Obituary

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Obituary is a video work about the story of a dead woman found at Cam Loch, in Scotland. The newspaper description of her on discovery said she was found in the foetal position lying on the ground, some distance from her tent. This is a curiously visceral and material impression of her body. When I first read this, it drew my gaze to her cadaver as body on the ground, rather than as a missing person. In this more shocking form, it seems less of a scenic death than a death-scene investigation. A rambling tourist enjoying the scenery was the first to discover her body. His witness turned the place into a death scene. He went to seek help. A local gamekeeper then led police back there. They discovered her journal in the tent, the entry in the diary trailing off into empty pages. Then the story began to circulate, drawing the attention of journalists.

I first encountered her death scene as a short newspaper article. It fascinated me, and, through a process of speculation and confabulation, I made a fiction out of it and then a video work. Breakfast at the Beauty Spot was first published as a short story in a collection of fiction written by contemporary British artists. Here, the
work is presented as a series of stills from the video. The video takes the
conversation between the couple in the story and overlays it upon the empty
landscape in which the death took place. The soundtrack is made up of the two
voices of the airy low drone notes of the didgeridoo and bagpipes.

With camera in hand, I went to seek out the place where the woman had
died and found a multiply empty place, criss-crossed with absences: the absence of a
dead woman no longer there; the absence of the empty ‘wilderness’, which is
constructed against human presence; the absence of a people from a landscape as a
consequence of their annihilation from a territory and a wilful obscuring of their
traces; the absence of the place of the corpse as it empties out place, and creates a
‘nowhere’; and a reflection of our own absence we experience in witnessing these.
The death scene puts subjectivity under question, exposing a radical instability
underlying the witness–object–agent nexus, in life as in representation. When death
takes place, place is taken away, our place as well as the others. Seeing the figure on
the ground, we lose the ground beneath our feet. The only reply to the silent
complaint of the corpse is to keep bearing witness to the story, and walk on.

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and abroad. She is currently a PhD candidate at the Bartlett School of Architecture,
UCL, London. Her doctoral project, titled no More Elsewhere: Melancholia,
Subjectivity, Landscape, focuses on the watercolours of Antarctic explorer Edward
Wilson.

——Notes
1 Jeremy Akerman and Eileen Daly (eds), The Alpine Fantasy of Victor B and other Stories, Serpent’s Tail,
He lays out the tablemats on the table. Their pastoral scenes show three cows by a watering hole. The large mat takes the hot coffee pot and the pair of thin china cups.

He pours them both a cup and spills a little milk from the jug. Unnoticed, colour white against the green.
She takes the kitchen cloth in her hand and wipes away the little pool of spilt milk, before putting the jug back in its place.

He picks up the newspaper, takes a red biro from the breast pocket of his shirt and deliberately circles a column.
listen...
I've found something for you

dead woman 'ate nothing but air'
Go on

'A woman in an isolated beauty spot in the Scottish Highlands may have died while trying to convert to a New Age movement whose adherents claim not to eat or drink.'
She was following the teaching of some Australian guru

a 21 day conversion course
'followers eschew all food and drink for seven days and then take only sips of water for a further 14. After that, Jasmuheen claims, adherents to 'breatharianism' need never eat or drink again.'

Can you believe what some people will believe?
stupid cow...

She looks up at him, startled. The scene is becoming a little more vivid in her mind: the dead woman, pale and still, a lonely spot.
She watches him while he reads, his strong and tender hands gripping the flimsy newspaper. He doesn’t see her but continues reading, with a little smile playing on his lips.

It says six days.

How long can you survive?
She was found by a nature-loving tourist.
You are out for a walk and come across that imagine that

Other people do so spoil a pretty view
It says she was Australian.

Perhaps she was searching for her roots.

As he talks, she has been staring at the brown and green of the tablemat. It is a painting of a pastoral scene from the nineteenth century.
Three cows at the waterside,
big heads bent down.
A cowherd playing his
flute as he attends the herd.

She reaches over abruptly
to take the paper, sees the
red biro mark, and picks
out a line to read to him.
'With 'breatharianism' we free ourselves from the very basic primordial fear which is if you don't eat you are going to die.'

She wanted to be free, I suppose.
The beauty spot that she chose, was it like that?

She leans forward and pushes the cups and coffee pot from the mat to make the cows and cowherd visible.
He half catches the jug as it tilts.

Be careful!

But was it like that?
Like that picture on your mat?
It says here that she was found in the Scottish Highlands.

So that would suggest a far more harsh type of beauty.
closer to the sublime
than the picturesque

It's funny,
I imagine her naked
I thought you would find it funny, that's all.

Eat your breakfast.
He stands up to walk to the sink but she links her arm around his waist and pulls him towards her.

Off balance, he casts his hand out and knocks against the kitchen table. Her face against his waist, the jug has tipped over.
He hears the sound of something dripping on the floor and opens his eyes to see a line of milk trailing from the table, splashing upon her left foot.

He watches as the remaining flow lessens to a few drips, adding to the little puddle of spilt milk on the hard kitchen floor.
He stays there, looking at her foot,
the milk seeping between her toes.
She says nothing, holding him to her.

'The milk,' he says