Fragmentation and narcissism in Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville:

A Lacanian interpretation

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DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the degree M Tech: Fine Arts, in the Faculty of the Arts, Tshwane University of Technology, is my own original work and has not been previously submitted to any other institution of higher education. I declare that all the sources cited or quoted are indicated and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

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Alecia D. van Rooyen
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my parents and to my fiancé for their unconditional love and support in completing this work.
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ABSTRACT
The human body is one of the most represented motifs in art. The human body is in a constant process of finding an identity which performs within various social contexts that continuously informs the formation, and transformation, of identity.

This study applies Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage theory, with specific reference to the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism and implies how these experiences can manifest in the art of Lucian Freud (1922-2011) and Jenny Saville (b. 1970). The application of Lacan’s theory aids in understanding the artworks of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville; and, in turn, aids in understanding humanity’s captivation with the human figure. The same theory will then be applied toward an understanding of my own artistic practice.

Lacan’s mirror stage theory forms the foundation of my research as his forms a connection between the captivation of the self-image and fundamental psychical development during infancy. Lacan further develops the concepts of the imaginary which runs consecutively to the mirror phase and implies a continuation of this self-fascination into adulthood. In short, Lacan’s mirror stage theory describes the manner in which a person develops an ego or identity while studying him or herself in the mirror at the time of infancy. ¹

The self-portraits of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville serve as examples in understanding the popularity of the human figure as subject matter due to both artists epitomising the human body in their artmaking.

¹ The terms self and ego are used interchangeably throughout this thesis. The self is used as a more general term for to the ego whereas the term ego is used in more formal psychoanalytic theory. The concept of the self is rather a combination of mental concepts which, together, form an idea of what / who the ‘real’ self is (Leary & Tangney, 2012:72).
The purpose of this study is to use psychoanalytic theory to inform an understanding of art including the image of the human body.

At around eighteen months, the child starts to understand that the specular image is his or her own reflection, and this serves as the basis his or her ego development. In this research, this concept is compared to the process of art-making, with reference to artists who paint self-portraits; and to the idea that the artist’s canvas assumes the position of the of the mirror or reflected surface as mentioned in Lacan’s mirror stage.

I propose that the study of the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism together with Lacan’s mirror stage theory, and the application thereof to visual examples, specifically self-portraits, could aid in understanding both the reason for the captivating power the represented human figure, as well as the artist’s possible motivations for painting the human body.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and motivation

This first chapter contains an overview of the literature to be reviewed further on in Chapter Two. Chapter One begins by introducing the human figure as it has been represented in art throughout history and implies how it still remains still a dominating motive. This chapter incorporates an introduction to Jacques Lacan’s motivations in forming his mirror stage theory along with concepts of fragmentation and narcissism as subjective experiences. This study investigates how Lacan’s mirror stage theory and these subjective experiences can be applied towards an understanding of the artworks of Lucian Freud (1922-2011), Jenny Saville (b. 1970), and my own art. This should, in turn, aid in understanding humanity’s captivation by and fascination with the human figure.

The human body is one of the most represented images in art; both artists, Freud and Saville, focus on the human figure as subject matter; their self-portrait paintings specifically will serve as examples in understanding the popularity of the human figure as subject matter. I propose that humanity’s fascination with its own form stems from primordial psychological roots and, for this reason, I will utilise Lacan’s mirror stage theory (1949) to form the backbone of this study.

Firstly, I will begin by indicating the prevalence of the human figure in art throughout history, after which I will discuss how Lacan’s mirror stage theory could be applied to understand the captivating power of an image of the human body. The human figure is perhaps the most represented motif in art, continuously changing in cultural, historical and social contexts (Petro, Eskins, Nichols, Heinz, Demaiolo, 2007:2). The human body is a universal, fluid subject in the arts, a subject that allows us to observe
key developments of society and art history alike (Levitt & Green, S.a.:5). An image of the human body carries a plethora of meanings, which confront its spectator’s intellect and sensibilities (Hudson, 1982:49).

Although it is possible to notice the prevalence of the appearance of the human body in art, it is impossible to establish the exact circumstances under which the artistic representation of the human body became a conscious option for human beings. There are, however, some individuals who attempt to speculate. Stoichita (1999:7), for example, suggests that the first representation of the human body in art was created in an attempt to outline a human shadow. Another theory, which will be elaborated later on, suggests that the first representation was attempted after observing a reflection of the self-image in water (Mirzoeff, 2005). But why do we as humans feel the need to re-create and study our own image: Elkins (1999:160-276) attempts to answer this in his book *Pictures of the body, pain and metamorphoses*, in which he proposes that humans have a primordial need to see and compare themselves to others.

The human body is the one thing that we all have in common; this is why it has the power to provoke controversy in whatever condition it is represented (Levitt & Green, S.a.:5). For many artists, interacting with a canvas (or other means of art making) is a way of meaning-making. It is a widespread belief that we are more than our physical bodies which will inevitably perish. Johnson (2007) states in the opening of his book *The meaning of the body: aesthetics of human understanding*, “We are born into this world as creatures of flesh,” and it is by means of a corporeal engagement with our environment that we create meaning. In other words, all meaning is human as we create meaning through our human bodies by our human experiences. Undoubtedly we assign great significance to lumps of flesh as we project not only socially
constructed values but individual traits onto our bodies; an important note to remember as I will be elaborating on this idea in Chapter Two.

