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### **Artmaking, Subjectivity, and Signification**

Drawing upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, neuroscience brain research, and the practices of contemporary artists Ann Hamilton, Jasper Johns, Elizabeth Murray, and Oliver Herring, this article argues for the relevance of conscious and unconscious knowledge in artistic practice. Parallels drawn between Lacanian psychoanalytic clinical practice and artistic practice demonstrate a meaningful interdisciplinary alliance forged through a shared interest in conferring agency on the unconscious. The description of a recent graduate art education course, designed around artistic practices with conscious and unconscious knowledge, strongly exemplifies the pedagogical implications of the foregoing investigation.

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**As art education professors, art teachers, and students, we do not know enough about how meaning is produced through artmaking.** Often, artists themselves cannot give articulated or nuanced accounts of their signifying practices. Drawing upon Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the present article wrestles with this issue in an investigation of artmaking as a consequence of both conscious and unconscious thought processes. Scholar Shoshana Felman (1993) similarly theorizes literary practices of writing and reading as a deadly struggle between conscious and unconscious knowledge, and the following discussion focuses on this struggle. The discussion also incorporates related findings from neuroscience brain research into insight and problem solving to amplify and support this position. While the two theoretical discourses—psychoanalytic theory and cognitive neuroscience—derive from very dissimilar perspectives and aims, they share a common regard for thought processes other than deliberate mind fulness.

The article begins with an account of installation artist Ann Hamilton’s artistic practice as a demonstration of how artmaking operates at both conscious and unconscious levels. Following this presentation, the article examines Lacan’s conception of unconscious knowledge followed by scholars Dany Nobus and Malcolm Quinn’s (2005) theorizing of Lacanian psychoanalytic practice as a failure of conscious knowledge. The implications of Lacanian clinical practice, as Nobus and Quinn explicate, purposively invoke unconscious subjective truth, a clinical strategy that has implications for artistic practice as a similarly contested site characterized by tensions between conscious and unconscious knowledge. A brief account of current brain research and insight follows with findings that offer interesting neuroscientific parallels to psychoanalytic concepts of conscious and unconscious thought processes. Subsequently, the article looks at painters Jasper Johns and

Elizabeth Murray and sculptor, video, and performance artist Oliver Herring to further exemplify the relevance of these different modes of thinking for artistic practice. In the latter section of the article, a description of a recent graduate art education course, “Image Makers or Meaning Makers,” addresses the pedagogical implications of the previous investigation of psychoanalytic theory, neuroscience brain research, and contemporary artistic practice.<sup>1</sup>

### **Installation Artist Ann Hamilton**

Although discursive and symbolic knowledge figure prominently in Ann Hamilton’s practice, she consistently undercuts language to evacuate a space for non-discursive ways of knowing. Critic Joan Simon (2002) recounts that in Hamilton’s MFA installation, *the space between memory* (1985), “language became a palpable material” (p.44). For this work, Hamilton instructed a fellow graduate student to enunciate a Swedish text. It was not, however, the content of the text that mattered— most viewers would have found it incomprehensible—but rather, the rhythm of the reader’s enunciations that became of consequence.

Frequently, Hamilton’s installations include language transformed in ways that frustrate comprehension such as barely audible whispering, garbled speech or, as in *mantle* (1998), radio receivers picking up overlapping voices, static, and Morse code. Such actions emphasize the materiality of language as do the attendants in Hamilton’s installations systematically, line-by-line, erasing, cutting, or burning printed text. In conversation with museum studies professor Mary

Coffey (2001), Hamilton articulates the function of language in her practice. She remarks,

A lot of people have asked me if I am trying to make a prelinguistic sort of work by erasing text. I don’t think I’m doing that at all. I’m very interested in the hierarchies of our habits of perception, and how, if something can be contained within the discursive structure of words, that we trust it will have more legitimacy than other kinds of information or ways of knowing. I think that I’m just trying to take this access and tilt it, so that the felt-quality of the words is equal to, but not dominant over, other kinds of sensory perceptions. (p.15)

In critic Lynne Cooke’s (1999) critique of *tropos*, Hamilton further explains her regard for sensate experience. She remarks, “you have to trust the things you can’t name ... You feel through your body, you take in the world through your skin” (p. 1).

