

**Phokeng T. Setai**

University of the Free State, South Africa

**Jan K. Coetzee**

University of the Free State, South Africa

**Christoph Maeder**

University of Zurich, Switzerland

**Magdalena Wojciechowska**

University of Lodz, Poland

**Leane Ackermann**

University of the Free State, South Africa

## **The Creative Process. A Case for Meaning-Making**

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.14.4.06>

**Abstract** Since the beginning of time art-making has been a tool to express, preserve, and challenge the extant knowledge in society. Artists do this by finding or creatively constructing new understandings in society. An artist is able to do this through the medium he/she uses to relay the message of the artwork. The medium that an artist uses to express his/her artistic concept has an impact on the character that the artwork will take. The medium of expression forms but one of the many considerations that go through an artist's mind when creating art. In the process of art-making, an artist seeks to create new meanings or re-imagine old ones by organizing materials and concepts. In so doing, he/she discovers novel ways to get ideas across, and thereby creates new interpretations of social phenomena. In this article, attention is given to meaning-making as a conscious and iterative component of creating art. From a series of in-depth interviews, the authors analyze the inward processes that occur within six artists' creative praxes and how these lead their construction of meaning. Attention is also paid to how the artists manipulate concepts and how they construct and deconstruct their understandings of these concepts in the course of their creative endeavors.

**Keywords** Art-Making; Creative Process; Intersubjectivity; Lifeworld; Lived Experience; Meaning; Meaning-Making; Signs; Symbols; Typifications

**Phokeng T. Setai** obtained his Master's degree in the program *The Narrative Study of Lives*, Department of Sociology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

**email address:** lanoir92@gmail.com

**Jan K. Coetzee** is a Senior Professor of Sociology and Director of the program *The Narrative Study of Lives* in the Department of Sociology at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa. He specializes in qualitative sociology and serves on several international advisory boards.

**email address:** coetseejk@ufs.ac.za

**Christoph Maeder** is a Professor in the Department of Teacher Education at the University of Zurich, Switzerland.

**email address:** christoph.maeder@phzh.ch

**Magdalena Wojciechowska** is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology of Organization and Management, Faculty of Economics and Sociology at the University of Lodz, Poland.

**email address:** wojciechowska.ms@gmail.com

**Leane Ackermann** is a Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

**email address:** ackermal@ufs.ac.za

Art-making is an important form of self-expression. In our social world, people convey messages and share their experiences through the medium of language. As a means of communicating information, and a way of making meaning of experiences, language varies in its utilization and interpretation. The most ubiquitous application of language by human beings is verbal communication. Verbal communication is one way that people externalize their internalized modes of experience. The communication that occurs between people, whether it be two individuals or within a group, engenders an intersubjective and collective understanding of human experience in social reality.

Art is a particular kind of language used expressly by artists, and sometimes by crafters, in the service of advancing their ideas and those of humankind. The purpose of art-making to an artist is twofold. Firstly, an artist engages in art-making to satiate

his or her own desire to bring something (new) into existence. This desire is evident in the scores of artists who make art as an end in itself (e.g., *art for art's sake*). A large number of art-makers find themselves within this category of artists who put sheer art-making before profit-making. To these persons, creating art is akin to a spiritual endeavor, which is necessary for them to perform in order for their existence to be valued and validated. Secondly, artists partake in art-making to raise the consciousness of the people around them and of those in society. This is a more altruistic reason to create art and is one that is of vital importance to the collective consciousness.

Visual art is a sub-category of art and is the central focus of this article. Artists who engage in visual art-making produce observable signs and symbols that act as a repository for people's subjective interpretations. Signs and symbols are fundamental

to how a visual artist communicates meaning through his or her artwork. The use of signs and symbols enables the artist to transcend boundaries imposed on him or her by time, space, and other forces within his or her lived experiences. Signs and symbols are a significant part of the vocabulary of our stock of knowledge as human beings. That signs and symbols allow people to express their lived experiences in diverse ways (Dreher 2003:141-143) is especially true of visual art-making. The purpose of this article is to understand the role of meaning and meaning-making in the creative process of a visual artist. Another aim is to understand the connection that the artist makes between his/her subjective and objective experiences in formulating his/her personal interpretations of reality in art-making.

