MEDWIN PUBLISHERS
Committed to Create Value for Researchers

Thomas Hirschhorn on the Swiss Uncanny

Morales Aparicio L*

Independent scholar, USA

*Corresponding author: Lorena Morales Aparicio, New England; Email: kulturbegriffes@ icloud.com

Abstract

Switzerland as a nation is a construct dating to the late eighteenth century, codified by the Swiss political and intellectual elite. Switzerland as an idea, as a holistic nation-state, determines four culturally and geographically distinct demographics into a whole – one unified by Romantically natural, thus neutral, icons such as the Alps, agrarian production, and a medieval oath sworn by the founding forefathers in a meadow outside of Zürich. Swiss national identity is, even today, still being determined and refined for her citizens. In recent months, there has been a persistent drive by the Swiss political elite to apply yet a further Ockham's Razor to Switzerland's national construct: to reduce the number of cantons (federal, independent states) from twenty-six to a mere seven. This historical and socio-political situation flags for us the fundamental question of a collective identity, its construction, and its remainders by demonstrating the continuous and concerted effort to manage the icons and structural systems of Swiss national, regional and cantonal identity. Indeed this pressing and pervasive issue of identity must be understood at once as a social phenomenon/problem and also something the self is undergoing while in a state of its own becoming. Thomas Hirschhorn's artistic work, as we shall see, seems to assume and perform this tense and multi-tiered predicament. At the same time, these issues of subjectivity will be well-served by a consideration that is specifically alert to the philosophies of Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger – particularly the paradigmatic scope of the Uncanny in their diagnoses of subjective experience. That is, the topological problem of Swiss identity will be treated as a manifestation of how the Uncanny (for this artist and these thinkers) is understood and treated as a phenomenon, and then also what this phenmenon leads to – what the Uncanny might 'do', or what we might 'do' with the Uncanny.

Keywords: Swiss; Phenomenology; Sigmund Freud; Martin Heidegger

Switzerland as a nation is a construct dating to the late eighteenth century, codified by the Swiss political and intellectual elite. Switzerland as an idea, as a holistic nation-state, determines four culturally and geographically distinct demographics (German, French, Italian and Romansch) into a whole, one unified by Romantically natural, thus neutral, icons such as the Alps, agrarian production, and a medieval oath sworn by the founding forefathers in a meadow outside of Zürich. Swiss national identity is even today still being determined and refined for her citizens. In recent months, there has been a persistent drive by the Swiss political elite to apply yet a further Ockham's Razor to Switzerland's national construct: to reduce the number of cantons (federal, independent states) from twenty-six to a mere seven. This historical and socio-political situation flags for us the fundamental question of a collective identity, its construction, and its remainders by demonstrating the continuous and concerted effort to manage the icons and structural systems of Swiss national, regional and cantonal identity. The whole issue of identity must be understood at once as

a social phenomenon/problem and also something the self is undergoing while in a state of its own becoming. Thomas Hirschhorn's work seems to assume and perform this. These issues of Subjectivity will be considered within Freud and Heidegger, as the paradigm in which they understand the Uncanny. How the Uncanny itself (for this artist and these thinkers) is understood and treated as a Phenomenon, and then also what this phenomenon leads to – what it might 'do', or what we might 'do' with it.

Ironically, Switzerland is a country where identity is also most essentially observed at the cantonal level and even village level, regardless of Switzerland's constitution as regionally German, French, Italian, or Romansch. Thus there are tensions concerning identity in Switzerland, ranging from the quotidian familiarity of the familial village, to the cantonal civic codes, to Switzerland as a noumenal whole in the collective consciousness—a noumenal whole that is designed to override both village and cantonal identifications. Thus Swiss identity has been and is continually problematized as a cultural identity in crisis. The situation, historically and in the present, is one in which the artistic negotiation between material and form is very much at issue. How does one begin to determine a Hegelian particular vis-à-vis universal identity in a nation where identity is so clearly fractured and yet continuously bridged by the constructs of formulated iconicity? The ongoing cantonal issue illustrates but one social-political phenomenon that is undergirded by what I will term the operative 'uncanny'—the disquieting unfamiliarity in processual assimilation against the established familiarity, the homely—aspect of the Swiss experience of identity. I do so in order to frame the question of identity as, properly speaking, an ontological predicament. At the same time, as we will see, it is worth examining how this predicament is flagged and formulated in a particular way by the arts.

Not Politics as Usual

In what follows I argue that the problematic experience of Swiss identity experience cannot be merely engaged, deconstructed, lamented, or reconfigured at the political level. The discursiveness of Swiss identity requires a hermeneutics that is refracted through an ontology of the individual, and that this event obtains in a particularly striking way through the aesthetic intervention (the enunciation of the beautiful as truth, justice, and so on) of contemporary Swiss video and installation artist Thomas Hirschhorn's thematic works of the uncanny. Hirschhorn, in his 1995 *Robert Walser Video,* interrogates the routine summarization of national Swiss identity. As the key protagonist of the *Robert Walser Video,* Hirschhorn's determined intervention is existential, involving particular aesthetic choices that interrogate the familiar and unfamiliar—the uncanny—of Swiss identity based on his

own experience of and engagement with being Swiss. In light of this social, aesthetic, and existential (thus evoked through Hirschhorn's work), I will demonstrate Swissness as an uncanny experience, a Socratic and paradoxical familiarity of Swiss national identity in process and an event through which the uncanny forces each individual Swiss to ever reassess Swissness to signify him/herself as an idea in event, rather than in a fixed iconicity. The Swiss uncanny tests the ontology of Swiss being within the individual for an ever deferred, not fixed or static, signification of individuality.