For Hamilton, conceiving ways to transform the discursive represents a conscious intellectual act; however, the artist’s comments from an interview with critic Lynne Cooke (1999) suggest other options at work as well. In this interview Hamilton observes,

On one level you do this intellectualized research and you think you’re really onto something—but it’s almost as if you’re keeping yourself busy because you’re blind to deeper issues. It’s like you set up a process that allows these issues to rise to the surface. And as my research takes its own path it almost forms an organism within which each project occurs. (p. 25)

Hamilton’s comments strongly remind one of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s privileging of subjective truth and Nobus and Quinn’s (2005) descriptions of Lacanian psychoanalytic practice as “a ‘game beneath the game,’ in which the mind is wagered against the goal of subjective truth ... The darkness or ‘death’ of the mind becomes the light for the subject ...” (p.148). This is not thinking outside of the box but remaining attentive to issues turning up from more subjective sources. The ensuing discussions further explicate these and other related concepts from Lacanian theory and clinical practice as a ground for comprehending conceptualization and subjectivity in artistic practice.

### **Lacan and the Unconscious**

Early 20th-century Surrealist and Dadaist artists and literary figures, influenced by the emergence of Freudian psychology, considered the unconscious to be a liberating force, freeing

society from the repressions of society and social conventions.<sup>2</sup> Surrealist recognition of the unconscious steered artistic practice away from cerebral rationality toward the irrational, emotive, and intuitive aspects of human experience. Lacan's personal interest in Surrealism, association with literary and artistic Surrealist figures such as André Breton, Salvador Dali, and George Bataille, along with publishing several early articles in the Surrealist journal *Minotaure*, has been well documented. Drawn to Surrealism, Lacan enthusiastically sympathized with the Surrealists' rejection of socially enforced rationality and logic to rather embrace the more subjective irrational aspects of human experience.

With its emphasis on discourse and the textually constructed self, contemporary poststructuralist theory has minimized psychological persuasions regarding subjectivity. Lacanian scholar Marshall Alcorn (1994) considers that Lacan, however, has uniquely synthesized these two very different conceptions of the subject, the psychoanalytic and the poststructuralist. Alcorn observes, "for Lacan, relations between discourse and the subject are two sided. The subject operates upon discourse, and discourse operates upon the subject" (p. 27). Importantly, for the present purposes, this theoretical duality permits theorizing meaning making in artistic practice as highly engaged with the social order, but concomitantly, in a decidedly subjective manner.

Lacan adopts Freud's tripartite structural model of the psyche, the id, ego, and superego, but, as Eugene Goodread (1991) observes, "transfers the site of psychoanalysis from the ego to the id" (p.145). Lacan finds the ego to be deceptive and false, deliberately fashioned with signifiers taken from the symbolic order to represent an idealized version of the self. Hence, authentic subjectivity resides, for Lacan (2006a), only in the involuntary constructions of the unconscious. As an unintentional construction formed from repressions of the symbolic order, Lacan considers the unconscious to be a more

credible source of subjectivity than the consciously manipulated ego.

In thinking through subjectivity and artistic practice, I prefer Alcorn's position expressed in his contention that discourse operates upon the subject and the subject upon discourse. It is this interaction that secures attention in this study. The artist acts upon discourse consciously intellectualizing their practice, but also, by overtly making a space for the unconscious, permits discourse to act upon them. This does not negate the fact that the unconscious will intrude uninvited into the artist's practice, as Freud and Lacan theorized the disruption of conscious speech with slips of the tongue, jokes, and so forth; however, the focus of this study resides with the artist's *knowing* efforts to entreat unconscious knowledge. That is, although the unconscious is always directly inaccessible manifesting itself as a disruption to conscious thought, the artist can create fertile conditions for allowing and acknowledging these types of intrusions. In the previous description of Ann Hamilton's practice, for example, the artist recognized deeper ideas and concepts that emerged although she was not consciously pursuing them. Hamilton's (qtd in Cooke, 1999) remark, "it's like you set up a process that allows these issues to rise to the surface" (¶25), identifies the focus of this study in seeking to understand how the artist can design his or her practice in ways that overtly permit the functioning of the unconscious. Later observations from Jasper Johns and Elizabeth Murray suggest a similar recognition and valuing of creating this space as their practice.

