

DISTANT RUPTURES OF THE UNCANNY

ALEC VON BARGEN

'THE UNCANNY IS WHAT COMES OUT OF DARKNESS'. NICHOLAS ROYLE¹

INTRINSIC TO THE ARTIST ALEC VON BARGEN'S VISION AND IMAGERY ARE THE PIVOTAL CONCEPTS OF THE TEMPORAL AND INEFFABLE, THAT WHICH NOT ONLY CONFOUNDS OUR PERCEPTION AND PRE-CONCEPTIONS, BUT THAT WHICH ELUDES THE SPECTATOR TO RENDER A STATE WHICH CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS 'UNCANNY'. PARTICULARLY SO, WITHIN THE RECENT WORKS OF VON BARGEN, TITLED '*PE.NE.LO.PE*', FROM THE 2012/13 SERIES, '*VERITAS FEMINAE*', TO BE EXHIBITED IN 2013, 2014 & 2015 AND HIS RECENTLY EXHIBITED WORK '*THE LONG WALK HOME*' AT NUOVA GALLERIA MORONE, MILAN, ITALY.

INTERTWINED THROUGH THESE LIMINAL, VAPOROUS AND SUBLIME PHOTOGRAPHIC WORKS, THE SPECTATOR IS INTOXICATED BY THE HUMANITY OF THE SUBJECT, OF THE BODY, A BODY, A FLEETING PARTIALITY OR A PERIPHERAL GLANCE, A NANO-SECOND GAZE THAT PERHAPS UNSETTLES, DISQUIETS, MAKES STRANGE OR 'UNCANNY' OUR PRESENCE BEFORE IT. IT IS HERE, WITHIN THIS AGENCY OF TIME AND ITS COMPRESSION AND EXPANSION THAT THE ARTIST SPEAKS OF HIS WORLD AND ENCOUNTERS OF CONSCIOUSNESS, MEMORY, GENDER AND PLACE. A PLACE OF PARADOXICAL BEAUTY YET UNCANNY AND STRANGE, A BODY, A SUBJECT OF PASSIONATE KNOWING AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIP, YET ONE OF UNEASE. THESE DECEPTIVELY MODEST YET POWERFULLY SIGNIFICANT IMAGES TRAVERSE AN INNER PSYCHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE OF LOSS, RECUPERATION AND AGAIN LOSS, WITHIN A SEEMINGLY CYCLIC TRANSIT ZONE OF EMOTIVE RECALL, TO JETTISON ACROSS FILMIC JUMP-CUT FRAMES TO A DISTANT PLACE AND TIME. AS WITH THE SERIES '*PE.NE.LO.PE*', VON BARGEN UTILISES THE TEMPORAL SLICING AND FRAMING OF A FEMALE PORTRAIT WHOSE APPARITION-LIKE PORTRAYAL RECALLS THE ANCIENT AND HISTORICAL LITERARY WORK OF HOMER'S, THE ODYSSEY, ECHOING THE MELANCHOLIC AND PAINFUL FUTILITY OF LONGING PENELOPE ENDURES WHILST MOURNING HER LOVER ODYSSEUS. NEVER TO COMMIT TO ANOTHER, PENELOPE MAINTAINED THAT SHE WOULD CHOOSE A HUSBAND AS SOON AS SHE FINISHED WEAVING A BURIAL SHROUD FOR HER ELDERLY FATHER-IN-LAW, LAERTES. HOWEVER EACH NIGHT, SHE CAREFULLY UNDOING THE KNITTING THAT SHE HAD COMPLETED DURING THE DAY, SO THAT THE SHROUD WOULD NEVER BE FINISHED. TO TANGLE, UNTANGLE, WEAVE, UNPICK, CREATE AND DISSOLVE TIMELESSLY, ARE ASSOCIATIVE METAPHORS OF PERFORMATIVE ACTIONS THAT ALEC VON BARGEN ENACTS VISUALLY WITHIN A TIME-LAPSE JOURNEY OF SPECULATION ON PLACE AND THE BODY POLITIC WITHIN HIS EXTENSIVE OEUVRE TO DATE. HIS PHOTOGRAPHIC WORK EMBLEMATICALLY DOCUMENTS THE COLLAPSE OF TIME AND SPACE WITHIN THE SEQUENTIAL PICTORIAL FRAME.