Hirschhorn's artwork provocatively calls attention to the forced displacement of the process that is being Swiss, which is a process of *Dasein.* Existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger explicates *Dasein* as the kind of being specific to human being-in-the-world. Thus *Dasein* is an action of understanding being-in-the world as well as the choices of being-in-the-world. *Dasein* is an ever process of relation of with the world, which includes the process of the uncanny. The uncanny is a foundational or basic process of *Dasein*, during which *Dasein* chooses a path to or from the unfamiliar. Thus it is *Dasein* who deliberately chooses its construction (of identity) in conflation with or in the repressing of, the values or iconicity at hand. The use of the uncanny in Hirschhorn's artwork elucidates this process of being, specifically the basic process of being (choosing to be) Swiss with respect to its referents at the particular and universal level, with its uncanny fractures between the village and the national identity level.

As the choices of *Dasein* are secondarily psychological (secondary to the a priori, processual, ontological structure of being), Sigmund Freud's uncanny—also the unfamiliarity with the established familiar—resulting from affect (a symptom of neurosis), requires a Heideggerian recuperation of traditional psychological discourse as to the ethics of the psyche, of *Dasein's* experiential uncanny impelling choice, which is a process *a priori* to particularized, or affected, identity such as Swissness and gender. sArt historical criticism has considered Hirschhorn's work within the narrative of Pop Art, the political (utopian), the archival and the rhizomatic, however it has failed to take up an interpretive line sufficiently, and revealingly, informed by this notion of the uncanny in relation to identity. In view of these cultural, ontological, and aesthetic points of reference, this paper will examine the relationship between Hirschhorn's *Robert Walser Video*, Freud's affect of the uncanny, and Martin Heidegger's *Dasein* that seeks a proper *heim*—a home, an ethical identity. To realize this view we must move through three constitutive questions, arguments: I will argue that Hirschhorn's video presents manifestations of the Freudian uncanny which move away from the historical and historicized Freudian screen of the

codified Swiss nationalist narrative into an Heideggerian becoming of a fluid Swissness.

Swissness Enframed

Before the utilitarian notions of Swissness are enframed, we must carry out a phenomenology of how Swiss identity is constituted. A focused attention to Hirschhorn's artwork will furnish this interpretive lens. Heidegger's phenomenology and Freud's study of affect may seem like an unlikely methodology from which to consider Swiss identity. However Hirschhorn's videos clearly demonstrate the basic structure of the uncanny inherent in the *Dasein*, as well as in *Dasein's* subsequent affect. As the human uncanny is an ontological issue, thus the Swiss uncanny is too. I will demonstrate how the uncanny in Hirschhorn's work is an Heideggerian threshold forward, as an articulated experience. This Heideggerian experience finds the Freudian drives and emotions in the wake of this impetus forward to articulated experience (understanding). Heidegger's ontological experience of the Uncanny requires an assessment through Freud's affect of the uncanny. Thus we will see how Heidegger's assertion of the Uncanny precludes and informs the Freudian Uncanny, as well as the important differences between the two thinkers.

This aesthetic uncanny is a conceptual statement of a relationship between *Dasein* and the world: the issue of the uncanny bears on both the concrete level of cultural phenomena, and then also on the existential level of ontological constitution. The uncanny is also a channel of return (similar to Freud's return of the repressed) to progress—to the progress of social and political identity. Thus, the uncanny in Hirschhorn's video is an existential, aesthetic register through which the problem of Swiss national identity is understood and engaged. The uncanny, a symptom of modernity, is an Heideggerian worldlessness impelling the creation of a new *heimat*, through structures such as technology, specifically the technology of political formations. This angle on the phenomenon is productive for the issue of the uncanny shaped by Hirschhorn providing a clear understanding of a philosophy of being. In our case, a philosophy of codified national identity that can be extended to other national identities. This merits our attention as Switzerland's unique system of *direct* democracy and it's mythic political neutrality casts her as an ideal society, even in the twenty-first century. This paper concludes with an assessment of the Swiss uncanny through Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic polyphony of creative renewal, inaugurated by Fyodor Dostoevsky's literary oeuvre. The uncanny is contextualized by the Dostoevskian character's idea, or achievement, put into question while simultaneously being maintained in its integrity and in its question.

Thomas Hirschhorn: Swiss Contemporary Art

I shall first ascertain the Uncanny through the immediacy of Hirschhorn's 1995 video *Robert Walser Video*, and will later thematize the Uncanny more conceptually. In what way does it do this, and to what extent is this evocation possible aesthetically? The *Robert Walser Video* has an agitprop, carnivalesque spirit demanding an interrogation of its compositional and contextual details with respect to Swiss identity and to the Uncanny. The *Robert Walser Video* is a low-budget and unedited production, save for the basic framing of the set with a sun-glassed Hirschhorn, pressing play on the video camera, ambling back into view to press play on a portable cassette player, and then sitting down, facing the camera, w\ith a makeshift white sheet as the background scenery. The sheet is fitted with a Suprematist[1] abstraction and inversion of the Swiss red and white flag (the Swiss national flag was codified by the first Swiss Constitution in 1848. It is a white cross against a monochromatic red ground. Hirschhorn's video inverts this figure / ground relationship), above which is the text "Robert Walser Video." There is a black and white photographic-cutout of a teenage girl with a ponytail, her visage turning toward the "flag" on the right, perhaps an allegory of Heidi. The formal composition of the sheet is reminiscent of the Constructivist El Lissitzky's agit-propaganda. The top border of the sheet is a scarf, with alternating, knitted blocks of repeating red, white, and black. Hirschhorn wears an argyle sweater in the same color pattern, with the addition of grey blocks. The "podium" upon which the cassette player stands to the right, is covered by what appear to be book covers, each one bearing a black and white photograph against a green background (there are nine: three per row, three per column). As an anomaly, the book cover on the lowest left corner is white. On the periphery, to the left are more knit garments, sweaters or scarves in various colors (hunter green, purple). To the right are sheets of paper, affixed with packing tape to the wall, one with a schematic diagram, the other perhaps an invoice. Both peripheries cut off the objects--or, the objects are not centered fully within the frame of the camera along with Hirschhorn and the sheet. The soundtrack is a quasi-spoken word, extolling "sugar-free jazz," rendered in hip-hop as Hirschhorn moves his head back and forth to the beat.