Lacan followed Freud in linking the unconscious with language but argued against his biological formation to famously characterize the unconscious as structured like a language. In *Seminar VII* Lacan (1992) asserted,

We only grasp the unconscious finally when it is explicated, in that part of it which is articulated into words. It is for this reason that we have the right ... to recognize that the unconscious itself has in

the end no other structure than the structure of language. (p. 32)

Both Freud and Lacan theorized partial knowledge of the unconscious through coded verbal signs such as omissions, slips of the tongue, hierarchies, negations, paralipsis, pauses, and mixed metaphors (Fink, 2007). In a deliberate effort to suppress conscious discourse and draw out unconscious expression, Lacanian psychoanalytic practice aims to evoke such speech. Dany Nobus and Malcolm Quinn (2005) conceptualize Lacanian psychoanalytic practice in these terms figuring it as a failure of knowledge. The following, Nobus and Quinn's account of clinical strategies enacted by the Lacanian analyst, offers a useful perspective for thinking through the artist's efforts to invoke unconscious thought in artistic practice.

### **The Failure of Knowledge**

Nobus and Quinn (2005) explain Lacanian psychoanalytic practice as an active instigation to occasion the failure of conscious knowledge whereby the analyst attempts to elicit unconscious speech from the analysand [patient] in the form of verbal omissions, slips of the tongue, hierarchies, negations, paralipsis, pauses, and mixed metaphors. Nobus and Quinn conceptualize these signs of unconscious speech as the fulfillment of a Lacanian analytic goal in which "the analysand is guided not towards a moment of (self) recognition, as the culmination of a Socratic 'know thyself,' but towards a practice of non-recognition in which knowledge appears as a foreign substance" (p.111); hence, the failure of knowledge.

Nobus and Quinn (2005) assert that the aims of Lacanian psychoanalytic practice are not achieved by thinking outside the box nor the result of conscious will. They explain,

The whole notion of activity is shifted from the inner workings of a mind towards an action that is taken *against* its integrity ... success is not achieved by following a set of codes and rules, substituting one discourse or discipline for another, or by

'thinking outside the box.' Success is instead insured by a 'game beneath the game,' in which the mind is wagered against the goal of subjective truth ... The darkness or 'death' of the mind becomes the light for the subject. (p.148)

Almost a cliché for creative and innovative behavior, the notion of 'thinking outside the box' involves conscious knowledge and intellectualization. It is not an instance of unconscious thought. This becomes an important point in thinking about artistic practice whereby unconscious thought might be confused with novelty or cleverness. Attempting to shut down conscious thought, avoiding conscious contemplation, is quite different from skillfully pondering canny possibilities.

In Lacanian psychoanalytic practice, the analyst withdraws normative intersubjective relationships with the analysand, playing dumb, feigning blindness, deliberately mishearing and other such deliberate tactics designed to undermine conscious knowledge. Further, Lacan (2006b) emphatically declares that the analyst directs the treatment but not the patient (p. 492). He compares the clinical experience to a bridge game in which the analyst enlists the aid of the dummy [*le mort*], suggesting that the analyst's feelings "have only one possible place in the game, that of the dummy" (p. 493). Nobus and Quinn (2005) interpret Lacan's directives as requiring the analyst "to absent and negate his own agency, not performing as a demanding, suggestible, or competitive subject, but conducting the treatment in a manner that does not lead or seduce the analysand" (p. 169).

Nobus and Quinn's (2005) description of Lacanian psychoanalytic clinical practices, asserting agency over conscious knowledge, intimates possible considerations for artistic practice. That is, might the artist also operate similarly, absencing and negating agency over the work; directing the treatment, but not the work; and suspending

their usual rules for practice, purposively playing dumb, feigning blindness, and mishearing? Such actions could figuratively describe artistic practice when the artist voluntarily surrenders intellectual control. The following discussion of neuroscience brain research, advocating the necessity for similar inattentive behavior in achieving insights with problem solving, offers additional support for such strategies.

