

*YOU CAN ONLY CRY BUT SO MUCH*

by

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## INTRODUCTION :

The matter of difference and the emotive expressions which ultimately follows as a result, is the exact meaning of the work. The difference wells up abundantly here and there as the work is made. The difference of photograph and memory, the former working to mime the latter; the difference between the rural and its boundary, described as its strange experience and its cultural expression; the difference in pointing at any definition and tracing its meaning. It is all at once collected and used to craft a new articulation about a place I am familiar with.

What all started as a momentous effort to disprove a perceived cultural expression of a landscape I felt familiar with slowly has transformed to be about whatever difference can be seen. The failure to define, draw boundary, mime, or close in on anything definite rejected the knowability of every space I entered. What once was a wrongness then became simply a difference: not a lie to be excised out, but merely a failure of two demarcations, landmarks, phenomenologies or presences to meet up.

I have found as I have researched that every origination point of definition begins not from some ultimate lie told to us about landscape and memory or the camera and the document, it is all less definite. It starts as traded down tradition, outcomes of exploitation, a myth about what dwells near and in the woods, or the ad campaign of the camera- it all contains within itself lies as well as a slow drift from its origin. As I have made images and frames, it is that difference and unknowability I have become enamored with. How those failures to know might be used to express and map a landscape. I have become drawn by the spectral gap between love poems and ghost stories about a place and memory- however distant those entities might be.

From this point on- I am to describe in less amorphous terms some of these differences and failures. First through an examination of how that place called the rural has appeared before, then through the ways it and other memories have appeared in photographs. Reflexively, a passage through some of the stories which became our definitions, and the gaps between those stories, experiences and historic ghosts. It is after all those images and ideas that I will speak to my own work. Work which was an effort to map a movement (my movement) through the landscape; a movement which ultimately proves the strangeness of space and perhaps denies the idea of any sort of knowability.

## I : THE RURAL AND ITS REPRESENTATION

The initial desire to narrate a new cultural document has transfigured into a reckoning with the representation of rural space itself. This is to say that while initially there was a sense of the documentary, my work now (the photographs, structures, installation) desires to express a phenomenon and experience moreso than to define any one truth. The work can be talked about in many terms but ultimately it is about the boundaries and gaps between knowing, defining, experiencing, and representing. Those gaps refer not only to failure or missing information, but also in essence the unknowability of the rural landscape.

Two selected expressions of the rural which will be discussed work off of a dichotomous opposition to one another: the idyllic and the horrific. While selected from a well of representations, it is important to ground the discussion of the rural through these lenses among many because of how they have affected the space in reality.

To examine the idyll, I first looked backward to the foundations of the pastoral. In an introduction to the history of the term, British scholar and poet Terry Gifford's book *Pastoral* collects from both historic document and poetic tradition to point to three distinct specificities when defining the concept. At once, Gifford defines it as a historical poetic form, an aspect of contrast between the city and the country, and finally a critique of the former definition's sparse ecological dialogue.<sup>1</sup> While all informed by the poetic tradition, which ultimately is what works to enforce the idyllic landscape, each remains distinct. The poetry written by Greek poet Hesiod, in his text *Work and Days*, provides some of the first distinct boundaries of the pastoral when examining Gifford and other critics timelines of the form. Even further, it is Theocritus' *Idylls* (of which the term idyllic stems from) which elaborates on the notion of the country as a space reminiscent of an innate goodness.<sup>2</sup> However, it is within a definitive sense, that Gifford points to Virgil's use of the language of country life to talk about a time which has long been forgotten to bring upon the image of "Arcadia" in similarity to how the term idyll in relation to the countryside is understood today.

Both framing the countryside as a virtuous antithesis to the urban and simultaneously a way of life which has begun to disappear at a rapid rate, Virgil writes not only about a physical mirroring of the space, but more involvedly an ideological mirroring. Gifford elaborates that Virgil illustrates not only the value of the labor and landscape, but also how it can remove one of their foey of laziness.<sup>3</sup> This romanticization in the text, which importantly functions through thematic foundations rather than structural, can be historically streamlined and traced to become what is more widely known as the poetic form of "the pastoral" today. Such a traceable identity allows concurrence with the idea that the form largely shapes the pastoral, and that such a space is willfully virtuous, ideal, and most importantly, a landscape which is idyllic.

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1-2. All the forms in some way call to viewership an elemental wonderment related to the space of the countryside. As such, though they are constructed upon one another and contend with each prior purpose, they all contribute to some reification of place.

