

## Central Lancashire Online Knowledge (CLoK)

Title	Raymond Moore's Uncertain Places
Type	Article
URL	<a href="https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/40092/">https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/id/eprint/40092/</a>
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2022.2060288">https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2022.2060288</a>
Date	2022
Citation	Scanlan, John (2022) Raymond Moore's Uncertain Places. Photographies, 15 (2). pp. 225-239. ISSN 1754-0763
Creators	Scanlan, John

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2022.2060288>

For information about Research at UCLan please go to <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLoK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/policies/>



## Raymond Moore's uncertain places

John Scanlan

To cite this article: John Scanlan (2022) Raymond Moore's uncertain places, *photographies*, 15:2, 225-239, DOI: [10.1080/17540763.2022.2060288](https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2022.2060288)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17540763.2022.2060288>



© 2022 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 27 Jun 2022.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 338



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

## ARTICLE

**John Scanlan** 

## RAYMOND MOORE'S UNCERTAIN PLACES

*This article examines the work of late British photographer Raymond Moore (1920–1987) and the ways in which his images of landscapes and objects allow us to understand his work as being driven towards encounters with what I term uncertain places, which is to say places in transition or between states of being that also point the observer of these images to that which lies beyond even photographically-aided perception. This idea is further examined in terms of Moore's acceptance that as a photographer he was but one element in a human-technological process, something that separated his work from the predominant trends in documentary realism that dominated public perceptions of photography during the late period of his career. The uncertain places of Moore's photography, it is argued, matched his temperamental attitude towards his craft and his willingness to allow landscapes and objects, in a sense, to emerge or reveal themselves rather than objectifying or representing them in any conventional sense.*

Raymond Moore, the English photographer whose work spanned the years between the early 1950s and 1980s, will be little known outside of those with an interest in twentieth-century landscape photography. Even towards the end of his own life it was common to see him described as a forgotten figure; a once prominent exponent of a certain kind of photography who had slipped out of view, an unfashionable photographer of empty and unattractive landscapes in an age of documentary realism.<sup>1</sup>

Moore's guiding philosophy was elaborated in a variety of artistic statements produced to accompany exhibitions of his work and would be repeatedly expanded upon in interviews over the years as he seemed as much caught up in a need to explain the point of his work as he was in plunging further into a subject matter that seemed obscure. What interested Moore was finding liminal points where two worlds, "two ways of being", met.<sup>2</sup>

---

CONTACT John Scanlan [JScanlan1@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:JScanlan1@uclan.ac.uk) In Certain Places School of Art and Media University of Central Lancashire West Lakes Science and Technology Park, Cumbria CA24 3JY

Such places produced existential encounters where his very “being” (his term) was charged into a heightened state of receptivity by landscapes in which the arrangement and coincidence of objects, physical forms and atmospheric conditions could not be resisted.<sup>3</sup> In the late period of his work, by the turn of the 1980s, he was describing the state of being this gave rise to in terms of an identification between self and subject that he felt unable to escape from. And so, he kept pursuing it, and for much of his life it would almost take the form of a journey that moved him along the western edge of Britain, from Pembrokeshire to Cumbria and finally to Scotland.

## Emergent landscapes and objects

Looking at Moore’s photography today and observing the apparently descriptive titles he gave his images — which were usually always place names — it is difficult to avoid dwelling on the idea of place and on the way that places existed to and for him. What his photographs do, this paper suggests, is “map” out an ontology of contingent human relations with *place*, this being a more deeply layered notion than landscape simply because it more readily invokes time, history, change, human presence and absence — among other things — than that other more commonly used term, which was closely tied to a history of artistic representation that Moore himself had abandoned. Moore’s images are of places mostly devoid of people. This is not in itself unusual, of course, but is notable because if the human is not often present in these photographs in obvious ways, it is nonetheless often there to be glimpsed in the traces that reveal its absence.