Altogether, the composition of the work generates a spectacle of a superficial irreverence that gives way to a thoughtful meditation of what become familiar forms in a disquieting second order juxtaposition—the uncanny.

---

1 Suprematism is an early, twentieth century, Russian art movement begun by Kasmir Malevich, with the aim to create a visual, utopian, trans-cultural, thus metaphysical language of basic forms rendered in basic (black, white) and primary colors, formed into simple compositions.

In an interview with art historian Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, Hirschhorn asserts his choice of Robert Walser (as well as other figures he has dedicated videos and altar-installations to) as a subject: "I selected them because of the tragic nature of their lives" (Buchloh 84). Here Hirschhorn signals that the Swiss constructed utopia is actually a dystopia, not only that to which Walser's life arc testifies, but, to Hirschhorn's own. Walser self-interned "to an asylum in order to be able to write" (Buchloh 82) while Hirschhorn discharged himself from a career in the Swiss army, with a penalty of four months in prison, to live in exile and comment on the construction of Swiss identity and life. Buchloh, speaking to Hirschhorn, elaborates: "Yet your efforts at a resuscitation of their memory does not aim at a new cult of these artists. Rather, if one actually ... gets to know Robert Walser ... one gains a more complex understanding of our supposedly modernist history, and of what these artists were actually engaged with, and had to live through" (Buchloch 84). In other words, Hirschhorn's aesthetic of the uncanny—of the profoundly disquieting unfamiliar vis-à-vis the established familiar (codified or not)—is in the tradition of a poet like Walser, who sought refuge from the utopian codifications of isms—modernism—in the unlikely and disquieting setting of an asylum. Walser thus installed himself in a deliberately instituted and provoked constant state of the Uncanny.

To understand how Hirschhorn attaches himself to this same condition of the uncanny, more aptly--the *Swiss* uncanny--we must establish what the uncanny is in Hirschhorn's enframing of Walser. Robert Walser was a self-taught and prolific prose writer. Walser left school as a teenager, born and returned to reside in the Germanic region of Switzerland. Walser interrogated his own life's arc in his writings, demonstrating a tension between acculturation to the national Swiss identity vis-à-vis regional Swiss identity, in texts such as *The Robber* and *Jakob von Gunten*. The protagonists in these works perform their identity. Either with the *effete* public mask of the urbane cosmopolitan or as quintessentially being the unfettered sylvan. As a national hero embodying the arc of the everyman in the world ever with the yen to return to the idyllic pastoral, Walser is situated within the canonical Swiss icons of neutrality: the authentic wholesomeness of the natural, and a recollection of the *Eidgenossen*—farmers, who with a meta-legal and moral verbal pact aimed to abide democratically with each other outside of institutions, systems and isms. In terms of how Walser's poetic form enframes the subsisting tensions within being, asserted Tamara S. Evans asserts there is a "dichotomy so apparent ... between extreme formal reduction on the one side and the confused predicament of creation on the other [that] engenders ironic tensions as well as diffractions of reality that are reflected most poignantly in the ambiguities of Walser's language ..." (Evans 34). Thus notions of (performing) identity within a construct, taken

as an assertive choice of being confronted with values, are interrogated by Walser's choice of syntax (form) vis-à-vis canny and uncanny environs that establish a discourse of processual signification.

Such compositional and narrative elements are significant in their own right, but, more specifically, because of the manner in which Hirschhorn takes these established notions of Walser and situates him in a decidedly artificial, or *constructed*, collage of images that remove any sense of poetry or Romantic semiotic deferral. So doing, he executes a banal Pop Art gesture that suggests the commodification of national identity at the expense of a plural (polyphonic) and dialogic relational discourse. The trendy and upbeat song with meaningless yet catchy lyrics is an explication of an affected, or repressed, engagement with the world— it becomes a nominal figure / ground tension between rhetorical gloss and repression, located in Hirschhorn's deliberate formal composition. Art historian Pamela M. Lee, discussing Hirschhorn's 2005 *UTOPIA, UTOPIA=ONE WORLD, ONE WAR, ONE ARMY, ONE DRESS,* asserts: "For the language of art is everywhere indebted to the rhetoric of figure and ground ... we tend to evaluate what see in terms of figure / ground relations: what stands out ...what seems to retreat; what tension is at work between the object's formal elements" (Lee 8).