<sup>2</sup> Gifford, *Pastoral* 15-18

<sup>3</sup> Gifford, *Pastoral* 19

But how and in what way do these forms begin to affect reality today? In his study of the British landscape, *The Country and The City*, Raymond Williams traces these beginnings and the evolution of that poetic form to be of major influence in early cultural definitions of the ideological experience of the rural.<sup>4</sup> Addressing Virgil's influence on the genre, as Williams sees it, the form of the pastoral seeks to define or describe the space of the country landscape as one which is ideologically pure. One where the nature of labor turns to the fruits of virtue. This form which becomes later cultivated and re-appropriated into texts and mediums beyond poetry thusly, at least in a cultural sense, sections off thousands of years of western representation as descendant of the greek form.

In his essay *LandLust*, German scholar Eckart Voigts elaborates upon Williams and identifies that by synthesizing cultural texts such as Virgil's, the space of the rural becomes knowable through the specificity of the observer.<sup>5</sup> This is to say that through poetry for example, tracts of rurality are defined and understood through character's stories or relationships to said space, and it is through the amalgamation of many of these texts and communities that a cultural definition forms around that space.<sup>6 7</sup> By way of Baudrillard's treatise *Simulation and Simulacra*, one then can see how cultural definitions and images of such spaces, like the rural, then transform the space itself into a simulacra.<sup>8</sup> As the lived rural increasingly refers to abstracted cultural representations of itself, it becomes hyperreal.<sup>9</sup> Reflecting a version of the space which fails to resemble anything but farce constructions far from any source. As such, it is crucial to see how established perceptions of rurality through mid-twentieth century media such as *The Waltons*, *The Andy Griffith Show*, and *Green Acres*, not only then work to affirm a legible cultural definition based off of historic poetic ideologies like the ones established in the form of the "pastoral", they additionally shift the place's lived reality.

By centralizing cultural representations in an accessible space such as the television, said communities by which the space is understood or



Figure 1. Opening credits to *The Andy Griffith Show*, depicting sheriff Griffith and his son Opie on their way down a bucolic lane towards an afternoon of fishing

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and The City* (1973; Reis, Nottingham: Spokesman, 2011), 14-17.

<sup>5</sup> Eckart Voigts, "LandLust-The "Knowability" of Post-Pastoral Ruralism" in *Ruralism: The Future of Villages and Small Towns in an Urbanizing World*, ed. Vanessa Miriam Carlow (Berlin: Jovis, 2016), 164

<sup>6</sup> Voigts, *LandLust* 164

<sup>7</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 165. Williams first coins the term "knowable communities" as a means to talk about spaces which become communicable by an examination of their relationships through a form like the novel.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, Trans Sheila Faria Glaser (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994) 1-3. This is to say that the "rural" is a reflection of distant simulations and as such there is no difference between said simulations and reality as both fail to become meaningfully distinguishable and contain only referent.

<sup>9</sup> Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* 2-3

defined ends up largely occupied by a cultural commonality. Indeed, by showcasing enough selective representations of virtuous whiteness, and godly idyll, the space radically shifts perceptions away from its historic ghosts of colonialism and violence towards white resettlement and pastoral idyllicism.



Figure 2. *After Fire* from *you can only cry but so much*

What then is to be said about the resulting shift and its impact on definition and experience? Well, the idea of cultural knowability reaches past the subject hood of singularity and postures a multiplicity. In her book long essay *The Rural Gothic*, Bernice Murphy touches upon the oppositional yet connected cultural depiction which examines the psychic landscape of the rural by way of its relationship to horror and violence.<sup>10</sup> Murphy discusses how through some of the earliest encounters between European settlers and the native population of the Americas, an ineffable terror was thought to be found in the wooded wilderness of “the new world.” Murphy outlines how experiences with starvation and poor resource management led the Roanoke colony among others to suffer or completely collapse.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, early stories describing capture by native tribes made effort to illustrate that what was just beyond settlement

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<sup>10</sup> Bernice Murphy, *The Rural Gothic in American Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

<sup>11</sup> Murphy, *Rural Gothic* 30-34

in the woods was innately barbaric or corrupting.<sup>12</sup> Murphy elaborates that this initial myth-making is a key element of origin of the “rural gothic” in the United States. Through the fabulation of fragments of true historicity, be it the collapse of early colonies or the true horrors of colonial settlement and violence, American myths of the wilderness and rurality were born.