Some of his early pictures were included in one of the first retrospectives on landscape photography, the V&A’s 1975 exhibition titled *The Land*, which was curated by Bill Brandt. Moore’s images of rockfaces, pools of water and decaying surfaces revealed objects within shifting atmospheric conditions and in extreme close-up. These images fitted well within an exhibition that had less to do with “land and environment” than it did with “modernist preoccupations with form and geometry of the image in terms of framing, focus and tonal contrast.”<sup>4</sup> A good example of the way that Moore’s interest in landscape is at times narrowed down to the surface of objects can be seen in the image *Pembrokeshire 1965* (Figure 1), one of several selected for *The Land*. The photograph shows the surface detail of a rockface that — from a more distanced perspective — might have been one object amongst many in a landscape, but here it takes up the whole frame, giving it a more monumental and mysterious presence. It is almost akin to a character study of something seemingly inanimate that has become a very different kind of presence that pops out of the landscape. But here, as is the case with much of Moore’s work of the time, the unseen landscape to which the object belongs is absent.

Given the abstract and sometimes forensic nature of some of these images, it is not surprising that Moore was seen to have some affinity with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (“New Objectivity”), a broad movement in the arts that originated in 1920s Germany.<sup>5</sup> In photography it was closely associated with the work of Albert Renger-Patzsch — some of his images were also featured in Brandt’s *The Land* — whose photographs of mid-twentieth century industrial landscapes offer stark impressions of human-made structures and objects taking over and dominating the environments of



Fig. 1. Raymond Moore, "Pembrokeshire 1965" © The Estate of Raymond Moore.

their human creators. This kind of work, with its focus on the formal or physical qualities of objects helped to foster a philosophy that privileged the detailing of landscapes and commonplace objects in ways that only a machine like a camera could. Renger-Patzsch's aim was to picture his subjects "exactly as the camera saw them, devoid of any external elements that risked detracting from the 'being' of the object photographed."<sup>6</sup> "Photography," he wrote in 1929, "works faster, and with greater precision and greater objectivity than the hand of the artist."<sup>7</sup> It was something that Moore had quickly discovered himself and he would first be recognised for images of decaying surfaces taken at close quarters and landscape features whose surfaces registered change in the environment.<sup>8</sup>

Such pictures, quite straightforwardly, show the mutability of surfaces or forms and objects in changeable landscapes, while registering a level of visual intensity and detail that had only briefly flashed into life long enough to make the picture. One well-known early image dating from 1959, titled *Flatholm* (Figure 2), presents a close-up of a surface interior from a rundown cottage on the Pembrokeshire coast. Other images taken around the same time show more of the interior of the building where *Flatholm* was taken, but here the way the image is framed around an arrangement of evanescent shapes — created by reflected light — is suggestive of "openings" to an outside or "beyond" that is not there, yet at the same time somehow becomes part of the character of the surface under certain conditions; again — as with *Pembrokeshire 1965* — almost like a "face" that only occasionally reveals its characteristics. This perception, of course, is caused by tricks of light and framing and the coincidental arrangement Moore chanced upon or brought out in the process of development, light and dark rectangular

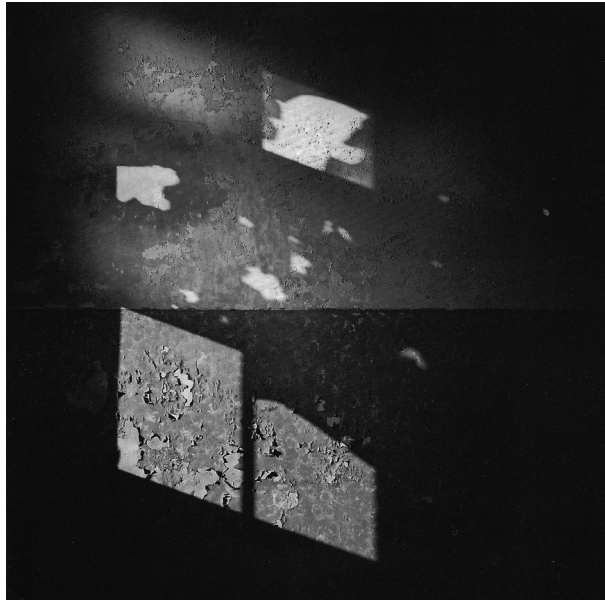


Fig. 2. Raymond Moore, "Flatholm." An image dating from 1959. © The Estate of Raymond Moore.

shapes and luminous surfaces that would over time become part of the visual language of Moore's work and which can be seen in the many photographs he took of windows, rectangular and square shapes of one sort or another, mirrors and a preponderance of reflective surfaces in general. What they amount to are forms through which change and transformation within a landscape can be brought to light. As such, *Flatholm* offers a foretaste of what was to come in his later work, where many images show us not only what is empirically there and present to the eye, but also incorporate openings or reflections that suggest that places are more expansive and imbued with uncertainty than we might usually notice.