### **Towards an Understanding of Meaning**

Meaning-making is essential to how people achieve understanding in, and of, their social realm. For meaning to be considered authentic, it has to emanate from some kind of social agreement between the parties involved. This social agreement is known in the social realm as mutual understanding. People foster understanding with one another when they share common experiences. Therefore, understanding can be seen as dependent on the intersubjective experiences and encounters that a subject has with others. There is a connection between an individual's meanings and another person's meanings. This connection is a pivotal one because it is how people fundamentally make sense of social phenomena and of each other in their social reality (Koppl 2010:221).

The meaning that people make in society does not occur arbitrarily, it goes through a complex and iterative process that social constructionists refer to as "negotiation of meaning" (Berger and Luckmann 1966). This perspective argues that meaning is negotiated consciously and unconsciously during intersubjective interactions. An individual takes his or her subjective lived experiences and externalizes them—primarily through interchanging them with others' subjective lived experiences. From this exchange of information, meaning is negotiated and social understanding is reinforced or challenged. The sedimentation of the meanings that people make over time leads to an accumulation of stocks of knowledge. These stocks of knowledge are transmitted from one generation to another and are, therefore, available to the individual in his/her everyday life (Berger and Luckmann 1966:56). People use stocks of knowledge to make sense of their emergent experiences and of phenomena that take place in social reality.

The intersubjective generation of meaning in society relies on typificatory schemes that underlie all human thoughts and actions. Everyday social life is composed of typifications that make it possible for people to apprehend and deal with face-to-face encounters (Berger and Luckmann 1966:45). Such is the consequence of typificatory schemes that they stimulate reciprocity of interaction between members of society who are in communication with another. As stated earlier, language is an important means by which people share ideas and meanings—within the body of language are rules that govern the use thereof. These rules that govern the use of language operate around a set

of typificatory schemes that individuals must comply with if they want to be understood. How people create meaning in society is influenced by the typifications that are unique to, and are over time crafted by, the members of that society. Meaning is constructed iteratively in the on-going encounters that people have with one another; encounters that have objective conditions such as typifications as their framework.

### Meaning-Making in Art

The making of meaning is a decisively integral component of art-making. Meaning-making in relation to the creation of art serves a symbolic and a practical purpose. On a symbolic level, the essence of meaning-making is highlighted when we encounter works of art that are of an abstract nature. In these works of art, the artist uses unrelated concepts and arranges them in such a way that a story can be constructed, emerging from the composition of these elements. The story that the artist is telling is a symbolic one in that he/she creates a representational space for the audience to decipher the meaning of the artwork. The artist methodically positions the meaning within the artwork and leaves it to the viewers to derive their own understandings from it. It sometimes happens that the audience concurs with what the artist is saying in his or her artwork. In such circumstances, viewers of the artwork are endorsing the relevance of the artist's voice and its expression *vis-à-vis* his/her artwork.

A more utilitarian expression of meaning in art-making can be seen when artists give titles

to their artworks and write motivations for their pieces. It is sometimes necessary for the artist to do these two things in order to orient or direct viewers of the artwork. The artist makes the viewers' experience of his/her art less intimidating and encourages the viewers to engage with and respond to the artwork. A viewer's perception of an artwork is shaped by the signs and symbols the creator assigns to the artwork, and that give the artwork its import. This is a starting point for the conversation that occurs between creators and viewers of art. The viewer's role in this conversation is predominantly passive. However, the degree of a viewer's passivity in this dialogue depends on the imprint the artwork makes on him/her, and on the degree to which the viewer engages with the work when he/she internalizes and then subjectively (re)interprets the meanings being conveyed in the artwork.