Elkins (1999:1,19) states that every artwork is a picture of the body. This statement, he explains, refers to how Cezanne (1839-1906), for example, sees the body in landscapes and fruits; it is merely the representation that changed. Similarly, Nozedar (2010:345) suggests that everything represents the body as the natural world is packed with a likeness to the human body, if not in physicality, then in essence, for example, the soft feminine curves of hills and mountains.

The pictured body has the ability to communicate, however, it does not arrange signs as a language would. Instead, when presented with a picture of the human body, one must think about the transformation of thought by merely looking. Looking at a representation of the human body which, at first, has no obvious purpose, is an opportunity to rethink one’s own identity by comparison – who I believe myself to be an who I aim to be (Elkins, 1999:160). The human body is not only our communication tool but also our means of understanding others, our environment, and its objects. It is difficult to imagine that there exists any artwork that does not directly or indirectly represent the human body due to the idea that both the making of an artwork and the way in which we relate to an artwork depends on our embodied experiences with the world (O’Reily, 2009:7).

An ideal standard of representing and visualising the human body has been set by Western art traditions in the numerous studies of the ‘nude’ (Davis, 1997:170-171). Contemporary artworks seem to be engaging in a more controversial representation of the human body; attempting to confront beauty standards, political issues and mortality (Maude & Macnoughton, 2009:3), whereas in eras such as Classical and
Renaissance, the body was depicted is such a way as to idealise and study the human form. This change in the way the body is represented most likely follows the Feminist movement of the 1970’s with its primarily body-orientated work; this movement changed the focus of the nude body image from the objectified image to spectator provocation and confrontational subject (O’Reily, 2009:13).

In contrast to the celebrated and idealised Classical, Greek, Roman and Renaissance bodies, contemporary art brings new understanding of the body’s representation in terms of mind-body relationship, for example, confronting the aging of the physical body and with it, the idea of one’s own mortality (Kulasekara, 2017:36). According to O’Reily (2009:46), “the representation of the body in art is more various and closely allied to our sense of self than ever,” where the body has become almost inseparable from psychological frameworks.

Studying the human body, by creating art of the human body, allows the artist to understand his or her own fears and desires towards it. Even in a seemingly image-saturated world, the image of the human body still has a captivating power as the body is both the site of desire and the site of suffering (Nochlin, 1994:18). The pictured body can communicate through the artist’s meticulous emphasis on certain parts of the body, for example, the self-portrait serves as a social mask, expressing internal thought processes outwardly (Hudson, 1982:12). Silverman (1982:370) states that “[s]elf-portraiture is the self, establishing a likeness of itself as a painting.” Many artists deal with private disturbances by recreating the self in the form of a self-portrait (Hudson, 1982:9; O’Reily, 2009:46 & Johnson, 2007:283). Therefore, the process of studying one’s own image by means of artistic practice is an act of introspection.
Indeed, the represented body has many connotations. With some insight into selected psychoanalytic theories, I will expand on the understanding of art creation, specifically self-portraiture. Sigmund Freud, for example, has an interesting theory about artists and the process of art-making. He noticed similarities in the behaviour of artists and neurotic individuals. According to him, both cases attempt to escape reality through a world of fantasy (Wollheim, 1980:77). However, the artist, unlike the neurotic, attempts to grapple with reality in the act of producing art, subsequently using art to come back to and readdress reality. The artist therefore outwardly expresses unconscious repressed emotions which initially steered them away from reality (Freud, 1905 in Smith, 2011:2235).

Freud refers to the process of art-making as sublimation; the term referring to a process during which an individual discards libidinal energy in a non-sexual way. In other words, art-creation or sublimation is, therefore, a more socially acceptable escape from sexual tension. It is safe to say that the analysis of an artwork representing the human body, specifically self-portraits may give insight into the artist’s cognitive condition at the time of artistic creation, perhaps even lay bare the artist’s fascination with the human body. The human body is, after all, a fluid object and its representation in art usually implies a greater meaning beyond what is depicted (Granzoil-Fornera, 2017:23).

While the preceding section on the representation of the human body in art does inform my analysis of the paintings of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville and my own artistic practice, the focus of this study is to use psychoanalysis to assist in understanding the artworks of the above-mentioned artists; and subsequently the captivating power of the image of the human body. Like a mirror, art can be illusive or deceptive. It can either ‘reflect’ an object as it appears, or it can distort the subject in order to express
problematic aspects of social and psychological dynamics (Weststeijn, 2008:237). I, therefore, propose to study Lacan’s mirror stage theory with reference to the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism, as his theory delves into the development of subjectivity. Lacan’s mirror stage theory is also used to connote the manifestation of fragmentation and narcissism in the art of Freud and Saville.

1.2 Literature review: Lacan’s mirror stage theory and the imaginary

Lacan’s mirror stage theory forms the foundation of my research. His theory informs this study by connecting the captivation of the self-image to fundamental psychical development during infancy. He then further developed the concept of the imaginary order which runs consecutive to the mirror phase and implies a continuation of this self-fascination into adulthood. The concepts of fragmentation and narcissism relate to both psychological aspects, as will be explained using Lacan’s work as a source.