This rhetorical denial of reality for the sake of an ersatz and objectified reality, is what Heidegger terms a turning away from the world. This turning away from the world prevents Subjectivity from qualitatively engaging with the *event* provoking this turning away. Turning away is an event that produces the *ethical* process of being. What is ethical— or true being? How is this efficaciousness of being located and produced? Heidegger asserts, "the real confrontation ... brings the thinking that encounters us historically before our thinking and into the open space of a decision, which becomes inevitable through the encounter" (Heidegger *Thinking and Poeticizing* 8). The impetus—the event—causes us to look away from a feeling and its provoked and assigned values— its context is the uncanny. In the uncanny we are confronted with a choice: aesthetically this choice is obtained in a sensuously mediated phenomenology. Heidegger asserts, for a glimmering moment, we see that our being is nothing until it interacts with the world and other beings. Heidegger assesses that being is nothing until it grabs onto, assimilates and reciprocates value. Only in the process of creating value out of the uncanny do we experience being. Understood with the aesthetics of Hirschhorn's *Robert Walser Video* in this way, the Swiss uncanny is experienced by the provocation of Subjectivity in the throes of the uncanny and its subsequent Freudian affect. It is a processual event in choosing to confront or repress the Uncanny as a foundational event of *Dasein* that illuminates Subjectivity's agency in choosing

a value of identity. However, there is a paradox. While codified Swissness attempts to eliminate authentic (variant) subjectivity in favor of the mimetic performativity of national Swiss identity, it impels an Heideggerian fundamental choice of Subjectivity that actively confronts this codification. Subjectivity can then choose to meld with or recuperate value. If Subjectivity chooses to repress the codification, then the Freudian affective uncanny emerges in the wake of the Heideggerian Uncanny event of choice. Hirschhorn is inviting us into this space of both the Uncanny and Choice. I will argue later on that Bakhtin asserts an agency of a polyphonic situation in which Subjectivity is tested in its questioning of events and of values—ideas.

The Uncanny in Hirschhorn's video results from recognizing Walser as a cornerstone of canonized, rich and existential Swiss nationhood—her literature and her culture of identity. Hirschhorn's work does this by way of utilizing the conflation with the hip-hop song that is catchy yet meaningless, with a ghostly decapitated Heidi (another Swiss literary and cultural allusion, this time a world renown children's story), and the dive-bar do-it-yourself aesthetics of the text, the sheet, the thrown knitwear, and the Duchampian arranged papers on the wall. Worse, there is an anonymous man (an elision with Hirschhorn as Swiss) wearing sunglasses, who defiantly situates himself in this paradoxical Uncanny compound, as though he were on the street staging an agit-prop protest. But an agit-prop protest of *what*? Robert Walser's abandonment of formal education? Walser's self-committal to an asylum? Walser's dedication to nature? The answers to these questions do not begin to satisfy Hirschhorn's project as they remain on the level of the political. Beneath these issues, we must appreciate how the Uncanny in the *Robert Walser Video* results from the casual if not subversive treatment of (familiar) Swiss personages, values and accoutrements relating. This compositional treatment is made personal by Hirschhorn figuring himself so prominently as the key protagonist in the context of Swiss iconicity. It is as though Hirschhorn is confronting basic ontological questions of how Subjectivity is structured by the Uncanny provocation of Subjectivity's agency in a confrontation with or in the turning away from (the Freudian repression) of the issue at hand. The Uncanny goes further in ontological structuring than the merely political: Hirschhorn's conceptual figure / ground compositional choices challenge the rhetoric of the political iconicity of Swissness into a provocation of the constitution and performance of being, of identity, at a foundational, ontological level. Hirschhorn puts the Swiss Uncanny in question through the polyphonic experience of other voices on the immanent plane. Hirschhorn navigates how to put the Swiss Uncanny in question per Heidegger, and as we will see, per Bakhtin. We must consider the ontological realm to reap the full richness of Hirschhorn's open provocation of the

(Swiss) Uncanny.

The Swiss Uncanny in Hirschhorn: Heidegger and Freud

Thus far we have seen how the Heideggerian Uncanny compels Subjectivity's agency in choice. However, it remains to be seen how Freud is relevant to the repression of the Heideggerian Uncanny. Hirschhorn's interrogation of the Swiss Uncanny, in its ability to provoke consideration of Swiss identity beyond the political into the ontological, requires an assessment of its symptomatic manifestation as the repressed turn away from confrontation with the Uncanny. This creates a profile on the phenomenon of the Uncanny as evoked through Hirschhorn's work in the constitution of Subjectivity and the pathos of its choices. Let us consider Freud's seminal inception of the uncanny. Freud, compelled by the aesthetics of feeling—their sublimity—also finds the uncanny an issue of the rhetorical and ontological figure / ground relationship. For Freud, the uncanny is an affect. Meaning the uncanny is a learned behavior, a symptom of repression. Heidegger's Uncanny happens *to* us – which is an important distinction from Freud's uncanny which happens as a consequence of being, although one could say the Uncanny happens to us from within the psyche for Freud. The uncanny is determined by a provocative and disquieting unfamiliarity with someone or something exceptionally established as familiar.

The uncanny entails the constitution of the Ego against the Thanatopic drive as it is an anxious repetition of the same value or event to stave off (to repress) the trauma that occurs with full cognition of the value or event's *denouement*. Freud's uncanny consists of "too much material of the same kind … This relation is accentuated by mental processes learning from one of these characters to another … so that one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other … there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (Freud 3686). Freud asserts that consciousness is flooded with associations stemming from what the familiar form—the familiar relation. What is uncanny about this flood of associations is the newly added, unfamiliar forms that are signified from the established, familiar forms and related content. This results in a doppelgänger of Subjectivity that forces a relation between the familiar self and its newly disfigured distortion. This overwhelming amount of new information—forms and values—are obsessively ruminated upon to stave off further disfigurations of the Subject that threatens its established (and learned) Subjectivity. Freud elucidates how the Uncanny is a choice of accepting or repressing the valuation determined by the doubling of the familiar when foregrounded by the unfamiliar, which retains an iconicity of the familiar rendered suddenly incongruous by history and context. That is, Subjectivity is aroused into creating new values from its confrontation with the extended

signification of established values.