Murphy’s text draws attention to Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland* in a way which appropriately mirrors the influence or ideology of Virgil. Breakthrough in his ability to form and predict new cultural tropes and futures, in *Wieland* Brown probes the deeply religious and expansionist beliefs of the early United States to turn up a reflection of colonial attitudes on what could happen outside of the bounds of European civilization. Murphy identifies that through embodied voices, divine intervention, familial violence, and transfiguration against the backdrop of early Pennsylvania, Brown extrapolates history and myth in order to find a narrative structure which borrows from the European Gothic but would be later re-appropriated by authors such as Edgar Allen Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne during the nineteenth century. Brown crafts a unique cultural text which would make clear the “racial and territorial anxieties” felt in a land which had supposedly “already been transformed into a reassuringly pastoral landscape.”<sup>13</sup> *Wieland* precipices towards the potential of wilderness until romanticization leads to self annihilation. It is within the novel, that an emblematic settler family wrestles with the horror of the unfamiliar rural and is forced to return where they came completely transformed by the landscape.



Figure 3. Scene before the filmmaking trio enters the woods in *The Blair Witch Project*. *The Blair Witch Project* encapsulates a reinvigorated and re-animated trope which has contributed to the continual reforming rural representation. Its success spawned a complete transformation of the horror genre, which would lead to a revitalization of the “fear of the woods” trope both in media and reality. Importantly, the advertising leading up to the film aimed convince its viewers that the film was real.

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<sup>12</sup> Murphy, *Rural Gothic* 35- 36

<sup>13</sup> Murphy, *Rural Gothic* 54. Notice here how Murphy positions the pastoral as an ideological opposition to the framework of Brown’s tale of the Pennsylvania gothic.

What comes from this dichotic lineage opposite to the idyll defines the outpost next to the woods and wilderness as innately corrupting, and surreal. Be it *The Blair Witch Project*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, or *The Village*: for every journey where an ineffable witch or evil punished those who chided the American or Western countryside, there was a mirrored small town diorama of a simpler life waiting on the other television channel.

It is then between Brown's *Wieland* and Virgil's *Eclogues* that it becomes comprehensible on some scale that the Western concept of the Rural is uniquely positioned to oscillate culturally between at least two violent extremes. It may express the beautiful suffering of labor and expansion through godly means, or fall victim to an inherent evil which seeks to work through the landscape itself. Importantly, at the crux of these representations there lies a reinstatement of the myth and reinforcement of western expansionism. The boundary between the countryside and the city may be "cleanly" divided, but the meaning of what the countryside is resides in an incomplete refraction and retelling of narrative devices, myths, folktales, and obfuscations. It is with these devices that the landscape is known, simulated, and experienced. Whether by self affirming action via westward expansion and homesteading, or true momentary reflections of reality via the disorienting experience of traveling through unfamiliar space, the phenomenological mapping of the rural landscape is driven by the specters of representation in its past and future.<sup>14</sup>

The very first gestures embodied within *you can only cry but so much* reject and converse with the premise of any legible definition of the rural. The installation of photographs decry any sense of knowability of what is a permeable ideology formed by myth. This is not to say that myth does not begin with a facsimile of reality or that these cultural definitions do not project any sense of accuracy. The landscape of rural America is predominately white because it is selected to be so. Through curated representation and violent repositioning, echo chambers of space are created to cement similarity. As such, there is a historic trauma related to the landscape, as well as a godly belief in its ability. No, rather, *you can only cry but so much* suggests that because of the ever shifting nature of these definitions, the phenomenological experience is definitively unknowable and always in flux- however mapped. Myths and motifs are both embraced and denied as photographs along the wall trace the oscillating boundary of what could and could not be considered the rural. What arises is an emotional expression of a singular movement through the rural space: a personal yet participatory mapping. As the gaps between what is experienced by one and what is defined by many are called into question, a personal rendering of that psychic landscape is made. One which still converses with the specters of its supposed knowability.

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<sup>14</sup> The homesteading act can be seen among many efforts to motivate the citizens of the United States to directly claim tracts of land under the belief of Manifest Destiny. A premise innately connected to the expansionist practices found in both expressions of the rural described in this section.

## II. PHOTOGRAPHS AND MEMORY

It is important that the personal mapping of representational gaps and movement be rendered through the very means in which rural space has at least partially been expressed before. Photography itself mirrors the process in which the landscape has attempted to be understood and defined.<sup>15</sup> It is at once a reference of document making and keeping- in which information has been collectively mined to build representations- but also a reference to the failure which happens when photography attempts to create such a document. This gap, which mirrors the gap that exists between knowability and experience, is the play of my photographs.