Jacques Lacan was a trained psychiatrist and psychoanalyst with the mirror stage theory being his biggest contribution to the field of psychoanalysis. with the mirror stage theory as his biggest contribution to the field of psychoanalysis. Lacan presented the paper titled ‘Le stade du miroir’, or ‘The mirror stage’ at the Fourteenth International Psychoanalytical Congress of the International Psycho-Analytical Association in Marienbad in 1936, and it continues to be his most influential work (Eyers, 2012:18). His mirror stage theory originated from an experiment led by French psychologist Henry Wallon, which was to investigate the infantile development of both humans and chimpanzees. Wallon introduced both a child (six months old) and a young chimpanzee to a mirror. Remarkably the chimpanzee’s reaction was completely opposite to that of the child, as the chimpanzee lost interest rather quickly, whereas the child became excited and fascinated with his own image (ibid,19).
The six-month-old seemed to recognise himself in the mirror and displayed excitement about the fact that the specular image matched the movement of his own body (Lacan, 1951:14). Lacan used this information to establish a specific timeframe for the formulation of human subjectivity. Consequently, for Lacan, the mirror stage is a turning point in a child’s mental development from an initial fragmented state to a whole coherent state (Lacan, 1951:14).

Lacan frequently returned to the work of the Austrian psychoanalyst, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) to develop his theory, as is particularly evident in his mirror stage theory (1949). Sigmund Freud, like Lacan, wrote about the two subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism. For example, Freud refers to the fragmented nature of the human being when he refers to a person as being split; a person is split into the id, the ego and the super-ego (Freud, 1923:1656). According to Freud (1924 in Smith, 2011:3951-3963), in his paper *The ego and the id*, the id refers to an individual’s most primitive instincts and accounts for the individual’s personality traits; the ego is the part of the psyche which is influenced by society; and the super-ego (or ego-ideal) influence the ego’s decisions through conscious morality and controls the impulsive id.

Freud’s model of the subject is tripartite; the model holds that ego development only takes place during maturity, once the subject is socialised (Freud 1930 in Smith, 2011:4467). That is, as will be the case with Lacan’s mirror stage theory later, the ego or self-image is constructed from psychical fragments such as mental images of either the ideal self or of the fragmented body. Emotions such as anxiety are generated by the subjective experience of the body or mind as fragmented or, through fear of physical death and disintegration. Of course, the subject may later become captivated by his or her own image during the formation of subjectivity which, then, conjures a
narcissistic personality. In psychoanalysis, narcissism is, generally, an infatuation with the self-image (Gallop, 1983:121). Narcissism is a term which appears in Freud’s work as early as 1910 and becomes a central psychoanalytic concept by 1914 when he writes the paper titled *On narcissism: an introduction*.

Lacan expands on Freud’s tripartite model, proposing rather that ego development starts during infancy. Lacan then develops his three psychological orders of the imaginary, the real and the symbolic out of Freud’s concepts of the id, the ego and the superego (ego-ideal), respectively (Verstegen, 2015:276). The imaginary, which will be elaborated on later, is one aspect of this tripartite model which culminates in images and illusions essential to ego-development; this is the order which will form the focal point of this study, since fragmentation and narcissism primarily relate to the imaginary, as I shall clarify. Although this research focuses on the imaginary order, both the symbolic and the real is briefly mentioned to provide context. During the child’s psychological development, the imaginary precedes and is later structured by the symbolic order (Emerling, 2005:186).

These three orders comprise the entire experience of the subject, however, as stated, this study will mostly relate to the imaginary order as it is concerned with the interpretation of images or paintings, which is primarily the domain of the imaginary.

Lacan, like Freud, places great emphasis on the influence of the image of the self in the formation of subjectivity. Lacan elaborates on Freud’s writings of subjectivity by describing the onset of fragmentation anxiety as taking place during the mirror stage when an infant sees him or herself for the first time (Lacan, 1949:507). The mirror stage is closely linked with the imaginary and is an early childhood (between six and eighteen months of age) developmental process of the psyche in which identity or ego
formation takes place. During the mirror phase, the infant becomes aware of his or her body as being separate from the mother. The infant observes his or her specular image and realises at this moment that his or her body consists of uncoordinated limbs and that he or she has little to no control over his or her physical body; the infant perceives him- or herself as being fragmented.

When the infant does assume the mirror image as the image of the self, the child will start to realise that he or she can move and manipulate the image by moving his or her own body, which provides a sense of pleasure, or jubilation as Lacan terms it. Conversely, the infant also observes that the reflected image mimics his or her movement and for a moment sees his or her body as a unity. The specular image serves a necessary function during the mirror stage, initiating identity formation; this is important as it will aid the infant in overcoming fragmentation anxiety.

Fragmentation, if not dealt with or overcome wholly during infancy, may still manifest in dream images and fantasies; this is a rich source for artistic inquiry and, in turn, an artistic expression which allows the artist to confront and solve the issue of the fragmented self (Lacan, 1951:13).

To achieve unity and self-mastery, or at least the illusion thereof, is a constant battle and the subject must continuously steer away from the anxiety of becoming fragmented once again. Thus, the specular image of the self depicts unity through the ‘whole’ image (gestalt) presented, in contrast to the chaos of the uncoordinated body (Lacan, 1951:20). The battle to overcome fragmentation anxiety is initiated during the mirror stage. It is during the mirror phase that the infant first identifies this ‘whole’ image as his or her own image and for a moment overcomes fragmentation. The infant,
at this time, may become captivated and fascinated by his or her own image and develop a narcissistic relationship towards it.