The uncanny is easily provoked by a visit to the first home where one grew up. It is familiar in its basic structure, however it has been newly inhabited many times over and given new, canonical features (forms) and values. It is the confluence of one's established ideas of home with the new forms that are instantly strange to one's gestalt as they have been established by the Other. We recognize the basic structure, however it is manifoldly screened through forms and thus values of the unfamiliar—of objectified systems of representation other than our own. The challenge to our gestalt is that there are other equally significant gestalts within the context of our originary enframement. It is a displacement of the self's understanding of himself and his world that makes the Uncanny a viable methodology for reframing narratives—from the national to the masculine to the subjective.

An Aesthetic Enquiry: Withy's *Heidegger On Being Uncanny*

Although Freud merely began to excavate the top soil of the uncanny that, for him, remained to be fully articulated theoretically: "We might say that these preliminary results have satisfied *psycho-analytic* interest in the problem of the uncanny, and that what remains probably calls for an *aesthetic* enquiry. But that would be to open the door to doubts about what exactly is the value of our general contention that the uncanny proceeds from something familiar which has been repressed" (Freud, *Complete Works* 3696). How does Freud's aesthetic enquiry relate to cathected, eidetic formations (forms) of Subjectivity and its (active, performative) identity? The "aesthetic enquiry" Freud alludes to is our ontological interrogation of the uncanny in the eidetic artwork as in the eidetic structuring of life--the psyche's ethical estimation of the good, the just, and so on: of the concept of unfamiliarity within the established, within the familiar. Thus Hirschhorn distorts the Swiss national flag into a Constructivist composition, conflated with a beheaded Heidi that is not painted, but a black and white photocopy that has been cut.

Thus Freud gets us to a point where we can do more work with Heidegger in relation to Hirschhorn, in which Freud's exposition of the uncanny comes up short. Heidegger's Uncanny dwells within such signification demonstrated by Hirschhorn's disquieting formal and thus conceptual framework. Heidegger tells us the Uncanny is an *a priori* process of Subjectivity. This foundational process inherent to Subjectivity forces agency, a choice that constitutes identity. Katherine Withy, in *Heidegger On Being Uncanny*, demonstrates how Freud's affect of the uncanny can be regarded as an authentic experience as a consequence of being. The Freudian uncanny results from a choice that is

made at the very foundational processes of being—being, for Freud, is the interrelationship between the Ego and the Id foregrounded by the Es. Subjectivity for Freud is the filtering of the historicized Thanatopic and Erotic drives, vis-à-vis the symbolic realm of the iconicity of the Ego. Thus the uncanny for Freud is affect and for Heidegger it is an a priori process that ever constitutes the present in a choice, or confrontation with, that basic, a priori process of the Uncanny.

Withy, demonstrating how Heidegger elaborates on Freud's contribution, situates this affect as resulting from an *originary structure* of the Uncanny--one that is within the fundamental structure of being, of the *Dasein*: "There is no *thing* that threatens *Dasein,* and no *thing* that is threatened, just—*nothing*. Thus what threatens, and what is threatened, is *everything*. It is this indefiniteness that drives one to look for reasons, and makes it perplexing that *Dasein* does not just 'get over it' and learn to live with uncanniness" (Withy 73). Stated differently, *Dasein* is in constant confrontation with creating itself. This a significant departure from Freud's rather 'causal' way of reading the Uncanny. When *Dasein* engages with or represses the contested familiarity of its own historicity, its origin, it is engaging with everything when confronted with a lacuna of familiarity. What *Dasein* confronts is not affect, but an ever process of reconciliation with itself—with its origin as everything or nothing depending on its agency of choice, not repression. The Uncanny thus requires an understanding of being that transcends the psychological and thus the political. To wit: we argue and convince others to achieve ideas and objectives. This is based on our social thus psychological acculturation and assimilation--it is learned. Being social and being political is learned. Thus an understanding of the Swiss Uncanny based on Heidegger's grounding of the Freudian uncanny opens the discourse of Swiss national identity to a discourse of the fundamental ontology of being. We must amend the paradigm of psychoanalysis in order to really 'get' at the heart of the Uncanny. Hirschhorn's *Robert Walser Video* juxtaposes a Suprematist abstraction of the Swiss flag with a sugary hip-hop song to elucidate utopian narratives affective of being. The doubling of the Swiss flag, in its primary signification of political neutrality with the utopian visual language of Malevich's movement creates an elision of the political with Suprematism's attempt at constructing a holistic society united by the fundamental shapes of the visual world: squares, triangles, rectangles. It is Hirschhorn's dissection of the ontology of being. The sugary hip-hop song reinforces the Swiss Uncanny, by calling attention to the manufactured identity of Swiss iconicity circulating in popular culture. Yet, why continue with the Swiss Uncanny if we understand it to be an integral and foundational choice of being to either confront it or repress it? Why consider the Freudian affect in detail if it is secondary to *Dasein?* What greater implications can an ontological understanding of the Swiss Uncanny provide?