### **Cognitive Neuroscience and Insight**

Widely acclaimed author Jonah Lehrer (2008) recounts cognitive neuroscientist Mark Jung-Beeman's investigation of brain activity and insight. In this accounting, Lehrer presents Jung-Beeman's observation that insight requires both the left and right brain hemispheres. Charged with different functions, the left hemisphere excels at denotation while the right hemisphere deals with "everything that gets left out of a dictionary definition, such as the emotional charge in a sentence or metaphor" (p. 41). Lehrer enlists Jung-Beeman's explanation that "language is so complex that the brain has to process it in two different ways at the same time ... it needs to see the forest *and* [emphasis in the original] the trees. The right hemisphere is what helps you see the forest" (p. 41).

Through their research into the insight process, Jung-Beeman and his colleague John Kounios discovered that the brain first intently focuses all its attention on the problem at hand. Lehrer (2008) notes Jung-Beeman's and Kounios' explanation that "once the brain is sufficiently focused, the cortex needs to relax to seek out the more remote association in the right hemisphere, which will provide the insight" (p. 43). Lehrer additionally reports that Jung-Beeman and Kounios surprisingly found "trying to force an insight can actually prevent the insight" (p. 43). According to Lehrer, Jung-Beeman and Kounios conclude, "while it's commonly assumed that the best way to solve a difficult problem is to focus, minimize distractions, and pay attention only to the relevant details, this clenched state of mind may inhibit the

sort of creative connections that lead to sudden breakthroughs" (p. 43).

Jung-Beeman and Kounios' recognition of two types of brain activity, one characterized by intentional focus and the other distinguished by a more relaxed, distracted state of mind, suggest psychoanalytic practice that acknowledges the presence of both conscious and unconscious thought in the clinical setting.<sup>3</sup> The ensuing discussion examines this dichotomy further as it is also manifested in the artistic practices of painters Jasper Johns and Elizabeth Murray, installation artist Ann Hamilton, and sculptor and video and performance artist Oliver Herring.

### **Painters Jasper Johns and Elizabeth Murray**

Although recognized as a highly intellectual painter, Jasper Johns speaks of the benefits of focusing on the *making* of a work rather than its meaning. In David Sylvester (1997) Johns explains, "it may be that focusing on the making diminishes thinking about what one intends the work to mean, leaves the unconscious with room in which to operate, allows meaning to accrue without interference" (p. 10). Sylvester notes that to this end, Johns frequently fills his sketchbooks with drawing commands to be carried out in his painting practice. These commands take the form of nonsense such as "Take a skull. Cover it with paint. Rub it against canvas. Skull against canvas" (p. 10). Johns' drawing commands particularly impress because the artist is known to exercise considerable intellectual command over his practice. Johns' abdication of such control evinces a belief in the merit of alternative modes of conceptualization. The following remarks by painter Elizabeth Murray (2001-2007) are similarly suggestive of deliberate intentions to forego intellectual control. Murray observes,

For a couple of years I've been working with cutting out shapes and kind of glomming them together and *letting it go where it may* [emphasis added]. Like basically making a zigzag shape and making a rectangular shape and a circular

bloopy fat cloudy shape and just putting them all together and *sort of letting the cards fall where they may* [emphasis added]. And I don't know why I am doing it this way.... The thing that has been hard about these paintings is that I don't know how I am going to get them resolved. *It's like the resolution has to happen without anybody seeing it, not even me* [emphasis added]. (p. 2)

Murray's admission to an invisibility inhabiting her practice reflects psychoanalytic claims for the surreptitious arrival of the unconscious as well as Jung-Beeman and Kounois' finding that insights occur when one is not looking or trying so hard. Later, it will be found that this same notion emerged from a graduate student participating in an art education artmaking course.

#### **Oliver Herring: Chance Encounters**

In his internationally renowned public project, *TASK*—performed at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (2006), the University of Maryland, and performances at the Seattle Public library in Seattle (2008), as well as in Philadelphia, Toronto, and San Francisco)—Oliver Herring turns over intellectual control to strangers. For the performance, Herring provides an array of props, writes a number of simple tasks, places the written tasks in separate envelopes, and sets up basic rules. Prior to the performance, Herring instructs the selected performers to bring three sets of clothes to personalize the experience and communicate how they want to present themselves to the audience. Additionally, Herring enjoins the performers to bring printed reference material as a possible resource during the performance. The performers receive no other information other than the time, location, and date of the performance.