Lacan links the formation of the ego with the development of narcissism, which forms during the mirror stage, due to the infant’s fascination with his or her own specular image. Lacan (1949:502-509) explains in his mirror stage theory that a child is able to form an identity by observing his or her image in the mirror for the first time before they can control their own body or environment.

The relation to the specular image is not only one of narcissistic identification; Lacan’s mirror theory holds that the child may see the specular image as an individual, external subject, and experience this subject as a rival due to the specular image being a coordinated, ideal image (a state the infant feels he or she has not yet achieved) (Jennings, 2001:22). Even though the infant does recognise him or herself in the mirror, the infant does not realise the image is separate from the self. Lacan (1949:508), refers to this as méconnaissance (misrecognition). The specular image is other to the infant; thus, the infant recognises him or herself and confuses him or herself with the other (Slatman, 2006:193). In other words, ego identification or formation is based on the misrecognition of an illusion. Upholding this illusion of wholeness is the main purpose of the ego (Homer, 2005:26). Consequently, the function of the ego can also be described as misrecognition and the denunciation of fragmentation anxiety (Granzoil-Fornera, 2017:39).

Lacan then suggests that being captivated by this illusion, this specular image of the self, allows an individual to shape him or herself according to that image and avoid fragmentation anxiety (Lacan, 1949:507). The problem with this is that, with age and
experience, the specular image changes as the physical body changes; meaning that the self will inevitably continue to misrecognise the image of the self.

As mentioned, the mirror phase develops concurrently with what Lacan refers to as the imaginary order. This is one of three psychical orders identified by Lacan. The imaginary is continuous with and inseparable from the mirror phase as it is based on images (mirror-images) and illustrations (Bowie, 1991:92). In *The seminar of Jacques Lacan* (1954:79) in the section *seminar VII - The topic of the imaginary*, Lacan explains the imaginary as a formation in the mirror stage, as follows:

> [T]he processes of the physiological maturation allows the subject, at a given moment in his history, to integrate effectively his motor functions, and to gain access to a real mastery of his body. Except, the subject becomes aware of his body as a totality prior to this particular moment, albeit in a correlative manner. That is what I insist on in my theory of the mirror stage – the sight alone of the whole form of the human body gives the subject an imaginary mastery over his body, one which is premature in relation to a real mastery.

The imaginary, unlike the mirror phase, does not end with childhood, but rather continues through to adulthood; a concept that links to artistic creation and continuous fascination of the human body later on.

Narcissism and fragmentation are both characteristics of the imaginary as they have their basis in its deceptive illusion of wholeness and autonomy, or lack thereof, respectively. The imaginary captivation with the specular image speaks to the concept of narcissism (Evans, 1996:193), and offers a plausible explanation for a person’s (or the artist’s) representation and projection of their body onto objects of their environment, in this case, on a canvas. Similar to the infant’s experience with the
mirror, I propose that artists painting their own image assume this painted representation as their own.

To summarise, Lacan’s mirror stage theory, with the influence of Freud’s work, offers a basis for the understanding of the subject’s captivation by the specular image. Themes of fragmentation and narcissism are investigated to find how they manifest within the paintings of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville, as well as in my own paintings. These themes form part of the foundation of both this study and the mirror stage and need to be further studied in order to understand artworks containing images of the human body.

1.3 Definition of key terms

Alienation: In general, alienation refers to being separate or detached from something. In the case of this study, alienation is an essential part of Lacan’s mirror phase as it relates the feeling of alienation with an individual’s identification with an image external to his or her body.

Autoerotism: this term is used to describe an internal excitation, stimulated by the image or thought of one’s own body. In other words, it is a psychological attitude linked to self-admiration and sexualisation.

Fragmentation: A physical sense of disunity which impedes the subjective experience of wholeness and unity. In this study, fragmentation is also referred to as the split subject and the body in pieces.

Fragmentation anxiety: A constant fear of returning to a previous fragmented state after gaining a sense of unity by identifying with an image of the self.
**Freud’s Tripartite- Id:** The Id comprises of one’s wants and needs. It is the most basic part of one’s personality and usually demands instant gratification.

**Ego:** The Ego then is the part of the psyche that confronts reality and aims to find socially acceptable ways to satisfy the wants and needs of the Id.

**Super-ego:** The super-ego, similar to the ego, also aims to satisfy wants and needs, however, these satisfactions are usually based on moral values rather than what is deemed socially acceptable. In short, the super-ego is the conscience.

**Gestalt:** Gestalt is a German word describing a whole or organised pattern. In this study, Gestalt has a formative function on the ego during the mirror stage when an infant identifies with his or her specular image.

**Identity:** in this study, the term identity is frequently interchanged with the term ego, thus it too refers to the part of the psyche that deals with reality.

**Imaginary order:** The imaginary order is one of three orders in Lacan’s psychoanalysis which runs consecutively to the mirror stage and denotes the realm of images and illusions within the psyche. The imaginary order is an important part of this study as it refers to both infantile and adult identification with an image regarded as the self.

**Jubilation:** a sense of great pleasure or triumph.

**Libidinal:** the term libidinal connotes the instinctive, primitive sexual energy which lies central to all mental activity.
**Mirror stage**: The mirror phase is a psychoanalytic theory by psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan regarding ego or identity development from visual images, starting from infancy and continuing through adulthood. This theory forms the foundation of this study.