To understand Withy's delineation of Heidegger's *structural* Uncanny of the *Dasein* vis-à-vis Freud's psychology of the uncanny affect is to clarify that Heidegger is more essential than Freud. Yet Freud's methodology remains relevantly discursive as Freud's uncanny captures the subsequence to the confrontation with the Heideggerian Uncanny. Freud quantifies, or parses, the Heideggerian Uncanny in its residual. The Freudian uncanny, the disquieting of the familiar, is a simulcra--it seems real because it repeats the same thing: an affect or a screen, or an event. The affect of the uncanny is a repression of the *movement* of the structure of being. That is, from the natural, a priori process of the Uncanny. Heidegger, in assessing the postlude from Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil,* asserts, in the essence of willing, out of which the homeless ones will the open space, being itself appears … the essence of absolute subjectivity appears for itself as the will willing itself. The human of this essence leaves the previous human behind while it discovers a new home … and decides what is left behind as home and as the meaning of home in general from the human of the will to power" (Heidegger *Thinking and Poeticizing* 34).

By "will," Heidegger intends *Dasein's* agency, *Dasein's* choice, in the confronting or repressing value. *Dasein* can even choose to layer a palimpsest of value in its agency of being, its agency of identity, by filtering previous values and characteristics with new, nuanced values and characteristics.

Thus the originary process of the Uncanny creates its own doppelgänger--the affect of the uncanny (which is a stultified process, or an objectification into feeling and disassociation with itself and with the world)—as the *Dasein* attempts to reconcile itself relationally with either the uncovering of an unchangeable value or with the repression (the turning away from) the unchangeable value. What is Uncanny is that it is unchangeable, it stands independently of the *Dasein,* and thus reminds the *Dasein* of her finitude of being--the limits of understanding, of the action of choice and thus of being--of the nothingness that faces *Dasein* when she is not in a relational process. Thus, Heidegger asserts: "Even when mortals turn 'inward,' taking stock of themselves, they do not leave behind their belonging …When, as we say, we come to our senses and reflect on ourselves, we come back o ourselves from things *without ever abandoning* our stay among things" (Heidegger *Building, Dwelling, Thinking*). In other words, without ever abandoning an *a priori* processual relationship—an event. Heidegger's thought is always on the level of experience, which is already structured by our hermeneutic disposition, and by our thrownness into the world.

Withy's delineation of the Heideggerian Uncanny, as indebted to Freud's affect of "a sense of helplessness" (Freud *Complete Works,* 3689) is taken as an indication of death,

of which death is not rationally grasped--it is turned away from repeatedly, thus causing the affect of the uncanny. This is the moment when the *Dasein* confronts her imminent nothingness in death, and its counterpoint in the futile attempt to locate an *in sui generis* of the individual *Dasein's* constitution at the beginning of her life, *as a priori*. This uncanniness is a "compulsion powerful enough to overrule the pleasure principle" (Freud, *Complete Works* 3609). Withy interprets this Freudian "compulsion" as a basic structure of being that is primordial and *a priori* to the acculturated Freudian Erotic and Thanatopic drives, as the Heideggerian Uncanny.

Withy states,

> "language or (self-)consciousness, as determinative for man, is neither an invention nor a faculty, but a performative phenomenon, without antecedent or precedent. Man comes to be conscious by grasping himself as such. Thus the essential origin of man is not to be determined by tracing it back to some prior entity, but is to be located in a self-constituting act of self-finding" (Withy 171). Withy asserts that it is in the basic act of relating to the process of the Uncanny, prior to language and its symbolic order, that we locate our identity. For Heidegger, being lies in acting—being is a choice between actions. **QUOTE.** The Uncanny activates the will**:** it is this action that is of an *a priori* process. The Uncanny is Subjectivity's origin, a choice in process that is subsequently characterized by the culture Subjectivity has learned—characterized by its symbolic order.

For Heidegger, action is the implementation of ideas, expressed through the material, the symbolic and the metaphysical. **QUOTE.** Identity is choice—it is action. The Freudian affect is a subsidiary effect depending on the repression of the confrontation with the Uncanny or through the palimpsest nuancing and filtering of value. By calling into question both the process and the affect of the Uncanny, Hirschhorn disrupts the doubling of the ontological self beyond the Swiss political codification of the cultural regional (German, French, Italian or Romansch) and the national. Hirschhorn does so by eliding the Swiss-German identity (with which Walser identified) and the national Swiss identity (which Walser represents at a meta-cultural and meta-political level) and provoking a deconstruction of both into a metaphysical and thus ontological inquiry.

Coda: The Uncanny as Being in Testing

Hirschhorn tests the ideas of regional and national Swiss identity against the Uncanny. He stands in the Socratic tradition of an idea in event. Mikhail Bakhtin, a scholar of Russian literature, asserts that Dostoevsky's reformulation

of the ancient tragic-comedy forms of the mennippea that is the first instance in modern literature to offer the ever creative renewal of Subjectivity. One form of the mennippean tragic in juxtaposition with the comedic, is the irreverent and parodic crowing and de-crowning of a figure foregrounded historically, by tradition. Dostoevsky uses this form of the mennippea to constantly shift grounds between Subjectivities in discourse to rebuke any established or emerging hierarchy of any one person and their expression of Subjectivity asserted by objectified values. Dostoevsky does not allow for a coagulation of being—being is ever thrown into choice, into action which validates it as authentic being. Bakhtin discusses this in terms of ritual, extant in culture since the beginning of time, which unifies a group (a culture, the Swiss) in place and in time through a dramatic reiteration of values.