Of course, memory, much like depiction or representation is diffuse and non static. In his seminal text on photography *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes examines how photographs have been tied to memory and record keeping as an aide since their inception. In the text, Barthes points both the photographs affect, and its document by examining how photography functions and how he interacts with said functions.<sup>16</sup> He then postures that a photograph occupies the space of memory, but that that is true and not true simultaneously. In their similarity, a photograph is but a referent to experience or a sequence of time, the way a memory is much the same; however, photography counterproductively fills the act of remembrance violently, replacing it with the sight of an image alone.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, Barthes describes the photograph's existence as indescribably singular, with each beholder transfiguring the photographs contexts and contents based on their own experience.<sup>18</sup> What stands as a result of these contentions, is the photograph's inability to remain resolute. Both the photograph and memory are changed by what comes before and after and between them, and as such they both fail immediately at their creation. A photograph may occupy the space of memory, but is reduced to its referent. A memory may be replaced by a photograph, but fail to exist with the passage of time.

It is the claim of *you can only cry but so much* that to utilize these failures as a way to represent what is a permeable boundary of a space such as the rural frees photography and memory of their diminutive goals. Being willingly allowed to transfigure, as the rural does and as the memory of the rural does, the photographs express the same gap with acknowledgement to their own failures. Darkened images which faultily recall a memory of a diffuse recollection of an unknowable place maps not only the role of myth, folktale, or document but also the experience of such things becoming obfuscated through time or representation. This notion, which remarkably strikes against the history of documentary photography, both challenges the functions of photography and memory while additionally allowing connections to the historic to be made. It is perhaps impossible that photography will be ever free in some way of its referent,

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<sup>15</sup> Via land surveying photography, Farm Security Administration journalism, ethnographic photography, new-topographic movement, etc.

<sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981)

<sup>17</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 82-85, 91

<sup>18</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 73

a photograph then must explicitly recall the experience through which it was taken as a means to free itself of its collapsed meaning. This is to say that in reaction to a scene, act, or memory, the photograph must be transfigured much in the way the thing it is depicting is transfigured; a dissolved photograph which is invisible but from its experience.



Fig 4. *Following Profile* from *you can only cry but so much*

Artist RaMell Ross writes about the retrospective William Christenberry exhibition *Memory is a Strange Bell*, in terms familiar to the dissolution of the photograph as document. He postulates that while Christenberry makes effort to have his sculpted miniature buildings “twin the real structures that enliven their [real-life] coordinates,” his true aim is to “clone the object and site of feelings from single cell experiences.”<sup>19</sup> These movements by Christenberry, whose photographic and sculptural work reacts and embodies the specter of the southern rural landscape, exemplifies just what *you can only cry but so much* seeks to confront: the dissolution of and gap between memory, experience, definition and document itself.

It is within the history of photography that the rural is frequently mined. Be it by reaction

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<sup>19</sup> Ramell Ross, “Extra Familiar Completeness” in *Memory is a Strange Bell: The Art of William Christenberry* (New Orleans: Ogden Museum of Southern Art, 2019).

or by discovery, the rural is in constant flux of representation and identity. For Christenberry, this came by way of reaction to representations of his childhood landscape in the landmark photographic and journalistic publication James Agee and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.<sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup>Moved by the frontal depictions which seemed to embody no sense of his own movement, Christenberry took aim with his own childhood Brownie Box camera to invigorate representation of a place he felt he knew.<sup>22</sup> Returning over the course of several decades, Christenberry photographed buildings, signs, and the indefinable space of Alabama in a way which spoke to time, memory, and importantly, transformation. It is through the arc of Christenberry's work that the viewer witnesses the space via his eyes, and importantly, his translation of the place. The images, without people depicted, radiate what Christenberry termed a profound "sense of aloneness," and are aided by that same phenomenon. It is that same "aloneness" and sense of time which Christenberry imbues in his work, that also transfigures his images beyond the document.

It was years after William Christenberry's passing that RaMell Ross would converse with his legacy to touch and dissolve into yet another experience not yet depicted. Ross, who captures Black Americans standing in the same emptied landscapes as Christenberry, in the same "deep time," expands and importantly, transfigures the image of that space once more. In his first monograph *Spell, Time, Practice, American, Body*, Ross speaks of the making of photographs which liberate the legacy of southern photography but additionally, those people and contexts



Fig. 5 Elizabeth Tenge on the porch, Hale County, Alabama  
Walker Evans.