**Mirror/ specular image**: An image of one’s own reflection in the mirror, in another person such as the mother or father, and other reflective surfaces like water.

**Misrecognition**: When an individual assumes an external image or reflection of the self for as ‘true’ self.

**Narcissism**: an attraction towards one’s own body or self-image, and the need for constant admiration, gratification, and assurance by others.

**Psychoanalysis**: a collection of psychological theories regarding the treatment of mental disturbances. Psychoanalysis usually incorporates the study of the unconscious mind in terms of dream interpretation and free association.

**Self-portrait**: A work of art created by the artist by the artist. In other words, it is a picture or representation of one’s own image.

**Subjectivity**: referring to individual, personal experiences and feelings existing in the psyche.

**Sublimation**: the psyche’s way of converting socially unacceptable instincts and desires into socially acceptable physical actions, in the case of this study, dealing with anxieties and narcissistic tendencies through the practice of art-making.
1.4 Research question
How can Lacan’s mirror stage theory, with specific reference to the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism, be applied towards an understanding of the artworks of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and my own work?

1.5 Research aims
My main research aim is to apply insight into Lacan’s mirror stage theory to an analysis of the artworks of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville. Specific reference is to be made to the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism to assist in understanding their artworks. I also aim to apply Lacan’s theory and the interpretative framework developed in fulfilling the previous aim towards an understanding of my own work.

1.6 Research methods
This study is practice-based, containing both qualitative research and practical art making, culminating in the putting up of an exhibition. The research method is qualitative and embedded in the discipline of art history, incorporating elements of psychoanalytic theory. The aim of qualitative research is to investigate, explore and produce findings in relation to the study’s problem statement (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:17). This will aid in establishing how fragmentation and narcissism can manifest in the art of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville. Therefore, qualitative research permits for a more comprehensive understanding of a particular subject. Qualitative research is opposite to quantitative research (which is based on numeric data) in that the result of the study relies on a theoretical development rather than statistical procedures (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:139-140). Qualitative research methods may evolve during the course of the study as this method entails combing through a large amount of information to which more information could be added as new research becomes available.
The field of qualitative research consists of multiple designs such as ethnographical study, phenomenological study, case study, grounded theory study and content analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:171-176). In this particular dissertation, a case study design is used as selected individuals (artists) and selected artworks are discussed. This approach is termed a multiple case study which allows for comparison in a certain area of the study (ibid:171), however, this study largely focusses on critique writing and information gained from published literary sources rather than fieldwork and observations.

Content analysis as a research method involves examining documents, journals, films, art, books, etcetera and is incorporated as a method of this study. Content analysis implies that the researcher identifies a body of research material, which is studied and narrowed to identify patterns and biases (ibid:275).

A literature review is conducted as a critical review of relevant textual sources, situating the focus of the research within the fine arts field where it is important to develop an argument. The literature review in this study centers on Lacan’s mirror stage theory with specific reference to the key terms, fragmentation and narcissism. The literature review is conducted by gathering data from electronic sources (video documentaries) and printed data (books, documents, articles, journals). This study’s data analysis comprises of direct content analysis meaning prior research and existing theories are studied and reduced to key concepts (Schreier, 2013). All data is examined and compared to eliminate personal bias and assumptions allowing the research question to be answered as accurately as possible.

Primary sources in the development of this study, and for working definitions of key terms such as fragmentation and narcissism, include *The mirror stage as a formative
of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience (Lacan, 1949), Some reflections on the ego (Lacan, 1951), On narcissism: an introduction (Freud, 1914), The ego and the id (Freud, 1923), and Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety (Freud, 1926). Secondary sources include critique writings and dictionaries of Lacanian terms such as Jacques Lacan (Homer, 2005), A compendium of Lacanian terms (Glowinski, Marks & Murphy, 2001), Passion in theory: concepts of Freud and Lacan (Ferrel, 1996), and An introductory dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Evans, 1996).

The research is applied to case studies of artists Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville, where artworks from each artist are analysed and compared to understand fragmentation and narcissism in their paintings of the human body, specifically self-portraits. These two artists have been chosen as case studies due to similarities in subject matter (largely painted, grotesquely depicted nude self-portraits) and materials (oil paint on canvas). To gain insight into the artists’ subjective experiences and art-making processes, primary sources such as video documented interviews are studied. These sources include Lucian Freud’s rarest interview: part 1-5 (Art-sheep TV, 2014), Clip of the week- Freud in his studio (Dawson, 2014), Jenny Saville in conversation with Nicholas Cullinan (Modern art oxford, 2016), and Artist Jenny Saville: why human bodies fascinate (Channel 4 news, 2016).

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Results or conclusions gathered from the literature review and case studies are also applied to examples of my own art, and to my own art practice.

1.7 Chapter outline

This chapter, Chapter One, is the introductory chapter. This includes a general introduction and motivation for the study including a brief explanation of key concepts such as fragmentation and narcissism. This chapter also includes a review of relevant literature, specifically Lacan’s mirror stage theory. Thereafter a framework for the study is established, including methods of information gathering and interpretation.

Chapter Two comprises the theoretical framework, consisting of an in-depth discussion of the three key concepts of the study including fragmentation, the mirror phase, and narcissism. The chapter starts with a brief introduction clarifying the influence of Sigmund Freud’s work (including the theory of primary narcissism, the ego, super-ego, and id), on Lacan’s mirror stage theory. Lacan’s mirror stage theory is then discussed in greater detail with reference to the concepts of fragmentation and narcissism relating to the image of the human body.