The meaning that lies at the core of an artwork precedes what is ultimately art and artists' *raison d'être*. Art and art-making's bearing on social life can be linked to humankind's primordial fascination with storytelling. Stories have not only been vital to our survival as a species, they also underpin our urge to create—"to reshape the world as we wish it to be for our own purposes" (Rand 1957:7). Christopher Vogler (1998:299-300) in his book, *The Writer's Journey*, asserts that stories "can help us deal with difficult emotional situations by giving us examples of human behavior, perhaps similar in some way to the struggles we are going through at some stage of life, and which might inspire us to try a different strategy for living." Storytelling is a big part of art-making because stories provide

space for meaning to be constructed and deconstructed, lived and re-lived. Abstract concepts are converted into realizable experiences when they undergo storification.

## Operational Account

The aim of this article is to arrive at an interpretive understanding of the lived experiences of visual artists during their creative process. To facilitate this, a narrative approach is applied as the guiding methodology for data collection and analysis. The widespread idea held by narrativists is that every individual, family, organization, and group possess their own narratives (Spector-Mersel 2010:205). The narratives approach is an optimal way of representing and understanding the experiences of people because people understand their lifeworlds primarily through a narrative-based framework (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:17-18). Narratives have an enormous influence on how people conceive and shape their reality; they are instrumental to how people chronicle their individual lives, their life stories, and the way in which they represent their past and future (Spector-Mersel 2010:208).

Although multiple authors were involved in shaping the research and this article, the main (male) author was primary investigator and the only one involved directly in data collection. It was important for a researcher of creativity to approach his own work in a reflexive way, similarly to how visual artists approach their artworks. This is because the researcher participates in a creative project or venture of his own and must critically examine not only the nature of the research but also his role in

the research processes. The role of the researcher's reflexive thinking and practice is intricately interwoven into the fabric of narrative inquiry (Hickson 2016:381). With a reflexive understanding of his actions, as well as the actions of others, the researcher must then organize events into a meaningful whole and more clearly interpret the consequences of events and actions over time (Chase 2005 as cited in White and Hede 2008:24).

Uwe Flick (2009:283) stresses that the narrative approach is similar to the creative process in that it is a *Gestalt* in its own right—an organized whole that is more than the sum of its parts, and therefore loaded with more than a series of statements or recorded facts. Thus, inside the stories that an individual tells lie all the meanings that are necessary to understand that particular individual's lifeworld. Narrative inquiry is dynamic and in a perpetual state of development; this compels the narrative inquirer to be constantly wakeful and reflexive (Clandinin and Connelly 2000:184). Another reason why narrative methodology was chosen is because the relational context of storytelling creates a hospitable environment for the stories of ordinary people to be heard and retold.

Drawing an appropriate sample is crucial in fulfilling the aims of the research. In this study, the target population was young Black (African) South African visual artists between the ages of 25 and 35. Initially, we set out to get a total of six participants for this study, three male and three female. However, due to difficulties locating female visual artists, we had to work with six male visual artists.

Two forms of non-probability sampling were used to identify participants: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling allowed us to target and select specific artists who would form part of our study's core group. Snowball sampling—where we asked participants in our core group to refer us to one or two of their fellow visual artists (O'Leary 2004:110)—helped to overcome difficulties in locating additional participants. The participants were all based in and around Bloemfontein (Mangaung) at the time the fieldwork took place.

In the fieldwork stage of this study, semi-structured interviews were used as the conduit through which the researcher explored how participants create meaning out of their experiences and interactions with the world (Hickson 2016:382). During the interviews, emphasis was placed on the dynamic between interviewer and interviewee. In the context of a conversational, narrative approach, the interviewees were free to divulge the full scope of their stories. An auxiliary research technique was the application of visual methodologies in the form of photo-elicitation and photo-documentation. These pertain to when a researcher "(a) takes a carefully planned series of photographs to document and analyze a particular visual phenomenon, and (b) asks research participants to take photographs which are then discussed in an interview with the researcher" (Rose 2012:298). Utilizing both of these techniques yielded interesting insights into the artists' lifeworld experiences.