Bakhtin elucidates the crowning / de-crowning ritual as one event revoking the traditional positive and negative binaries (utopian—dystopian; Swiss—not Swiss; Swiss German; Swiss French; Züricher—Genevoise) through which being is constructed and signified:

> … this is not an abstract thought but a living sense of the world, expressed in the concretely sensuous forms (either experienced or play-acted) of the ritual act. Crowning / de-crowning is a dualistic ambivalent ritual, expressing the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of the shift-and-renewal, the joyful relativity of all structure and order, of all authority and all (hierarchical) position. Crowning already contains the idea of immanent de-crowning: it is ambivalent from the very start. And he who is crowned is the antipode of a real king, a slave or a jester; this act, as it were, opens and sanctifies the inside-out world of carnival (Bakhtin 124).

Bakhtin is useful in understanding the Uncanny—Heideggerian, Freudian, and the focus of this paper, Hirschhorn's provocation of the Swiss Uncanny. "The concretely sensuous forms" are objectifications of feeling based on the juxtaposition of values—ideas. As we have seen, both the Heideggerian and Freudian Uncanny result from a basic juxtaposition, an ambivalence, of values that crucially signify being—identity. The Heideggerian Uncanny is a juxtaposition of the familiar with the unfamiliar, the disquieting doubling of the familiar within different contexts. The Freudian affect of the Uncanny results from the repression of this confrontation. Returning to Bakhtin, he asserts this processual play of meaning that is ever inverted by the elevation (the choosing) of facets of Subjectivity as an event of the Heideggerian Uncanny. Values, ideas, hierarchy are all rendered relevant to an aesthetic (a choice) of conscious engagement.

Considering Hirschhorn's *Robert Walser Video* with Bakhtin, we partake in the crowning and de-crowing of codified Swiss nationalism signified by the parodic Swiss national flag, attentive to the paradoxical life arc of Robert Walser as a paragon of Swiss sylvan (Rousseauian) literature, the parody of alpinism with kitschy knitwear, and a parody of Hirschhorn himself as Swiss and as a contemporary (Swiss) artist. Hirschhorn is quite aware of the pivot hinging the ever impending "reversal," or the reconsideration, of Subjectivity that is continually impelled by the Uncanny. The *Robert Walser Video* is tragic as it is comic: it openly plays with codified (hierarchical) Swiss values while tearfully giving space, time and importance to a Swiss cultural figure such as Walser. Walser is given importance as this is the familiar context into which Swiss identity is thrown into. Walser is the doubled familiar context, or the Uncanny of being born within the performative borders of a Swiss village, canton, or cultural region. Walser's ambivalence toward his own existential goals is signaled by the perpetual Uncanny of his later years in an asylum—by choice. Walser remained ever foregrounded by the Heideggerian Uncanny in his the Freudian milieu of the asylum—the venue for ultimate repression and denial, the venue for the ultimate avoidance of the constitution of Swissness. Thus Hirschhorn tests Swissness with the Uncanny—with being in action. Swiss nationalism is a Bakhtinian event (ritual) provoked by the Uncanny that forces each person to ever reassess Swissness to signify herself as an *idea in event* rather that within a prescribed iconicity to test Subjectivity within itself for a relational signification—a signification of Subjectivity with itself at a foundational (identity-forming) level, with other Subjectivities, and with the signification of culture.

Thus (Situating) the Swiss Uncanny

This paper considers a hermeneutics of essential being that exists prior to the cultural, the political and the psychological. Heidegger's most fundamental assertion is that being is a choice: it is an action. Being as a constitutional process, as an event, that decides Subjectivity's path through a context of signification. Thus being is acting in the world, or creating a world—a structure of identification and thus identity. A direct confrontation with worlding or a turning-away from worlding to prevent an existential trauma is Uncanny to Subjectivity. The Uncanny occurs when established reality is newly cathected within a disquieting framework, a set of values, that expands the familiar beyond its normative context. Thus the Uncanny can be a useful methodology to interpret the identity of Subjectivity, useful in decoding constructs of diasporas and the unification of irredentist tendencies within a community—within a culture.

In this paper I have applied the methodology of Heidegger's Uncanny with its Freudian affect that occurs with the repression, or turning away from an engagement with values and the world. The Freudian Uncanny is relevant to Heidegger's ontology of the Uncanny as it occurs in its wake. If the Heideggerian Uncanny happens to Subjectivity, the Freudian Uncanny happens as a consequences of that Subjectivity's choice. Thus the values in play, such as codified Swiss nationalism, focused through the work of contemporary Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn. Relevant areas left aside in this paper for future work with the Swiss Uncanny and an applicable methodology of the Uncanny are: a consideration of the Levinasian exchange between Subjectivities favoring the Other as "thou;" performance theory; affect theory; Lacan's elaborations of Freud, especially the triad of Real, Symbolic and Imaginary signification of the Ego; and a consideration of the iconicity of island boundaries. Also left aside in this one project is a comparison between the work of Thomas Hirschhorn and that of an equally established peer.

It could be argued that Switzerland has maintained a stable democracy since its formal inception. It can be maintained that Switzerland is a democracy that has successfully resisted fascism, communism and militarism, irrespective of a deliberate construct of one, unifying identity at the national level. Why consider a Swiss Uncanny? Switzerland—a collective working together towards values of neutrality, peace, and authentic democracy—can benefit from an *unrepressed* worlding of her values, removed from the iconicity of totalizing narratives of patriarchal, Platonic universals. Switzerland, at the individual level, could further her determined political positioning by modeling an integrity and authenticity of being—one that demonstrates true choice. This creates a true identity valorized and expressed at the individual level as a Heideggerian model for problematic collectives elsewhere. One in which nuance is celebrated as it test the verity of the values in play within context—within a polyphony of Subjectivities.