The early reception of Moore's work occurred within a context of photography still not being taken entirely seriously as an artistic medium. In 1967, he was one of twenty contemporary photographers featured in a successful touring exhibition titled *Modfot One* (short for "Modern Photography One"). As the exhibition reached London, one contemporary review lamented that photography had not yet made its artistic merits clear and asserted that much of the work on show could be written off as the kind of "interior décor" that might find a home in some restaurant or office building.<sup>9</sup> Only Moore's "minute studies of the textures of frost, oil, rain [and] mould" and Don McCullin's "intense tragic faces of poverty" were credited with the kind of artistic merit that might see their work find a place in the Royal Academy of Arts, the more august venue next door to where the photography exhibition was staged.<sup>10</sup>

In retrospect it would be a significant notice in the sense that the work of these two photographers couldn't have been more different, with Moore setting himself against what he saw as a public perception of photography that viewed it mainly as a tool of social documentary (something not unrelated to the success of photographers like McCullin, and the spread of their work through magazines). As the kind of documentary photography associated with figures like McCullin gained more exposure, Moore's work by contrast looked as if it was caught up in obscure and unfathomable concerns.

## Edges and openings

If many of Moore's uncertain places might be redescribed in terms of the objects pictured and their relationship to both natural and human processes of change and transformation, it is something that is given a different slant in those that feature mirrors and reflections. These photographs present scenes where the presence of movement is more evident than was the case with *Flatholm*. But in both cases, the images are concerned with a visual field that is seen as never fixed or stable, but always *in process*. These shifting, uncertain places — they are titled by place name and date — could be described as picturing certain “accidents” or coincidences, pointing to a subject whose depth and complexity seems to be multiplied by the intervention of the camera and the images themselves, which subsequently makes us aware of how limited in perspective the human eye — with its singular vantage point — can be.

Are the figures in *Reading 1973* (Figure 3), for instance — one positioned behind the photographer and one in front — looking at Moore as he points his camera, or at each other? There is no telling, although the reflected surface also works as a source of evidence for how easily perception can be disrupted by objects in the environment and — in the case of mirrors and other reflective surfaces — the ways in which they bring otherwise unnoticed particulars or phenomena into view. Mirrors, indeed, might be considered as the kind of objects that Graham Harman's Object-Oriented



Fig. 3. Raymond Moore. "Reading 1973." © The Estate of Raymond Moore.



Ontology wants to convince us to think of differently; as things that “hold their forces in reserve.”<sup>11</sup> But as with the earlier Pembrokeshire pictures, we are drawn to the importance of surface and the revelation (or the hint of it) of depth beyond perception. Given the philosophical overtones contained in what Moore would say about his motivations, one wonders if he was aware of how mirrors had for centuries been regarded as strange reservoirs of metaphysical qualities, a means of “escape,” indeed — especially for the superstitious who believed that through such portals one might “take flight to another plane of existence”.<sup>12</sup> In *Reading 1973*, the contingent nature of Moore’s relationship to the landscapes that he photographed was once again affirmed by the sense of something else — even if it is only due to a perspectival shift in awareness — interposing itself into the shabby scene that the picture ostensibly foregrounds. It is an aspect of what Moore would describe as the “Alice in Wonderland quality” of the observed world.<sup>13</sup>

The same could be said for other pictures in which mirrors and reflective surfaces are seen. In such examples light is used in such a way that it expands the viewer’s sense of the potential for visual trickery that is inherent in photography, but perhaps more importantly also brings to the fore Moore’s desire to see through and beyond solid shapes and figures that we might take as the principal markers of place in the images.