Participant observation, the ethnographic technique of extended fieldwork where the researcher

shares the same experiences with his or her research participant(s), was the third research technique utilized during this study's data gathering processes. Carrying out participant observation proved fundamental to the research because it improved the main author/researcher's ability to combine subjective and objective interpretations that arose in the process of conducting fieldwork. The principal author/investigator also participated in an art-film by way of more directly experiencing the creative processes of one of the research participants of this study. The aim was to experience how an idea is taken from conception and elaborated on by the visual artist into a final product. In this process, the principal investigator used observation to understand how the artist goes about creating stories through the application of his visual medium, and what influences arose during this process.

Before starting the research, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Free State's Faculty of Humanities Ethics Committee (Ethical Clearance Number UFS-HSD2016/0345). No deception was used at any stage of the research to manipulate the participants. Written, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were assured that they were free to withdraw at any point in the study if for any reason they no longer felt comfortable participating. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw any statements that they made during our encounters. The permission of the research participant was sought at the onset of the research to use an audio-recording device during the interview, as well as to photograph his work-space (environment),

artworks, and whatever else was deemed necessary to this study. The participants were ensured that their faces, and any other identifying information, would be handled with utmost care and confidentiality. They were offered the option of providing pseudonyms of their own choice, and these are used to represent them in this article. The polite gender form he/she is not appropriate to participants in this study, who are all men, so from here on mainly the masculine form is used in relation to quotes and experiences.

Creativity as a concept, and the creative process as an experience or action, are difficult to assess. Different research methods (in-depth interviews, visual methodologies, and participant observation) are, therefore, used to gather and triangulate the data, interpretations, and analyses. Personal reflexivity was a key method used by the primary investigator as an instrument to maintain his awareness of the effects that his presence may have had on the research and its findings. Each individual research method contributed constructively in eliciting in-depth, consistent responses from the research participants. The use of different kinds of methods helped the researchers towards better understandings of particular phenomena (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2009:86). Analyses brought together the data gathered from the in-depth interviews, the photographs, and the observations.

### **Meaning-Making through Creative Storytelling**

The findings presented in this article are illustrated by verbatim quotes from research participants.

The purpose of the quotes is to provide the reader with a glimpse into the subjective and intersubjective sense-making processes that form part of the participants' experiences during the creative process of art-making. In addition, at the core of this article is an epistemological assumption that knowledge emerges from the active collaboration between researcher and research participants. It is for this reason that the primary investigator's reflexive interpretation and understanding of the narratives received from the research participants is acknowledged as a factor that shaped the study's findings. Lastly, as espoused by interpretive sociology, the presentation of this study's findings features "thick descriptions" that provide a rich account of the research participants' experiences.

One of the most fundamental aspects of the visual arts is to tell stories. Our creativity, as humans, and our ability to transpose our individual and collective experiences into meaningful stories have been vital to our human development and survival. The way we understand ourselves is enriched through storytelling, and art performs a critical role in the telling of stories that all human beings are able to identify and to connect with. Art-making is essentially about telling stories, communicating messages, and conveying meaning. Visual artists utilize visual platforms to express themselves, as well as to communicate and convey meaningful experiences to others. Art-making is spawned from a love of story-telling and the yearning of society, at large, to hear and be told stories.