To begin the performance, participants take an envelope, apply themselves to fulfilling the task, write a new task, put it in the task pool, and then select a new task. Herring produces the entire

performance, 5 to 8 hours, in three acts with two intermissions. Herring notes that after about 5 or 10 minutes the performance is self-generating and one doesn't know what is going to happen (Herring, 2001-2007).

For the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden *TASK* performance, Herring chose a diverse group of 60 persons from a pool of 700 volunteers. Assistant Curator Kristen Hileman (2006) describes the heterogeneous group of volunteers as “members of the military, community activists, teachers, restaurant workers, doctors, ministers, scientists, lawyers, high school and college students, hairstylists, retirees, IT workers, and self-described ‘bureaucrats’ and ‘vagabonds’” (p. 1). Individually and collaboratively, the volunteers performed tasks such as build a small monument to the people of DC; declare war; build an army; stop, drop and roll; stand on one of the tables that are used for writing tasks and move your legs for as long as you deem necessary; and find two participants who speak languages you don't understand and have them talk to each other in those languages for a minute.

Herring's attitude toward artistic control is of particular interest. In an interview with writer Lindsay Warner (2007), the artist remarks, “I never go into a project with any preconceived ideas or plans ... I trust the moment to generate something with the people involved” (p. 3). He further admits to writer Susan Sollins (2007), “once I gained the confidence to just play with the unexpected and the more chance I could incorporate into the work, the more my work grew because I couldn't predict what would happen” (p. 150). Parallels between Herring's construction of *TASK* and Jasper Johns' drawing commands could be drawn as both artists construct specific conditions that discharge artmaking beyond the artist's control. One difference rests with how Johns and Herring produce meaning from the intentional letting go. For Johns, significance derives from working through the results of the command in his painting. For Herring, the process

is not as direct. Although the *TASK* website indicates that the performers generate meaning in personal reflections of themselves and others, endowing the often pointless and foolish tasks with significance, Herring elects not to participate in performing the tasks but documents the event with a video recorder.<sup>4</sup> Meaning for Herring derives from a larger perspective of the totality of the event. In a letter composed to the 60 participants from the Hirshhorn performance, Herring suggests a future collective effort to structure the video footage, still photographs, and written recollections into a more meaningful document. Herring (n.d.) states, "I am curious to see what happens if we collectively shape the material into something unexpected, like the actual performance itself" (p. 5). Herring's desire to structure the documentation of the *TASK* performance could appear as an effort to further grasp the meaning of the event. Shaping the documentation suggests the struggle Felman (1993) theorizes between conscious and unconscious knowledge. Thus, renouncing conscious control is not sufficient in itself; the artist must imbue the surrender with significance.

The brief look at the practices of four contemporary artists foregrounds the concerted effort artists undertake to create distinct conditions for engaging conscious and unconscious thought. The following relates the pedagogical implications of this conception of artistic practice with a description of a recent graduate art education course, "Image Makers or Meaning Makers."

#### **Image Makers or Meaning Makers**

Throughout the graduate course, "Image Makers or Meaning Makers," reflection played a major role in class discussions and student journaling. Given that meaning and purpose intertwine, the students' first reflective task was contemplating the questions: (a) Why make art? and (b) Why do I make art? Establishing this essential foundation was requisite for pursuing the course purpose to investigate meaning making as it transpires in artistic practice. The course took

the form of a sequence of artmaking experiences, alternately designed around conscious and unconscious knowledge, and interspersed with the study of contemporary artists' practices, reflective writing, and group discussions. The goal was not to produce a final body of work but to set a reflective process in motion, one that would strengthen and intensify understandings of meaning making and artistic practice. The instructions for the final presentations directed the students to primarily focus on the evolution of their artmaking process during the course, rather than the final works. The expectation was that such a process would continue after the conclusion of the course.