In Chapter Three, the mirror stage theory, together with the two concepts of fragmentation and narcissism are applied to an analysis of visual examples of the self-portraits of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and my own artwork. This chapter will also include a brief introduction and biographical background on both the mentioned artists.

Chapter Four comprises a brief overview of chapters and a conclusion linked to the aim of the study. Areas of further research will be suggested.
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How can Lacan’s mirror stage theory, with specific reference to the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism, be applied towards an understanding of the artworks of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and my own work.

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In Chapter Three, the mirror stage theory, together with the two concepts of fragmentation and narcissism are applied to an analysis of visual examples of the self-portraits of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and my own artwork. This chapter will also include a brief introduction and biographical background on both the mentioned artists.

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CHAPTER TWO: THE MIRROR STAGE

Chapter Two comprises an in-depth discussion of Lacan’s mirror stage theory which forms the foundation of this dissertation. Included in this chapter is an examination of the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism which develops prior to, during, and consecutive to the mirror stage. More specifically, this chapter provides a theoretical background of Lacan’s mirror stage theory, including its origin and subsequent developments. The mirror stage theory provides insight into the understanding of the artworks of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and my own work as discussed in Chapter Three.

2.1 Sigmund Freud’s development of the concepts of psychical fragmentation and narcissism

Many of Lacan’s writings derive from concepts developed by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Selected theories by Freud, which will be discussed in this section, build the foundation for the subsequent discussion of Lacanian mirror stage theory. Theories that will be discussed in this section include the split subject, ego formation, fragmentation anxiety and narcissism, more specifically, primary narcissism.

Freud elaborates extensively on narcissism, using terms such as narcissistic-libido and ego-libido interchangeably in *Three essays on the theory of sexuality* (1905) (Konrath, 2007:1). Freud later completed a full study on the term in his essay *On narcissism* (1914). In this pivotal essay, Freud explains a narcissistic personality as an individual infatuated with what or who he or she is, once was or wishes to become, or as a person infatuated with someone or something that once was a part of them (Bedell, 2002).
Narcissism has its roots in infant ‘autoerotism’. Freud (Smith, 2011:1516) states: “The characteristics of infantile sexual life… are essentially auto-erotic (i.e. that the infant finds its object to be the infant’s own body) and … (the infants) individual component instincts are upon the whole disconnected and independent of one another in their search for pleasure.”

Narcissism and autoerotism are closely related. Rabaté (2003:29) describes primary narcissism as “the first state, prior to the constitution of the ego and therefore auto-erotic, through which the infant sees his own person as the object of exclusive love - a state that precedes his ability to turn towards external objects.” Primary narcissism (also referred to as normal narcissism) usually develops between six months to six years of age (Changing Minds, 2017). Primary narcissism is distinct from the narcissistic personality. Whereas the latter is pathological, the former is a normal part of systematic human psycho-sexual development.

Primary narcissism connects to early childhood development in that an infant experiences a libidinal attachment towards their own mirror image. The infant’s libidinal attachment to this image is the first sense of self an infant experiences; this provides a sense of unity which will facilitate ego formation and is the child’s first experience of object-love (Petek, 2008:11). A working definition of primary narcissism could thus be the child’s love or infatuation with the ideal self-image. A healthy development within a child would be to transfer the primary libidinal energy to another individual, progressing to object-love or ‘secondary narcissism’ (Konrath, 2007:2).

In his discussion of narcissism, Freud focuses on how the chaotic infant suppresses desires in order to become a functional part of society. A way for the psyche to deal with narcissistic and autoerotic mental processes is through what Freud terms
‘sublimation’. Sublimation, in short, is the psyche’s defence mechanism; it is the psyche’s way of dealing with socially unacceptable instincts by transforming these instincts into socially acceptable actions, for example, the act of creating art to deal with mental disturbances.

The constitution of the ego ensues from the process of sublimation, as the ego deals with reality and serves as a defence mechanism during the child’s formation of the self (ibid.) the ego aims to confront society and aids in the gratification of needs and desires. Freud (Smith, 2011:3951) wrote, ‘... in each individual there is a coherent organisation of mental processes, and we call this the ego. It is to this ego to which consciousness is attached; the ego controls the approaches to motility - that is, to the discharge of excitations into the external world.’

Freud (Smith, 2011:1473) explains that the development of narcissism as involving the libidinal investment in the ego is the transitional phase between autoerotism and object-love. According to Freud (Smith, 1914:2943), the attachment type object-love is a predominantly male characteristic and is obtained through primary narcissism (the child’s original narcissism after the autoerotic stage), where the sexual object is transferred from the self to another object. In other words, the child moves his or her sexual libido from his or her own body to another person who they admire and strive to look or be like; or to another object such as art or (in contemporary terms) idealistic media representations.

Freud (Smith, 2011:1515) believes that alienation, the feeling of a loss of identity and seemingly disassociation from society, lies at the core of the personality; alienation can most likely be attributed to a struggle to relate to others. Alienation is similar to fragmentation, as it deals with the feeling of anxiety and being other to society; it does,
however, differ from fragmentation in that it does not involve the feeling of the mind or psyche being split from the physical body. Both, the feeling of alienation and that of fragmentation, have influenced Freud’s development of the concept of the split subject; the subject is split or divided into the ego, the id and the superego (Granzoil-Fornera, 2017:37). The id is the most basic form of the psyche, concentrating on wants and needs; the ego is the part of the psyche that deals with reality; and the superego acts as one’s conscience.