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<sup>20</sup> Yolando Romero, "William Christenberry: Not Photographs but Stories" in *William Christenberry* (Madrid New York : TF Editores / Fundacion Mapfre / D.A.P., 2013)

<sup>21</sup> *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* stands as formative attempt to both document and uncover the process of document making. Importantly, the authors James Agee and Walker Evans, perhaps unknowingly, lay bare elements which would be used to create a lasting image of the rural for decades to come.

<sup>22</sup> Romero, *William Christenberry*

which appear in the images.<sup>23</sup> It should be said that in doing so, the boundaries of that space shift and uncover once more, a reflection of how those boundaries came to be.

In many ways *you can only cry but so much* strives to add once more to the chorus of these images. It is in addition that *you can only cry but so much* seeks to also wrestle with the nature of adding to the chorus in any way at all. In what way does constantly defining rural space further abstract rurality itself? In what way does the gaps between these abstractions of experience and reality matter?



Fig. 6 *Green Warehouse Newbern, Alabama*  
William Christenberry

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<sup>23</sup> RaMell Ross, *Spell, Time, Practice, American, Body* (London: MACK 2023)

### III. THE SPECTRAL GAP

*you can only cry but so much* notices the impossibility of any mechanism which aims to discuss a place such as the rural through the lens of permanence. The photograph, the memory, the document, the definition, the landscape itself- it is all subject to the influence of one another. It is the impossibility for these demarcations to meet up without pushing another aside that allows the experience of the singular as a means of mapping to be meaningful. The work does not simply accept that infinitely shifting boundaries are necessary- but rather, that each mapping must be generously added with understanding that the landscape will be uncovered and transformed and misunderstood again. It is with every missed connection that is pointed to or stumbled upon in the work, that the very essence of the gap is acknowledged and surrendered to.

Once more however, it is clear that to reference these gaps is to talk and converse with cultural definitions and simulacrum. The photographs which line the wall, floor, and explode from the corner of the installation of *you can only cry but so much* make this unmistakably clear. Familiar dissections of what rurality is known by come to the forefront immediately. Be it a patch of corn up against a house, a crop field with a dark marred spot in its center, a grain elevator erected and plastered against a featureless night sky, a caged chicken spot-lit under industrial lights- these simulacrum both recall the presence of violence and idyllicism in the rural and its histories. They contain both the potential to oscillate between the horrific and the pastoral, but even more implicitly, they are situated amongst other images both unfamiliar and surreal. Darkened photographs of topographies and buildings obliterate detail much the same way memory obliterates genuine experience, and even still, much in the way that knowability is obliterated by every change that, seen or unseen, happens in that space.



Fig 7. *One Dog, One Hound* from *you can only cry but so much*



Fig. 8, 9, 10, 11 Installation selections of *you can only cry but so much*

It is in the making of the photographs that the act of mapping is mirrored and permanence is denied. The photographs, which are both printed onto matte swaths of newsprint and the reflective like blacks of silver gelatin, purpose the struggle between definition and impossibility. The newsprint, which will struggle to maintain itself and will rapidly degrade, contains just the same elements of the transfiguration of experience as the gelatin prints. Yet the former prints will fade and leave behind the other, creating one more fragmented representation of a personal mapping of the place. The annihilated detail consumed by black, both from the overexposure of the sensitive silver particles in the fine gelatin prints as well as the charcoal coloring on newsprint, act as another means of highlighting this inescapable impossibility. What could be potentially erased and uncovered will fade far before the gelatin prints which will remain fixed black and permanently obfuscated. Ultimately still, both are affected by the conscious decision to reflect the presence of degraded memory and photographic limitation as well as possibility.

Figures move about in each image they are contained in, but always featureless, always with some identity denied. It is unclear then whether it is a person traveling through the rural boundary unfamiliar with the space or someone positioned to change within its contexts eternally as the landscape does. The characters set against the backdrop of the rural space are fixed and related to the space they inhabit in the frame but simultaneously complicate the notion of the framing itself as they exist in perpetual limbo in their timelines, forever still and interrupted by the camera. What follows these interruptions is not seen, but the frame does not implicate that what follows does not happen. The dark wooden frames suggests furthermore that what lies beyond the image could be a farce, a boundary, the end, somewhere just outside of the rural, or an incomplete referent that the photograph will struggle to dispel. It is within the structure of each photograph that each one of these possibilities is met. A building which extends out beyond what seemingly lies between the frame, two dogs with open jaws positioned carefully by hands, a fallen blackened tree mysteriously approached in the wood: each beg be expanded or for another context to be provided in sequence but are denied further clarity.