Moore created many such compositions that could only have been realised with a small and portable camera, equipment whose deadpan precision and capacity for receiving whatever was in the gift of the light allowed him to fix fleeting objects in the field of vision. One might point to the scene captured in the photo that is titled, *Maryport 1977 (Billy)* (Figure 4). Here we are presented with what seems to be one image projected onto a hut-like structure that Moore has photographed (the structure on the left-hand side of the picture), but on closer examination it becomes clear that the reflection is in fact from another surface that comes between photographer, camera and the objects in the frame, but through which the objects are seen in a radically altered configuration. What we are looking at here could possibly be taken for a double exposure, but it is more likely an effect produced by the interior of a car windscreen.<sup>14</sup> In that regard, the photograph combines two perspectives: a reflection



Fig. 4. Raymond Moore. “Maryport1977” (Billy). © The Estate of Raymond Moore.



of what was behind Moore (the “picture” that is seemingly projected on the hut, illuminated by the light coming off the ocean and horizon beyond and in front of him) and the two structures that form the photograph’s ostensible focal point. The precise nature of the trickery involved is less interesting than the fact that yet again the content of the image must only have appeared for the briefest moment of time and would likely be impossible to recreate.

Believing himself to be no more than a component in the process of making such photographs — a “go-between” in a human-technological relationship through which the pictures could come into existence — Moore would wait for the so-called Alice in Wonderland effect to take form.<sup>15</sup> The common assumption that the camera was an extension of the photographer, Moore thought, had things the wrong way around; rather, it was more the case that the photographer only existed in virtue of the prosthetic eye and all its associated chemical and technical processes that mark the realisation of photography in its observable material form. It is something that could now be redescribed in terms of Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory, which is to say that Moore’s view of his role as photographer was essentially the perception that he was one “actant” amongst many: one that can act through the camera lens, the mechanism of which acts in moving the film onto a new frame, before the chemical processing acts to create a print, and so on.<sup>16</sup> The “mirror” pictures exemplify the potential of the camera as a machine of extra-human capabilities able to abstract a kind of unexpected, unpredictable, rendezvous of elements.

Through the appearance of the kind of chance elements seen in *Maryport 1977* (Billy) and seen elsewhere in other images of edges and openings, Moore’s visual language would also become bound up in symbols and vectors of change. One can see this, perhaps, in some of his images of edges and horizons. The luminous upper right corner of *Pembrokeshire 1963* (Figure 5) shows the dying of the light at sunset and a reflection of the dropped sun in the distance. It seems to light up a pathway leading away from the shore, as if to present an exit from the darkness that will soon descend. On the sandy beach we see the aftermath of activity: footsteps, a hurried departure maybe, as if “the last of the light” had (in conformity with myth) beckoned evening sojourners to seek out the elusive “primordial home below the sunset.”<sup>17</sup> It is also worth saying that the possibility of reading the image in such terms makes *Pembrokeshire 1963* unusual in being capable of carrying that kind of representational weight. That is not to say it is what Moore intended, but that in general his work — with all its elements of uncertainty — is more ambiguous in its representational qualities.

The curious observer today might look at such pictures with their place-name titles and look for the kind of markers that would permit some kind of identification. But we look in vain for them here, because these are principally if not entirely images of places in flux rather than of places fixed according to more representational norms and there is a strong sense in which one can believe that this is just what Moore saw through the lens: shifting, changeable or transitioning places. “There is no sense of place about them,” one critic wrote of such images: “they never seem to jog the memory.”<sup>18</sup> They certainly did not document places in the way that photography — in an era of documentary realism in Britain — was sometimes expected to. In fact,

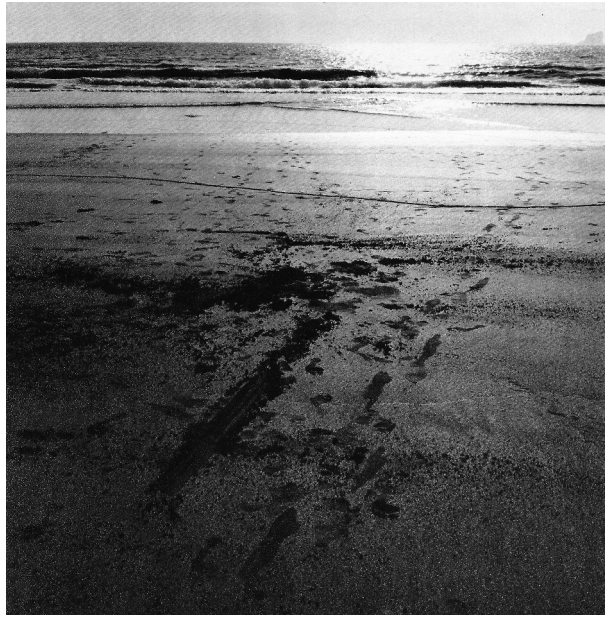


Fig. 5. Raymond Moore. "Pembrokeshire 1963." © The Estate of Raymond Moore.

