interview he also says 'I look for signs of finality and the end of time, impending departure and desperation' (Moore, 1981a). One could see the dark grey sea as an uncontrollable natural force, the fencing hints at our useless attempt to protect ourselves. The world hinging like some strange mouth. But the strangeness is so captivating, the dark drains are clear of snow, dark features in the white expanse. The everyday made extraordinary.

⁶ Although this can't be made out on my copy and unfortunately I haven't been able to get access to the original prints for this study.

Harrington 1982

(Harrington 1982 (Moore, 1982b) Can be seen at -

<http://www.fine-photographs.co.uk/index.php/display-as-list/53-moore-published-photographs?showall=&start=4>)

Again we stand back from the sea, the intervening land seems to have undergone an act of erosion or deposition. There are marks left by the comings and goings of cyclists. The area appears to be some kind of car park which is disintegrating, but it also could be that somehow the loose surface on the left has been deposited over the tarmac by some intervention. The bright patch of a puddle reflects the sky and draws the eye out towards the steps. A sense of the sublime pulls me out to the light area of sea and onwards to its bright horizon. The little sign on the left seems to caution me not to take the steps.

There's humour there in the small sign, the tiny puddle and the enormous sea. Perhaps the exhausted state of the land is caused by human migrations drawn here by the immeasurable sea. The abstract qualities are so interesting in themselves, the way that the boundaries between spaces are defined by light on dark/dark on light, this relationship changes at some point between, the boundaries between sea and sky cease to exist. This is also echoed in the play of light along the top of the sea wall. The threshold between the surfaces of road/carpark is also in flux. These thresholds between states seem important.

Conclusion

Raymond Moore's photographs have a quiet power that can create a variety of responses, some of which I have touched on above. This capacity of apparently simple photographs to catalyse these meanings found in the commonplace seems so extraordinary to me. I don't feel able to take an overview, only to acknowledge that for me all of these ways of seeing his work are valid, but for my own practise the most valuable ways of looking at them at this moment are to do with memory and perception, and the aesthetic aspects of his work which help to create these open meanings.

Links with my work

I've been looking at the work of Raymond Moore almost since the time I began studying photography at OCA. His philosophy of photography was in many ways my starting point even prior to beginning landscape. This is because I was naturally drawn towards ideas that seemed to coincide with his without me needing to work to accommodate them. Looking back at my logbook from that time I note that I didn't want to write about his work in case it took away the pleasure of discovering it. In many ways I feel the same now, I don't want to sully that overlap where my work meets his, I want to leave it as it is unspoken.

What I can say is that there are many differences of a superficial nature; I have been using a digital camera, possibly this is in his spirit though...he used a 35mm slr rather than a medium format so that he could work quickly. Also I have used colour for assignment 5, but in these days of digital processing colour is as controllable as black and white was in the darkroom.

Like him, I am committed to photographing what I know, the surroundings I happen to be in, in which I also have this sense of recognition. Prior to my research for this critical review my work for assignment 2 and 3 was stimulated by a photograph I took that reminded me of one of Raymond Moore's; reflecting on the photograph led me to think about photography in a different way, thinking about it as light from another place and time, and also to notice the strange flattening and perspective effects. These things together inspired much of assignment three.

(Flatholm, 1952 (Moore, 1981b) – A copy of this photograph is available here

[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-9Q2Gmq9WkVg/UePJ_qLuqJI/AAAAAAAAAFaE/ulQkfcBFV4/s1600/Ray+Moore+(5+of+5).jpg)

[9Q2Gmq9WkVg/UePJ_qLuqJI/AAAAAAAAAFaE/ulQkfcBFV4/s1600/Ray+Moore+\(5+of+5\).jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-9Q2Gmq9WkVg/UePJ_qLuqJI/AAAAAAAAAFaE/ulQkfcBFV4/s1600/Ray+Moore+(5+of+5).jpg))

Where we differ on a more profound level is that we are different genders and living in different times and in this post post modern age things just aren't the same. The article I studied by John Roberts placed Moore in a photographic lineage ending with photographers such as Demand who begin to create space in their photographs by means of models and manipulation (Roberts, 2010), that aspect also exists in my work for assignment 3. I also feel that for him, photography was his medium, whereas I think I need begin to integrate it further with my previous art training.⁷

Moore observes that his photographs were a type of return to Wallasey, the place he grew up, (Moore 1981a) this has a strong resonance for me. In my case I seem to recognise the same feeling in my photographs as though it was a time and place once known, but that is lost to me and can only be reconstructed from fragments.

⁷ I am on the Creative Arts Degree Pathway

So I share with him this sense of recognition of certain moments that for might be tied up with memories and emotions and the sense of loss and sense of finality he remarked on (Moore, 1981a) Like him, I also prefer to photograph places that are in-between or marginal; most of my work for this module has been in places that can be described in that way.

My work in assignment 5 gave me the opportunity to continue studying Moore's photographs closely. Rather than photographing in a way that is loosely inspired by him, (as I've been doing that for quite some time already) I used the assignment to make a sustained inquiry into his work and then photographed following Moore's suggestion that one should 'Follow your nature and accord with the Tao saunter along and stop worrying ...' Moore quoting Seng T'san from the 7th century (McClelland, 1969). So while partly inspired by my study of Moore, my photographs for assignment 5 are the result of an emotional recognition of my own.

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