What is defined by these elements is exactly the impossibility to understand the rural space but by its proximity to both things familiar and unknown. Every photograph comes into concert with one another. The line of images which follows the wall until it explodes with density in the corner is both a perfect sequence slowly tracing what is familiar to unfamiliar and also a discordant attempt to acknowledge and supersede trope. The effort with which each image was created was natural. Neither trope or unfamiliar surreal movement navigated solely by its ability to provide what it references. Rather, it was the crux of each moment of realization, about the unknowability of such a space, that the images were made as I proceeded through what is thought to be the rural.

In Irish poet John Montague's book *The Rough Field*, the oral memory of Ireland's landscape is haunted by the concept of the Pastoral and British colonization. However, it is through that same oral memory that Montague is able to embody such a ghost as a way to contend with the very impermanence which is lamented and surrendered to. Montague frustrates the defining of Ireland through such a form such as the pastoral, which ultimately aims to fix the landscape as a permanent ideology, by illustrating that the very origin of its form itself embodies a sort of transformation of reality away from collective experiences. Ireland cannot prevent its transformation but simultaneously is thus free from the definable rigidity that threatens to flatten the space. Ireland will change, and thus Ireland can change again; amongst all of this, the landscape, is still Irish, and still embodied by memories of those there, however diffuse those may be.<sup>24</sup>

Beverly Buchanan's *Marsh Ruins* too, contends with ghostly memory, tragedy, and an unfixed space which will continually change. In her 1981 sculpture, a monument to the victims of colonial violence including the mass suicide of the Igbo people resisting enslavement in 1803, Buchanan precisely addresses both the the memory of such a infliction on the landscape and the people there, but also acknowledges the diffuse nature of that very memory.<sup>25</sup> Utilizing tabby made with shells from the landscape in the creation of the structures, Buchanan re-incorporates the physical memory of the place as a means to trace what once was, and what will come to be. Allowing both the concrete mounds to serve as a historic monument and another element of the landscape which would be sometimes overlooked as another natural formation in the marsh grass, Buchanan mourns and evades any idea of permanent fixation in an act outlining what is to be and not to be forgotten or written down.<sup>26</sup>

A mapping of a landscape such as the rural is never to be done in completion or to definition- as to define it would be to change it. Still, the topography of place is important. As Voigts points out, cultural definitions are made by amalgamation. It is a process of seeing, collecting, and condensing, no matter however accurate the information or document might be. What moves me about these works, is that provable contribution to a place which will always be diffuse. That Buchanan and Montague offer a personal and vulnerable memory of people who were trampled and excised, that Christenberry and Ross express a place with which they are familiar with now but have accepted will change- ultimately builds and disperses those landscapes beyond a way which could be calculable. To rigidly define is to excise those mappings out for the preference of legibility and boundaries, which will, nonetheless shift. It is important then that *you can only cry but so much* does not accept that an incomplete archive

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<sup>24</sup> For further reading on the Montague's usage of the pastoral as a incisive tool for critique, see *Country Bumpkin and Cosmopolitan: Some Versions of Postcolonial Pastoral* by Shirley Lau Wong.

<sup>25</sup> Amelia Groom, *Marsh Ruins* (London: Afterall Books, 2020). 38-42

<sup>26</sup> Groom, *Marsh Ruins*. Perhaps by poeticism, Buchanan's structures also help re-contextualize Walker Evan's photographs of nearby Tabby Ruins, which was once a Slave Hospital but misconstrued as otherwise, as retracing of historical document.

must be necessary- but rather, that each mapping must be generously added with an understanding that a place such as the rural will be uncovered and transformed again. In releasing the want for that space to be perfect or unchanging, knowing how said boundaries and simulacra come to be drawn can be more meaningful than the boundaries and definitions themselves.

*you can only cry but so much* is a fragment of a phrase my Grandmother once told me after we had spent the day driving to fields and overgrown structures. Viewing apparitions of her past homes and a former rural place she knew, it was over a Bojangles biscuit that she offered some of her own personal movement, one which let it be known that no matter what ghosts of fields and homes were encountered, in the face of that failure to recognize something which one was clear, you can only cry but so much.



Fig. 12 *Untiled i* from *you can only cry but so much*

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