THIS ANALOGOUS NARRATIVE OF THE FEMININE, THE GAZE, THE INDIVIDUAL'S JOURNEY, OF A BODY AFFECTED THROUGH TIME IN SUSPENSION AND STASIS,

¹ ROYLE, NICHOLAS. THE UNCANNY, ROUTLEDGE, LONDON, 2003

HOVERING, LEVITATING AND WAITING, IS INEXTRICABLY LINKED TO CONCEPTUAL CONCERNS ALSO WITHIN THE CURRENT SERIES 'VERITAS FEMINAE' AND EMBEDDED POWERFULLY WITH REGARD TO AN INDIVIDUAL'S LONGING, SEARCHING AND PERSONAL STRUGGLE WITH PLACE WITHIN THE 2012 'BAPTISM', 'TWO PENNIES FOR THE PIPER' AND 'ME, MYSELF & I' WORKS FROM THE 'THE LONG WALK HOME' SERIES. AS WITH ARTISTS' WHO TRAVERSE CONCEPTUAL AND PERCEPTUAL ISSUES OF THE GEOPOLITICAL AND PLACE, ALEC VON BARGEN'S DIASPORIC CULTURAL CONCERNS ARE CRITICAL TO FORMING A DIALOGUE OF DISSENTION AND POWER, HOWEVER, WHAT SIGNIFICANTLY IS APPARENT WITHIN THIS ARTIST'S WORK, IS THE ELEGANT, INTOXICATING AND YET VISUALLY UNCANNY CONCERN AND USE OF THE BODY, IT'S APPEARANCE, PARTIALITY AND TEMPORAL PRESENCE, WHEN ENGAGED WITH BY THE VIEWER/SPECTATOR. HE IMPLICITLY ENVISIONS THE INVISIBLE WITH THE VISIBLE ANALOGOUS TO REFUGEE AS NON-PERSON, CRITICALLY PROVOKING DISCOURSE.

EVOKING THE STRANGE, TERMED THE 'UNCANNY'², BY ARTISTS' WITHIN THEIR WORKS SPANNING THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY, HAS AN IMPORTANT LEGACY AND DISSEMINATION WITHIN CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ART AND CULTURE, PARTICULARLY THE PHOTOGRAPHIC IMAGE. IT IS THIS REPRESENTATIONAL RUPTURE, THE EVOKING OF 'OTHERNESS' AND OF THE UNCANNY WITHIN ALEC VON BARGEN'S WORK TO DATE, THAT ALIGNS CRITICALLY WITH SEMINAL FEMINIST WRITERS SUCH AS JULIA KRISTEVA³, WHOSE USE OF THE TERM 'FOREIGNNESS' EXTENDS THE UNCANNY INTO CRITICAL DIALOGUES SURROUNDING SUBJECTIVITY, SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND OTHERNESS. BECAUSE AS SHE ARGUES, THE UNCANNY REINFORCES A LEVEL OF 'FOREIGNNESS TO OURSELVES', IT PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN RENDERING OTHERNESS NOT AS A MARGINAL BUT AS A UNIVERSAL IDENTIFICATION THAT IS COMMON TO EVERYONE. THE UNCANNY IS ALSO CONSIDERED AN IMPORTANT MECHANISM IN SOCIAL RELATIONS FOR IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DISRUPT, TO RUPTURE THE HIERARCHY OF OTHERNESS THAT UNDERPINS CONTEMPORARY POWER STRUCTURES. IT IS WITHIN THIS TEMPORAL COLLAPSE OR VISUAL DISRUPTION, THAT THE ARTIST ALEC VON BARGEN SHIFTS OUR SENSE OF SELF WITHIN OUR WORLD AS HE PLACES THE MIRROR NOT ONLY BEFORE HIMSELF, BUT UNCANNILY BEFORE US. A DISTANT RUPTURE.

LYNNE ROBERTS-GOODWIN© 2012-10-04

LYNNE ROBERTS-GOODWIN IS A VISUAL ARTIST AND ACADEMIC BASED IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA.

WWW.LYNNEROBERTSGOODWIN.COM

² FREUD HIGHLIGHTS THE CRUCIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN *HEIMLICH* AND *UNHEIMLICH*. FOR INSTANCE HE EMPHASISES THAT THE WORD *HEIMLICH* IS NOT UNAMBIGUOUS BUT BELONGS TO TWO SETS OF IDEAS WHICH ARE NOT MUTUALLY CONTRADICTORY, BUT VERY DIFFERENT FROM EACH OTHER - THE ONE RELATING TO WHAT IS FAMILIAR AND UNCOMFORTABLE, THE OTHER TO WHAT IS CONCEALED AND KEPT HIDDEN. *UNHEIMLICH* IS THE ANTONYM OF *HEIMLICH* ONLY THE LATTER'S FIRST SENSE, NOT IN IT'S SECOND. SEE FREUD, SIGMUND, 'THE UNCANNY' (1919) REPRINTED IN FREUD, SIGMUND, THE UNCANNY, PENGUIN BOOKS, LONDON, 2003, P1 32.

³ KRISTEVA, JULIA. STRANGERS TO OURSELVES, TRANS. LEON. S. ROUDIEZ, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1991.