Moore felt as if he was being constantly knocked for not making those kind of images. Perhaps he had in mind such reactions when, in 1984, he remarked that he kept running up against the idea that photography, for many, seemed only to exist as "a memory jogger."<sup>19</sup> Such an idea to Moore obscured the complexity of the entire context of the art and took little account of things beyond the pictures that nonetheless had a great deal to do with the making of the pictures, such as technical aspects of printing and how the mastery of such processes could transform "pieces of silver on a print" into what we call a picture or a photograph.<sup>20</sup>

If the place names that provide the titles for these images often seem at first view to do little more than register the date that Moore was present at the scene — a sense maybe reinforced by the banality of the places — it is nonetheless in emptiness and in places that have been abandoned or lack obvious cultural and place markers that Moore's subject, the uncertain, resided. Places, as well as containing the easily recognisable or memorable, consisted also of what was revealed in the accidental and transient, the unthought and pre-conceptual. Thus, the places pictured in Moore's work represent what lies beyond the immediate and in the near future, which is to say, the unknown. In opposing his intentions and subject matter to the more popularly known work of photo-journalistic realism, Moore kept moving on his own path in search of places where he might more fully realise his vision.

In West Cumbria, as with the other places along Britain's western fringe that he would explore, Moore didn't have much interest in people or even in the urban landscape, as such, but moved outwards to the coastal edges where marginal and forgotten places seemed to languish in various states of decline. These were places

where the human had not only run up against certain persistent forces — not least waves of economic devastation — but where a sense of betweenness was palpable. West Cumbria was home to a strip of small industrial towns that had risen up historically around a number of ports that faced out towards the Irish Sea but had started to slip into slow but ineluctable decline in the 1960s. If the interplay of absence and presence could be easily seen in an image such as *Pembrokeshire 1963*, it was found to be writ large across the landscapes of Cumbria's coastal fringe. These were places that stood in stark contrast to the overdetermined landscape of Cumbria's Lake District National Park, which had been a subject of writers and painters for almost two centuries by this time and was now predominantly a place given over to tourism, and which Moore — in his photography, at least — had no interest in.<sup>21</sup>

### Maps of experience

It is difficult to get away from the idea that Moore could not help but be attracted to thresholds and edges, with much of his photography focused on places where land meets water or consists of roads vanishing around corners or over horizons and into something unknown. From the early work in Pembrokeshire to the later Cumbrian images the presence of coastline and horizon, in particular, is a constant motif — and again, suggests the possibility of something beyond the immediate — and one that also charts a movement that took him along the west coast of Britain, and ultimately into the Western Isles before his death in 1987.

One other reason that he ended up working in West Cumbria was because it reminded him of Wallasey, the place where he was raised, which also faced west to the Irish Sea. It is something that makes the relationship between these images that determinedly avoided being presented as “memory joggers” and his own memory, somewhat more complex than is immediately apparent. The mystery for me rests in Moore's description of his pictures as “maps of experience.”<sup>22</sup> It's a description that might be taken as a way of fighting off attempts to pin the work down by retaining some elusive quality that was possibly inexplicable and essentially incommunicable, but the notion of the map on its own also opens up to considerations of a kind of temporal accumulation of place knowledge. Could it be that Moore was driven in his work by the search for some kind of photographic encounter that approximated a Platonic ideal of remembrance with respect to place? If so, it would suggest that the sense of place that exerted a pull on him was actually, at root, the manifestation of a search for self-recognition and as a result of which his images (often composed of the same forms and elements or sites and places over and over again) were effectively flashes of something already known, but thanks to the unpredictability of particular locations once again could be raised to the forefront of imagination: similar, but different, a new play on something remembered as elemental to his sense of being.