To commence the artmaking process, each student selected a big idea, defined as broad, comprehensive, representations of significant human experience and also selected related topics. The chosen big ideas that directed the students' artmaking throughout the course included place, memory, social illnesses, power, and identity. The students' selection of related topics supplied the big ideas with obligatory focus and specificity as, for example, the big idea of memory inspired topics such as family history, social history, personal experience, storytelling, time, forgetting, mapping, and identity. Armed with big ideas, the students produced a visual grid of objects that could be possibly associated with their big idea and topic. Additionally, the graduate students unpacked their big ideas and topics linguistically with lists of key terms and concepts. Next, through larger drawings, the students created additional meaning for their big idea and topic by positioning and repositioning selected objects from the visual grid into diverse contexts. These beginning exercises stressed conscious knowledge and intellectual activity as students purposively constructed meaning through generated associations and relationships.

Students subsequently switched to a more intuitive thinking mode taking up Jasper Johns' drawing commands strategy. One successful technique for working with the drawing

commands involved utilizing sculptor Richard Serra's (2002) well-known "Verb List." Produced during the era of Process Art, Serra accumulated more than 100 verbs for processes that could be done to or with a given material including such terms as "to roll," "to crease," "to bend," "to disarrange," "to rotate," and "to gather." Selecting terms from Serra's list, the students wrote drawing commands for themselves and other students, placed them in a common pool, and randomly selected a drawing command for their own artmaking. Engaging the commands as an impetus for investigating their big idea, the students proceeded without pre-thinking the end results. Meaning was derived as the students subsequently reflected on the resultant artworks. Often the drawing commands posed new directions for students' understandings of their big idea, ones they continued in other works.

To contrast the impromptu approach fostered by the drawing commands, the students were then

occupied in studying the oppositional strategies that construct photographer Shirin Neshat's black-and-white photographic series, *The Women of Allah* (1993-1997), and in reading an excerpt from author Peter Elbow's (1993) essay, "The Uses of Binary Thinking." After these preliminary activities, students created their own series of oppositions for further artmaking with their big ideas.

Succeeding this conscious intellectualizing of their big idea with oppositions, the students joined in producing artworks from a random assortment of items purchased from the local dollar stores. Commonplace items such as drinking straws, google eyes, fortune cookies, maps, plastic toys, envelopes, kitchen utensils, feathers, toothpaste, reading glasses, toothpicks, balloons, coffee filters, safety pins, string, rubber bands, stickers, clothes pins, wrapping paper, and mirrors became the students' artistic media.

The students were given permission to play with the unexceptional materials. They had witnessed artist Jessica Stockholder's unorthodox installations composed of consumer objects and Ann Hamilton's installations fabricated with highly unconventional materials such as 60,000 cut flowers, two tons of horsehair, 200 hundred canaries, five male peacocks, 40,000 pounds of flour, 4,000 used blue work

uniforms, 14,000 human and animal teeth, and 750,000 copper pennies. The play was semi-structured imposing rules requiring the students to focus on their big idea, utilize the dollar store items, and work from a specific play strategy such as revealing and concealing, staging fictions, or creating reversals. The sizeable accumulation of dollar store items along with the injunction to play seemed to electrify the students. The enthusiasm for making became palpable. The students' written comments indicated that, surprisingly, they discovered play to be a highly responsive strategy for conceptualizing ideas.

Encountering artmaking as an engagement with unconscious knowledge was unexpectedly radical for many of the students. Their final papers professed being exceptionally challenged to alter customary ways of artmaking, recognize quintessentially different ways of working, admit to previous formulaic artmaking, and acknowledge sometimes strong resistance in forsaking comfortable patterns of practice. Regardless of their prior level of artmaking, these experiences seemed to call prior conceptions of artmaking into question. However, the students also expressed a positive enthusiasm and appreciation for what they gained from the experience. One MFA student remarked that he had found himself somewhat lost after his first year of graduate school, but felt he now understood how sometimes looking too hard can blind one and that he had acquired a set of tools that would allow him to see significant connections in his work.