The way in which people interpret social experiences varies from person to person—this is also

true of artists. The many ways in which visual artists express themselves are nuanced in terms of two dimensions: the medium that the artist works in (e.g., photography, painting, film) and the stories he wants to tell. Kaizer summarizes the essence of being an artist:

I love stories, and especially I love short films. I love stories. I just love stories of people who are trying to: I don't know. People who are just trying to make it every day. [Kaizer]

Modalities such as the artistic medium and the interpretation of internal or external experiences are shaped by the typifications in the artist's social and personal world. Typifications refer to embedded practices or thoughts that are widely held in society. A person's thoughts and actions are influenced by his/her typifications and, as a result, we have multiple understandings of social experience. Visual artists base their creative works on their own intersubjectively formed typifications. Therefore, the stories that artists tell are intricately interwoven into their lifeworlds. Whether it is communicating a message or giving a phenomenological experience meaning, the artist performs these things most effectively when using a storytelling format. Kaizer acknowledges the central place of storytelling in art when he says:

Not sympathy. Because just to tell a story, I feel like maybe as humans we are...[storytellers]. Stories are so central to our lives that we sometimes understand something if it is a story. That is why as children; it is like the fables we are told. These fables are told to us to try to guide us morally. Like stories are so central

to us...It is like the story of Jesus' fables. Even Jesus told stories in fables. Like he would say in parables. It's like the parable of the...what's that guy? Who was...everyone passed and he was injured? The Good Samaritan! So, then it's like: who is the good neighbor? But, we had to tell that story so that when you think: "Oh, my God, like, yeah, man!" I feel like sometimes we make stories for us to actually connect to something. Actually, we do [it] to understand something or to see something. It's like you have, yeah, you see, whatever you have—something. Like something bothering you or something that you just felt. And you feel like: why isn't anyone seeing this? So, you feel like: maybe if I tell a story, maybe that is when people will realize this. [Kaizer]

Visual artists' penchant for storytelling comes from a desire to give form to their own interpretations of their lived experiences or from the stories and experiences of others from whom they derive inspiration. Artists formulate concepts or themes, which constitute the narrative(s) they seek to articulate through their work. Malik's work is inspired by people in his environment:

It's always just best that as an artist, that your work has a body. Therefore, sometimes it derives from a theme. I play around with themes a lot. I really do just conceptualize most of the time in terms of my work. Sometimes themes are not executed the way they were envisioned. [Malik]

Malik took a series of portraits of street dwellers who he sees society as having little regard for. He embarked on this work to draw attention to the lives of these individuals who are often regarded

as “undesirables” within their own communities. By documenting the individuals and the intersubjective lived experiences of these individuals, he constructs a theme or concept around their experiences and around his understanding or interpretation of them. In doing so, Malik gives his audience a glimpse into the lived experiences of these forgotten members of society. Through his art he strives to render them see-able, and to bridge the relational divide between the viewers and the street dwellers. For Malik, photography is a powerful medium to draw attention to socio-economic issues. He employs photography as his art medium because it reflects realism and engages the viewer in the process and manifestation of the story that he wishes to convey.

Malik’s use of photography illustrates that the artist wants to depict meaning, and how he wants to do so depends on the choice of medium to express a particular story. Faceless, another participant, is a multimedia artist and he plays with the modalities of medium and concept:

I will make a painting out of it. Where with the painting the colors become more expressive of what I am trying to say about you. So, yeah, my key medium is concept. The whole idea of conceptualizing. But, if I had to pick a medium, I would say photography. If I had to pick the traditional mediums, I would say photography because it’s spontaneous. [Faceless]

Painters use specific techniques and tools to give varied expressions to the stories they want to tell through their artwork. Haile makes use of differ-

ent creative devices such as the different textures available to him, paint mediums (oil and acrylic), and how he employs the paintbrush when painting:

Here I want to show the corporate world and what it does to kids. Because here it is sweet manufacturers. So here is the mould of the sweet. The guys are making the sweet and throwing it into the big pan where the sweets are going to be formed. Instead of putting sweets here, I have put kids. And this kid looks like a kid that is scared, but still it is not a normal kid. Because this kid was formed by a sweet and the end result of it is not finished yet. The kid is going to end up as a sweet. It is not going to be just a human being—to show that these capitalists are shaping the character of kids because they are getting disorders that are brought on by flavorants that are poured inside sweets. Because they are not healthy, but still they are alright for business. All those preservatives, they are not alright for us. So, that is why I have made these guys into sweets because they become what they eat. They get attention disorder and they cannot focus. They also get a temper that is not healthy for a child. So, my context is a nursery. So, you know that a nursery where plants are grown and kids are akin to plants? Because that whole thing of children is derived from Chi. Chi meaning tree. So, children [are] small trees: the shades and the dark areas. Yes, I actually wanted to find kids who are hyperactive. I wanted to show that this is a disorder. It is not a natural thing. [Haile]

So much of what we understand about ourselves collectively and as individuals is symbolically linked to stories we have been told:

I think I connect because it is a story that my grandmother used to tell me. And because of my studies—in my studies, I talk about traditional narratives of South Africans and how nowadays traditional narratives are not being given any attention like before. And I searched why in South Africa do we have traditional narratives. And it is said that traditional narratives preserve norms and values of us as a Black people. Back in the day, Black people did not go to school. They were not...They did not know how to read and all those things. [Prince]

Prince is referring to an anecdote that was told to him as a young child by his grandmother. In South African and broader African culture, it is customary for children to be taught important lessons of morality and the value of *Ubuntu*<sup>1</sup> through allegorical narratives that pertain to social life. Prince grew up among such oral storytelling traditions, and presently in his artwork, he seeks to replicate and preserve these traditional narratives by means of visual art:

When I was young, I was raised by my grandmother. My grandmother would always tell us the story of Mellita. Mellita is a child who was conceived by her own sibling. The story is about a mother who doesn't have daughters; she doesn't have girls, only boys. She then sent her one child to his uncle's house to ask for medicine, which is going to make it possible for her to bear a female baby. When the boy got to the uncle and got the medicine, on the way back he drank the medicine. You know how kids are when parents

send them to do something, like buy something, like water or something; we would drink the water along the way. So, the boy drinks the medicine and eventually the boy gets pregnant. He then gives birth to a female child and he calls that child Mellita. I learnt that nowadays when our parents send us somewhere or tell us to [do] something, we do what we want to do. We do not do what our elders tell us to do. I think that is a metaphor there in the pregnancy of the boy. This is the mistake that we as the youth fall into. We don't listen to our elders; eventually, we fall into bad behaviors. When the story goes on, the mother of the boy supports the boy; she supports him. His friends told on him to his mother and his mother got angry. And also, when I thought about it, when I looked at how Mellita was loved by this boy. In this story, we see how the young boy, who doesn't have the power to care for Mellita, tries by all means to take care of Mellita. [Prince]

Artists compose stories that speak to different and various components of their lifeworlds. The artistic or creative concept is gradually crafted into a story by the artist who uses his skill to make it happen:

People tell different stories about Soweto or the townships, to tell you the truth. They think it's all hunky dory. They send out the good side of the township and not showing the bad side of what's happening. And that's the type of things you see in social media. I don't know any artist—or, well, heard thus far—I haven't spoken to even one who takes pictures while walking around in the township and taking pictures. Because to them: that's kind of like a risk too. They feel like: "I am in a township. Someone might just take my camera and [I] get robbed."

<sup>1</sup> "Ubuntu refers to behaving well towards others or acting in ways that benefit the community" (Thought Co. 2017).