All speculation aside, it is a fact that the agents of change that brought an air of melancholy to the places that captivated Moore had their source in an epochal turn that was shifting Britain towards an uncertain post-industrial future. Perhaps, like

Moore himself, the uncertain places his images present us with are seen to be caught between the familiarity of the past and the uncertainty of the present and future. In the case of West Cumbria, it was a condition made more uncertain inasmuch as it existed at that time not only in a state of economic decline — which was one mode of betweenness — but also geographically between two worlds, as represented by the sea and its seafaring and trading past, and the seemingly unchanging landscape of the Lake District which now supplied the predominant image of Cumbria to the world beyond these places.

West Cumbria was its own world, one of abandoned industrial landscapes and out-of-season resorts framed by the turbulent objects of the sea, sky and the ever-changing atmospheric conditions borne out in many of the luminous and reflective surfaces Moore photographed here. We might consider these as images of place in the sense defined by Edward Casey: as sites where “things and events con-sist” or “sit together.”<sup>23</sup> By the time that Moore had discovered West Cumbria, some of the places on its coast were at the point of almost total exhaustion, with once-thriving industries in terminal decline in almost all of the locations that he would revisit again and again. In these images Moore transposed depleted landscapes, abandoned structures and tawdry coastal fringes into something more: visions of how fleeting and temporary human interventions in the landscape often were, suggesting how little we are able to finally arrest time’s restless onward motion. There couldn’t have been a greater contrast than that which existed between the sense of profound change in places now caught between two states of being — between life and death — and the seemingly timeless and unchanging landscapes of the more well-known Cumbria of the Lake District.

It is worth noting some other apparent continuities between some of the later work of this period, and his earlier Pembrokeshire images. The visual elements of shore, water and horizon, for instance, are held in greater balance in an image like *Maryport 1977 (Edge)* (Figure 6) than in the earlier *Pembrokeshire 1963* (Figure 5), of which it is reminiscent. In the latter picture, the sense of an absent human presence seems to be more foregrounded in what I earlier described as the signs of departure; the footprints left in the sand. *Maryport*



Fig. 6. Raymond Moore. “Maryport 1977.” (Edge). © The Estate of Raymond Moore.

1977 (*Edge*) also suggests the interplay of presence and absence in the cross-cutting paths that mark the foreground patch of grass, but the sea, the horizon and the sky are much more clearly delineated in a way that suggests that the aim was not just to photograph the same or a similar subject, but to attain a greater balance in the various elements of the composition and through the chemical process of development and printing.

As with the images of mirrors and reflective surfaces, Moore's tendency to make the sea an important subject also points to an element that is present but always subject to change and thus never under his command. It signifies the dynamic or changeable element that is held in balance as non-human aspect of place. The same visual elements of shore, water and horizon feature prominently in many of the best-known images from this period, which can be found in the two books of Moore's photography, *Murmurs At Every Turn* (1981) and *Every So Often* (1982). These "less than pastoral landscapes", in the words of one critic of the time, were symbolic of the profound air of uncertainty that was hanging over the places Moore found in West Cumbria.<sup>24</sup> As such, these are images that take on a significance which, in hindsight, moves them beyond whatever personal significance they had to Moore to make them more akin to a commentary on the human condition in a changing world. They are, in a certain sense, epochal pictures. Another place that drew Moore's attention was Silloth, a late Victorian seaside destination on the north Cumbrian coast that was well past its peak by the 1970s (even in its heyday it had once been described as a resort "that offered no competition whatsoever" to that most famous of north west English seaside resorts, Blackpool).<sup>25</sup> Yet another of these forgotten towns, Allonby, was even more of a relic of a bygone era and had been described as "the last remaining vestige of Victorian England."<sup>26</sup> Silloth, in fact, succeeded Allonby as the prime Cumbrian coastal resort in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was to be found some ten miles further up a road that passed through other favourite Moore locations, such as the unremarkable Flimby. But Silloth, at the height of its popularity and with its planted playgrounds and incongruous Italianate terraces, was — for a time — more popular than places in the nearby Lake District. Like the rest of coastal Cumbria, by the time Moore had started to make such places the subject of his work, it had almost lapsed into a state of suspended animation.<sup>27</sup>