### **Summation**

This present article has extended a Lacanian paradigm to artistic practice as an opening effort. Art educator Jan Jagodzinski's (1997, 2004, 2005) exceptional research into contemporary youth culture from a Lacanian paradigm represents the substantial depth to be attained from the employment of this vantage point. Jagodzinski skillfully draws upon Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts of subjectivity, identity, transgression, desire and alienation, the Law, and an ethics of the Real to explore the impact of contemporary media on youth culture. This same psychoanalytic discourse could comparably deepen

our understandings of artistic practice, raising an appreciation for, among others, issues such as voice, identity and recognition, the power of desire, resistance and disruption, master signifiers, and the pursuit of the Real as an expansion of our conceptualization of artistic practice.

As Jagodzinski demonstrates in his work, a Lacanian perspective positions art learning within the realm of the socio-cultural as well the subjective. Lacanian scholar Marshall Alcorn's (1994) earlier observation that, "the subject operates upon discourse, and discourse operates upon the subject" (p. 27), also evidences the fact that a Lacanian perspective cannot be conceived without recognition of a socio-cultural context. For Lacan, unconscious knowledge, formed from repressions of the symbolic, does not vacate the socio-cultural world, but manifests it in a more authentic manner. Thusly, from a Lacanian perspective, the social networks, historical connections, cultural institutions, economic constraints, and artistic and socio-cultural issues that inhabit artistic practice demand recognition as contributions to the artist's subjectivity. Given this frame of reference, Lacanian perspectives of artistic practice could draw upon the substantial body of work from art educators who advocate a sociological approach to artistic practice. Concomitantly, through recognition of the unconscious, a Lacanian perspective subverts constraints of conscious knowledge as a possibility for revealing new ways of understanding and signifying the world.

Drawing connections among psychoanalytic theory, neuroscience, and contemporary artistic practice, the preceding discussion identified the significance of both conscious and unconscious thought for artmaking. An important finding that emerged from this interdisciplinary perspective was the import of the conditions of thinking whether in the clinic, studio, scene of everyday problem solving, or the classroom. Thought processes responded to particular conditions. The description of the graduate art education course, "Image Makers or Meaning Makers," demonstrated that structuring the conditions for thinking with artmaking can be highly influential in guiding students' conceptualization of meaning.

Hence, although the invisibility of cognitive processes poses difficulties for designing instruction, considering the conditions that impact thinking can serve as a useful strategy for rendering cognition and artmaking in more concrete terms. I recommend that it is not only needful to engage students with various conditions that impact cognition in artmaking but to also overtly augment student awareness of their cognitive processes. Shoshanna Felman's (1993) earlier conceptualization of artistic practice as a struggle between conscious and unconscious knowledge, for instance, represents a highly useful concept that could serve as a guide in advancing this awareness. Ultimately, cognitive processes become individual negotiations, but the development of awareness of such processes through deliberate address can make a considered difference.

As observed, Jagodzinski's work demonstrates the considerable depth that Lacanian psychoanalytic theory offers for understanding subjectivity in conjunction within a socio-cultural context. The difficulty of this theory for scholars is well acknowledged as Lacan continued to evolve his theory over four decades, instituting changes wrought from rethinking key concepts. Furthermore, Lacan's personal discursive style can be considerably challenging. However, because he theorizes subjectivity through the symbolic order and language, central to contemporary theorizing of art and artistic practice, I find the theory signals significant ways of understanding meaning making and artmaking, suggesting that, as art educators, we should continue to research these implications for artistic practice and studio instruction.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 “Image Makers or Meaning Makers” was developed and taught by the author to 17 graduate art education and MFA students.
- 2 Hal Foster (2004) observes that Freud did not consider the unconscious to be liberating and viewed an art totally free from social convention as an invitation to psychopathology.
- 3 Support for the overlaps between psychoanalysis and neuroscience can also be found in Mark Solms and Oliver Turnbull’s (2002), *The brain and the inner world: An introduction to the neuroscience of subjective experience*. New York: Other Press; and in Mark Pizzato (2006), *Ghosts of theatre and cinema in the brain*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

The *TASK* website, <http://www.taskathirshhorn.com/applications/wordpress/?p=18>, no longer operative, included information from the performance at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in 2006 such as web documents from Herring (2001-2007), the performers, curator Kirstin Hileman, art historian and independent curator Laura Roulet,