Sometimes I fear that too. But, I try to shoot without any fear, 'cause you know I was raised there and I feel like I can fight back too when I do get attacked. It's more like a self-defense type of thing. And, since I want to portray these stories, I might as well do it without any fear and just spread the message. But, the township is very...it's shaky in a very strong way. But, I am doing it to spread a message, because people don't really know anything about the hood [neighborhood or township]. [Natural]

It is commonplace for artists such as Natural—in the extract above—to turn the communities they grew up in, and the realities within these communities, into central themes of their artwork. In Natural's case, the motive is to give new interpretations of old understandings of social life and of social reality as a whole. The way to do this is to tell different stories from the ones that were told before. People's understandings of social reality are influenced by the stories they are told about phenomena, stories they accept as being true. Natural wishes to re-story reality, to influence the way people see the township and so to enlighten through his art.

An artist will take an experience, a memory, an emotion, or a thought and find the meaning that underpins his sense of self. To find meaning, the artist has to unwrap or excavate it from the experience or phenomena he interprets in the work. This process usually culminates in the artist producing his own interpretation of the phenomenon, which then becomes the story that the artist presents as his artwork. Haile elaborates on this:

You see the way the woman's body has been created. Like the body shapes that you see: it's like the depictions you have seen especially of Black women. Like you see round shapes. Then you see straight lines and then it goes around again. Do you get it? Whereas, when it comes to males: you see that he is rigid. So, I love those variations and the softness. Because we need women; without women there is no life. We are the fruits of their hearts. It wouldn't be heavily conceptual because it obviously needs to reach people. I like things that can put the message across in a simple way; not too literal but at least have a lot of meanings behind it. When you speak about it, I find it interesting because I think I am a person who has [a] really strong memory. That is the thing that I would say God blessed me with. Even though I do not have words but the image I have. I can remember old things from as early as two years. [Haile]

Kaizer discusses a recent film project he was working on, in which storytelling draws attention to a societal issue:

So, it is like a big reservoir where it's like these rivers of water are now being reserved in one place. And then the water is being sold to South Africa and it can also generate electricity. But, right now, we are selling water to South Africa. But, then the problem is that when you are trying to conserve that water into one space, then the water keeps piling up. But, where the water was, there used to be villages. So, they moved people from villages to make those hydro dams. And some of these people were forcibly removed because we have to make this. This is for the good of the country. So, I was inspired by that...and I felt like, and I had a story, man, who...

of a young boy and his mother who were moved, but their father's grave was in a village that now they were moved from. But, he keeps dreaming of his father. But, then he finds an old man who has a small hut by the water's edge and the old man says he refuses to leave. This is all he knows. But, the old man has a chicken and the old man is like: what's important was blood. Not cow's blood or whatever; any blood. And right now, if you give the young man the chicken and he is like: "The blood flows into the river, the river will carry the blood into the grave." So, he cuts the head of the chicken and then the blood spreads into the water and then that in a way satisfies his father's spirit. Ah yeah! So, that's the story. The struggles, the pains of people and just showing people, what other people are going through. This is real for me. [Kaizer]

Artists manage to construe seemingly mundane phenomena into meaningful stories. They do not create social reality anew; their artworks are second order and sometimes third order representations of social phenomena. In the act of creation, the artist merely provides his or her interpretation, inviting the viewer to view reality in a different light. Artists also wish to capture their life stories and the lives of contemporaries in a historical moment of time. Faceless aptly sums this up:

My artwork is about history. It's about now...it's about now for tomorrow. For tomorrow's kids, for the next generation. I am hoping that future artists or future society will look back at my work and read into it what was happening now. That, okay, a student could live the way I live; also reflecting on other students, also reflecting on relationships

that people have. In a way, it tries to also draw comparisons to relationships, previously in generations that have passed. And hoping that whoever is going to look at the art is gonna draw comparisons from the present time to the time in the future. So that's why I am trying to make art that can last a hundred years. The type of mediums that I use, the type of paper that I use, the pencils that I use, photography, how I preserve my work—are put in a way that even when I am dead. Hopefully, it will be easier for someone to just crack the code, okay. Because I file things a lot—I will make a file. That file maybe will be today. So, with me doing: that is me trying to keep record. Recording everything: just keep on recording. So, my art is for the future. [Faceless]