And so it was that in this little-known corner of North West England Moore felt that he had reached something like "the edge of civilization."<sup>28</sup> These pictures provide glimpses into a place where things, in one way or another, were staggering towards some terminal fate. Here, the man with the camera who seemed to be in search of some kind of metaphysical encounter was at a confluence of existential, topographical and metaphysical thresholds where the very future of the places he pictured was in doubt. For some, the images "look desperate and haunted", as if Moore had been chased across the land to water's edge "and was now dodging washing lines and garbage bins looking for a place to hold out".<sup>29</sup> Even in the many examples of his work from this period that are devoid of human figures and sometimes otherwise marked only with fleeting signs of life (a child's swing, a bedsheet catching the wind on a laundry line, a road sign poking out of a misty emptiness, animals looking as if

they have been abandoned), the pictures have frozen time to illustrate something of the essence of places that once were that way. As fragmentary images of some unseen “bigger picture” reality they paradoxically end up crystallizing something of the “cultural wholeness” of post-industrial places, which by their very nature were always likely to be temporary islands of human settlement in the flux of historical change.<sup>30</sup>

Today, as you drive between these small and somewhat unknown places, it is not unusual to catch glimpses of the occasional road sign pointing to the remains of Roman milefortlets dotted along the coast, marking the now invisible western edge of another, and much earlier, world — that of Roman Britain — which has long since vanished. While there is no evidence to suggest that Moore was interested in or aware of such historical connections and whatever remains could be found there, the fact nonetheless allows Moore’s photographs of these places to be seen within a broader understanding in which places are fundamentally contingent human creations that are inevitably set against something bigger and uncontainable, as symbolized in many of these images by the ocean and the horizon, but also by what was once there but is no longer. It is something that is perhaps hinted at even more strongly in a picture like *Dumfriesshire 1985* (Figure 7), which also conveys Moore’s tendency to work close to thresholds of one kind or another. The image foregrounds a point at which paths cross and diverge, but here the landscape that this scene rises up from is not simply obscured by the thick fog; the human-made objects that mark out this landscape and might be considered as place-markers — roadside signs, a telegraph pole, a double-decker bus about to emerge into the picture — have become saturated by the fog. This formless and transient natural substance — a kind of diffuse object in itself that brings the natural towards the human — envelops the things we deposit on the landscape in our attempt to claim it as our own, and it does so in a way that is not within limits or predictable in duration.

There have been many well-known images and scenes of places overcome with mist or fog in Western art, but perhaps — given what has already been said about Moore’s other images and their relationship to places that become uncertain — his should be understood with respect to what François Jullien, in his study of Chinese



Fig. 7. Raymond Moore. “Dumfriesshire 1985.” © The Estate of Raymond Moore.



landscape painting, terms the “nonobject.”<sup>31</sup> The “nonobject” is seen in the kind of landscape image that shows reality as something that cannot be objectified through the conventions of representation and perspective, as it came to be in western art. In Chinese landscapes, “the emptiness of clouds and mists is not only the indistinct into which forms vanish at the horizon,” Jullien writes, “it also permeates the interiority of forms, opens them, and makes them evasive.”<sup>32</sup> Thus landscapes, objects and forms may be seen — they may reveal themselves to us — but they can also be obscured or seem to be withdrawn behind such diffuse objects as a veil of mist or fog. And this brings us back to Moore’s early photographs: nature, through the play of the elements of light, weather and atmospheric conditions in a landscape, casts objects and forms as the provisionally existing stuff of the world. The notion of the “nonobject” might therefore function as way of making reference to a boundless and indeterminate reality, one that is not only open to change or seen in the process of change, but which in some way is not dependent on the objectification of a human perspective.

The recognition of the landscape as neither one thing nor the other — neither the landscape of human objects and intentions, nor the natural landscape of an encroaching fog that swallows all in its way — complements the signs and marks of an absent human presence seen in Moore’s earlier images. When all is said and done, his photographs retain their power to excite interest because they show us that between experience and reality there lies ambiguity, and it is in such ambiguity or uncertainty that these images — like the places we see in them — are opened up to a more indeterminate thinking that exceeds what is merely representative and of the present moment.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes

1. Brittain, “Moore Land,” 45.
2. Quoted in Stahli, “Dwelling in Contingency,” 64.
3. Moore, “Artist’s Statement,” 5.
4. Wells, *Land Matters*, 166.
5. In Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography* (London, 1965), pp. 239.
6. Plumb, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1918–33*, 118.
7. Zervigón, *Photography and Germany*, 96.
8. Gernsheim, *A Concise History of Photography*, 239.
9. Mullins, “Some Quick Impressions,” 12.
10. Ibid.
11. Harman, *Immaterialism*, 7.
12. Grau, *Visual Art*, 280.
13. Jeffrey, “Ray Moore Talking,” 368.
14. Stahli, “Dwelling in Contingency,” 121.