One could also raise the contention that Hirschhorn constitutes an anarchistic, thus nihilistic view of Swiss nationalism. One that leans toward the monolithic, the totalitarian, the Platonic. Bakhtin demonstrates the Uncanny as a testing process of Subjectivity—of Subjectivity's choice of identifying values and their signification that necessarily evolve—in the context of an unrepressed community, refines value at relevant moments in time that is ever viable variety of choice for signification, for action.

Thus this paper argues for a reconsideration of the utopian figuration of Swiss national identity as it problematizes, confounds, and represses individual subjectivity. The Swiss Uncanny as performed by Hirschhorn's *Robert Walser Video* demonstrates how a methodology of the uncanny can recuperate a nationalist narrative from static iconicity to a ever becoming qualification of its identifying values. This favors an authentic subjectivity at the individual level as a subjectivity that is, as Heidegger demonstrates, essentially open to change and does not quantify values and other subjectivities in hierarchy—be it at the service of the national or the economic. The repression of this openness is culturally expressed by the repetition of the iconicity—the Freudian affect of the uncanny. Bakhtin can recuperate this social repression in repetition of static quantifications of identity by asserting the validity of parody, or the inversion of austere iconicity to recuperate the Freudian uncanny into a Socratic dialogue consistent with Heidegger's assertion of being as choice in time and space.

References

1. Agamben G (2007) The Coming Community. Trans. Michael Hardt. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.

2. Arendt H, Kohn J (1994) Essays in Understanding 1930-1954: Formation, Exile and Totalitarianism. Schocken Books, New York.

3. Bahktin M (1999) Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. Ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson. University of Minnesota: Minneapolis. Kindle.

4. Bishop C, Egenhofer E, Foster H, Joseph M, Raymond Y, et al. (2011) Thomas Hirschhorn: Establishing a Critical Corpus. jpr ringier: Zürich.

5. Bowie A (2003) Aesthetics and Subjectivity from Kant to Nietzsche. Manchester University Press: New York.

6. Dosteovsky F (2002) The Brothers Karamazov. Richard P, Larissa V (Trans.), Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, Kindle.

7. Dolar M (1991) I Shall Be with You on Your Wedding-Night: Lacan and the Uncanny. Rendering the Real (Autumn) 58: 5-23.

8. Foster H (2004) Prosthetic Gods. October Books / MIT Press: Cambridge.

9. Foster H (1996) The Return of the Real. October Books / MIT Press: Cambridge.

10. Foucault M (1994) The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Knowledge. New York: Vintage.

11. Freud S (1995) Civilization and Its Discontents. In: Gay P (Ed.), The Freud Reader. W.W. Norton & Co.

12. Freud S (2010) The Uncanny. In: Smith I (Ed.), The

Complete Works of Freud.

13. Heidegger M (2008) Being and Time. MacQuarrie J, Robinson E (Trans.). Harper Perennial: New York.

14. Heidegger M (1993) Building Dwelling Thinking. In: David Farrell K (Ed.), Basic Writings. Harper Collins Publishing: San Francisco.

15. Heidegger M (2011) Introduction to Philosophy—Thinking and Poetizing. Jacques Braunstein P (Trans.). Indiana University Press: Indianapolis.

16. Heidegger M (1993) On the Essence of Truth. In: David Farrell K (Ed.), Basic Writings. Harper Collins Publishing: San Francisco.

17. Heidegger M (1993) The Origin of the Work of Art. In: David Farrell K (Ed.), Basic Writings. Harper Collins Publishing: San Francisco.

18. Heidegger M (1993) The Question Concerning Technology. In: David Farrell K (Ed.), Basic Writings. Harper Collins Publishing: San Francisco.

19. Hirschhorn T (2013) Critical Laboratory: The Writings of Thomas Hirschhorn. Lee L, Foster H (Eds.), October Books / MIT Press: Cambridge.

20. Hirschhorn T (2000) Jumbo Spoons and Big Cake. The Art Institute of Chicago: Chicago.

21. Hirschhorn T (2005) Utopia, Utopia=One World, One War, One Army, One Dress. Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston.

22. Jünger E (2008) On Pain. David C Durst (Trans.), Telos Press Publishing: New York.

23. Lacan J (1998) Anamorphosis. In: Jacques-Alain Miller (Ed.), The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Sheridan A (Trans.). Norton & Company: New York.

24. Lacan J (2014) Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X. Jacques-Alain Miller (Ed.), Price AR (Trans.). Polity Press: Malden.

25. Masschelein A (2012) The Unconcept: The Freudian Uncanny in Late Twentieth Century Theory. State University of New York Press: Albany.

26. Nietzsche FW (2007) On the Genealogy of Morality. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Ed.), Diethe C (Trans.). Cambridge University Press: New York.

27. Nietzsche FW (2008) Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book For All and None. Common T (Trans.). Project Gutenberg.

28. Vidler A (1994) The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely. The MIT Press: Cambridge, Print.

29. Withy K (2009) Heidegger On Being Uncanny. Diss. University of Chicago.

30. Yates C (2013) Poetizing and the Question of Measure. Studia Philosophia Christianae.

31. Žižek S (2008) The Sublime Object of Ideology. Verso: New York.