Malik sees his duty as an artist in similar light:

They have a major role to play. We record history. We record history and we record it somewhat in the purest form. We know it through your art and we see it. And it lived. Here it is, you know what I mean? And I just think with photography—it's even more detailed. Because I capture moments in time, man. And these moments possibly last forever. [Malik]

Meaning-making and storytelling are inseparable and integral components of art-making and the creative processes that go into it. Artists base their art-making around these two fundamental pillars of human understanding. To create artwork that is driven by these two concepts requires the artist to have an epistemological grasp of meaning-making and of storytelling. The artist

accumulates such an understanding of inter-subjective, subjective, and objective phenomena through his own lived experiences and unique perspective of social reality.

## In Conclusion

Meaning is the cornerstone of human understanding. The transfer of information, whether represented orally, in writing, or visually, relies on the existence of a foundational understanding of the meanings of, and from, the source. Artists are able to create new meanings and understandings from old, even archaic, and current social practices and ideologies. The new understandings that emerge from the art-making processes of an artist can create new ways of thinking, of perceiving oneself and the world around us. Artists skillfully

re-imagine and capture social reality; their novel interpretations of past and present realities add to the social stock of knowledge. In so doing, artists are influencing society.

As creative thinkers, artists take ordinary social experiences and interpret them in a creative manner. The creative process is the process of interpretation and reinterpretation that the artist grapples with on his/her way to the final art-product. As illustrated in our findings, storytelling is a means whereby artists express their emotions, concepts, and opinions about social issues and worldviews. Expressing themselves through art-making requires artists to possess sensitivity, to perceive below and beyond the surface, and to articulate themselves in ways that are skillful, novel, and creative.

## References

- Alvesson, Mats and Kai Sköldböck. 2009. *Reflexive Methodology: New Vistas for Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Berger, Peter and Thomas Luckmann. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality*. London: Penguin Books.
- Clandinin, Jean D. and Michael F. Connelly. 2000. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Researchers*. San Francisco: Library of Congress.
- Dreher, Jochen. 2003. "The Symbol and the Theory of the Lifeworld: The Transcendence of the Lifeworld and Their Overcoming by Signs and Symbols." *Human Studies* 26:141-163.
- Flick, Uwe. 2009. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.
- Hickson, Helen. 2016. "Becoming a Critical Narrativist: Using Critical Reflection and Narrative Inquiry as Research Methodology." *Qualitative Social Work* 15(3):380-391.
- Koppl, Roger. 2010. "The Social Construction of Expertise." *Institute for Forensic Science Administration* 47(2014): 220-226.
- O'Leary, Zina. 2004. *The Essential Guide to Doing Research*. London: Sage.
- Rand, Ayn. 1957. *Atlas Shrugged*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Rose, Gillian. 2012. *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Research with Visual Materials*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Spector-Mersel, Gabriela. 2010. "Narrative Research: Time for a Paradigm." *Narrative Inquiry* 20(1):204-223.

Thought Co. 2017. *The Meaning of Ubuntu: Connectedness Between People*. Retrieved March 03, 2017 (<https://www.thought-co.com/the-meaning-of-ubuntu-43307>).

Vogler, Christopher. 1998. *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Venice, CA: M. Wiese Productions.

White, Tabitha R. and Anne-Marie Hede. 2008. "Using Narrative Inquiry to Explore the Impact of Art on Individuals." *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 38(1):19-35.

Setai, Phokeng T., Jan K. Coetzee, Christoph Maeder, Magdalena Wojciechowska, and Leane Ackermann. 2018. "The Creative Process. A Case for Meaning-Making." *Qualitative Sociology Review* 14(4):86-99. Retrieved Month, Year ([http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive\\_eng.php](http://www.qualitativesociologyreview.org/ENG/archive_eng.php)). DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.14.4.06>.