15. Turner, "Raymond Moore Retrospective," 11.
16. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 54.
17. Davidson, *The Last of the Light*, 9.
18. Januszczak, "Smiling Face of Sculpture." Images from this exhibition were published in Moore, *Murmurs at Every Turn*.
19. See note 1 above 46.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 45.
22. Moore, *Murmurs at Every Turn*, 9.
23. Casey, "Foreword," xii.
24. See note 1 above 43.
25. The quotation about Silloth is from Feaver, "Time to Stand Aghast," 35.
26. Bragg, "Preface," 5.
27. Marshall and Walton, *The Lake Counties*, 197–199.
28. Quotation from Jeffrey, "Ray Moore Talking," 367.
29. Roberts, *Photography and its Violations*, 139.
30. Edwards, "Beyond the Boundary," 59.
31. Jullien, *The Great Image Has No Form*.
32. Ibid., 78.

## ORCID

John Scanlan  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2951-7823>

## References

- Bragg, M. "Preface." In *Every so Often: Photographs by Raymond Moore*, edited by R. Moore, 5–6. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: BBC North East, 1982.
- Brittain, D. "Moore Land." In *Amateur Photographer*, London, UK, 42–47. 1984, September 15.
- Casey, E. "Foreword." In *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, edited by J. Malpas, viii–xvi. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2018.
- Davidson, P. *The Last of the Light: About Twilight*. London: Reaktion, 2015.
- Edwards, E. "Beyond the Boundary." In *Rethinking Visual Anthropology*, edited by M. Banks and H. Morphy, 53–80. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Gernsheim, H., and A. Gernsheim. *A Concise History of Photography*. Second ed. London: Thames and Hudson, 1965.
- Grau, O. *Visual Art: From Illusion to Immersion*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003.
- Harman, G. *Immaterialism*. Cambridge: Polity, 2016.
- Januszczak, W. "Smiling Face of Sculpture." *The Guardian*, April 24, 1981. p. 11.
- Jeffrey, I. "Ray Moore Talking." In *The Art of Photography, 1839–1989*, edited by Mike Weaver, 367–368. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989.
- Jullien, F. *The Great Image Has No Form, or on the Nonobject through Painting*, Translated by Jane Marie Todd. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
- Latour, B. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

- Marshall, J. D., and J. K. Walton. *The Lake Counties from 1830 to the Mid-Twentieth Century*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981.
- Moore, R. "Artist's Statement." In *Photographs by Raymond Moore*, edited by R. Moore, 5–6. Cardiff: Welsh Arts Council, Cardiff, 1968.
- Moore, R. *Murmurs at Every Turn: The Photography of Raymond Moore*. London: Travelling Light, 1981.
- Moore, R. *Every so Often: Photographs by Raymond Moore*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: BBC North East, 1982.
- Mullins, E. "Some Quick Impressions." *Sunday Telegraph*, May 07, 1967, 27.
- Plumb, S. *Neue Sachlichkeit 1918-33: Unity and Diversity of an Art Movement*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2006.
- Roberts, J. *Photography and Its Violations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Stahli, S. "Dwelling in Contingency: Towards a Reappraisal of the Late Work of the British Photographer Raymond Moore, in Light of Its Affinities with a Zen Buddhist Worldview." Doctoral Thesis, University of Wales, Newport, 2009.
- Turner, P. "Raymond Moore Retrospective." In *Creative Camera Yearbook 1977*, edited by Colin Osman and Peter Turner, 10–36. London: Coo Press, 1976.
- Wells, L. *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Zervigón, A.M. *Photography and Germany*. London: Reaktion, 2017.

---

John Scanlan is an academic working in cultural history. His work explores aspects of human experience (e.g., creativity, psycho-social and temporary states of being, time-place awareness) and their cultural-historical grounds and contexts.

---