Freud’s definitions of fragmentation and narcissism will form a context for my discussion of Lacan. The rest of this chapter focuses on Lacan’s paper *The Mirror Stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience* (1949, revised on the basis of the original paper of 1936).²

The mirror stage theory forms a basis in this study regarding humanity’s tendency to approach the world through self-recognition and identification with images; referring in particular to artists and their continuous studying of the self-image through artistic creation.

Lacan’s mirror theory proposes how the self or ego is formed primarily through processes of alienation and illusion - vital terms that will become clear throughout this discussion. The subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism are fundamental themes explored in this study as well as they relate to the continuation of humanity’s fascination with its own form throughout adulthood.

Lacan’s mirror stage theory discusses the moment human beings experience the bodily sense of self. Fragmentation, which is a concept related to the mirror stage,

² Lacan’s 1936 paper was not published in the 14th IPA (International Psychoanalytic association) conference due to a misunderstanding between Lacan and Ernest Jones (1879-1958) but was published 13 years later with the British Psychoanalytical Society (Stijn, 2011).
relates to the constant fear of losing the sense that one is a whole, coherent being (Lacan, 1949:506). Lacan’s definition of narcissism (Lacan, 1949:507), another concept related to the mirror phase, is compatible with that of Freud; narcissism relates to the sexual satisfaction gained from continuously observing images of the self and of the human body.

The theoretical framework developed in this literature review will form the basis for the analysis of the artworks of Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville and my own artwork in Chapter Three.

2.2 Lacan’s development of the mirror stage theory

Before Lacan there were numerous other authors, including Charles Darwin (1809-1882), who recorded their observations regarding animal behaviour towards their mirror reflection; the term ‘mirror stage’ is, however, first devised by French psychologist Henri Wallon (1879-1962) in his description of this developmental phase in human beings (Gronçalves, 2012:2). Wallon conducted an experiment called éprevue du miroir (mirror test) in which he places a child in front of a mirror, and the child progressively differentiates him or herself from the reflected image (Hewitson, 2010). Wallon concludes that the mirror stage revolves around the child’s development of a symbolic understanding of the space he or she exists in. Lacan’s mirror stage theory similarly focusses on the ability of an infant to recognise him or herself in a mirror during early childhood development.

To understand an infant’s ability to self-recognise, Lacan compares the differences in the behaviour between a child towards his or her reflection in a mirror, and that of a chimpanzee towards the reflected image. He describes it in his mirror stage theory as follows: “...this conception originated in a feature of human behaviour illuminated by
a fact of comparative psychology. The child, at an age when he is, for a time however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognise as such his own image in a mirror” (Lacan, 1949:502).

Lacan describes identification during the mirror stage as follows: “It suffices to understand the mirror stage in this context as an identification, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image — an image that is seemingly predestined to have an effect at this phase, as witnessed by the use in analytic theory of antiquity’s term, ‘imago’” (Lacan, 1948:76). Identification holds a strong position in Lacan’s work as it is the process encompassing the adoption of attributes from another in which the infant appropriates these features as the self (Evans, 1996:82).

Although at first, Lacan relied heavily on the mirror models to explain his theory, it is later understood that Lacan’s mirror relates to any reflective surface or object, including water, and even the gaze of the nursing mother, or the sight of other infants. The mirror stage marks the shift in an infant’s psychological development from experiencing fragmentation (at the beginning of the phase) to the awareness of the body as forming a whole (toward the end).

### 2.3 The mirror stage and fragmentation

The mirror phase serves to form the basis of a person’s identity or ego, as ego formation is initiated during the subject’s infancy. It should be noted, however, that Lacan describes the mirror stage as only the earliest formation of identity or ego, indicating that the ego is not necessarily fully developed, but is rather an artificial pseudo ego at this stage. The ego is constituted through the subject’s identification with an external image; the ego is developed, based on the perception that the
specular image reflects the body as a Gestalt (Mollon, 2001). Lacan refers to this Gestalt as a visual image, especially a visual image of the human body, which represents unity and wholeness (Lacan, 1949:504).

The image of the human body is a Gestalt that initiates instinctual responses, such as sexual responses, but it also constitutes the captivation of the mirror image. Lacan (1949:503) states: “The fact that the total form of the body is by which the subject anticipates in a mirage the maturation of his power is given to him only as Gestalt, that is to say, in an exteriority in which this form is certainly more constituent than constituted.” To put it simply, the image as a Gestalt has a formative function on the ego during the mirror stage when the infant identifies with the mirror image of the body. According to Hewitson (2010), Gestalt theory suggests that the infant’s brain is able to create a unitary image or form from purely geometrical shapes and lines; and this explains why Lacan states that the mirrored image is rather more constituted that constitutive.

Based on the coherence of this mirror image, this Gestalt, the infant is able to create (in his or her mind) an image of an ideal self – or ideal ego in Lacanian terms - that serves as a model to which he or she will aspire to become. This allows the infant to distinguish him or herself from the environment, as well as from other individuals (Lacan, 1949:502). Thus, Lacan emphasises the importance of images in the formation of subjectivity. Later in the infant’s life, this ideal ego or self-image no longer has to be a reflection of themselves but also of another individual or ideal with which he or she identifies (Kerren, 2012:9). This process could be related to the viewing of

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3 The term ‘Gestalt’ is a German word describing a whole or an organised pattern. According to Evans (1996:75), Gestalt was an experimental study during 1910 concerning phenomena of perception. The study was based on a holistic idea of the importance the body’s presentation has psychologically.
artworks representing the human body, where the spectator, for example, assumes or identifies with the image of the human body.

The infant’s assumption of a self-image provides a barricade against fragmentation. The image of the self as a whole serves to provide the subject with a sense of structure and order. According to Mollon (2001), it aids almost like a psychological cloak without which we feel naked and alienated from others.

Lacan’s mirror theory implies that self-identity is not a given but rather has to be found in the reflection of a mirror (or another reflective surface) (Van der Merwe, 2010:10). An identity or ego can be formed on the basis of ideal images provided for the child by society (such as the parents’ expectations for the infant) and culture.

Before the mirror stage, the infant experiences his or her own body as being uncoordinated and fragmented (Zwart, 2015:4). The baby has no understanding of where his or her own body begins or ends. Limbs move in an uncoordinated manner, and there is a primal sense that the body is not a unified whole.

The mirror stage (occurring between six and eighteen months) serves as a foundation for the subject’s development of a cohesive body image and an attendant perception that the self is a coherent whole. The mirror stage anticipates mastery over the body as it is by identifying with an image that the infant experiences the feeling of wholeness (Smith, 2010:17). The infant identifies with certain aspects of the reflected image and ascribes these characteristics he or she placed on the reflected image of him or herself (Kerren, 2012:8). According to Homer (2005:25), “This identification is crucial, as without it – and without the anticipation of mastery that it establishes – the infant would never get to the stage of perceiving him or herself as a complete or whole being.”
While it forms the basis of the development of a coherent sense of self, the mirror phase is not without the experience of alienation or the feeling of fragmentation (Kerren, 2012:8). At the time of the mirror stage, the infant not only sees itself as a potentially whole coherent being but simultaneously perceives the self as being fragmented (Gronçalves, 2012:3). During the mirror stage, the infant realises that he or she is a separate entity from the mother, and this awareness of separation also results in the feeling of alienation, anxiety and fragmentation (D’Avella, 2005:98). The child feels fragmented when he or she enters the mirror stage because the child sees the self as separate from the mother; this runs parallel to the child seeing the self as separate to the mirror image. While the image in the mirror is recognised as a whole, the infant perceives his or her own body as being fragmented. The infant’s perception of his or her lack of wholeness creates an aggressive tension between the physical body and the specular image as the coherent reflected image seems to threaten the physical body with fragmentation (Lacan, 1948:15). To counteract this, an infant needs continuous intervention from the caregiver during the mirror phase, not being able to act out coordinated bodily functions. Because human beings begin life in such a fragmented state, an external basis of coordination and stimulation is required (Mollon, 2001).

The notion of alienation is essential to Lacan’s mirror stage theory in which the subject or infant identifies with an image of the self which remains external or alien to it. Richter (2002:3) points out that: “If you look at yourself in a mirror, you see yourself either seeing or being seen, but never both at once.” The self-image in the mirror is a misrecognition of an ideal self which is an illusion of unity situated outside the body embedding a constant subliminal fear of reverting to a previous fragmented state (Bedell, 20000). Weber (1991:13), in his essay Return to Freud: Jacques Lacan’s
dislocation of psychoanalysis, summarises this point as follows: “[T]he mirror stage hereby locates the constitution of the ego in a dimension of fictionality and self-deception, which will have an alienating effect on the subsequent existence and development of the subject”.

Fragmentation in the Lacanian context not only denotes the perception that the physical body comprises uncoordinated fragments (for example, toes, fingers, hands, limbs) or is in pieces; it also refers to a psychical sense of disunity which impedes the illusion or subjective experience of wholeness and unity (Smith, 2010:17).

The subjective experience of bodily fragmentation, known as the phenomenon of the corpse morcelé (body in pieces) is one of Lacan’s original ideas. It is associated with the concept of the mirror stage insofar as it instigates the process of ego development and relates to the moment the infant observes him or herself as an uncoordinated and separate being (Lacan, 1951:13). The term, body in pieces, refers to those primal images of the body as being fragmented that appear in art, nightmares, and elsewhere, and which haunt us during adulthood. The corpse morcelé, fragmentation, or the body in pieces - all interchangeable terms - denote images of the disunified human body and relates to any form of fragmentation, such as a scattered and distorted state of mind. Human beings all live with a fear of disintegration (death and decay) and loss of bodily wholeness (physically or psychically) (Ross, 2010:1). The feeling of fragmentation provokes anxiety which accelerates the identification process with the specular image which shapes the ego. The synthetic ego remains threatened with fragmentation anxiety; the fear of returning to a previously disunified state. Fragmentation anxiety haunts the human imagination in dreams and through images of the body in pieces.
For Lacan, the fragmented body or ‘body in pieces’ is ‘fused together’ during the later stage of the mirror phase, when ego formation takes place, after an initial stage of dissociation and subsequent reconciliation with the mirror image, which prevents fragmentation anxiety. As suggested above, the sense of fragmentation can continuously beset the human imagination by manifesting in dreams, for example (Lacan, 1949:506). In contrast to the experience of fragmentation, identification with the specular image, which initiates the development of the ego, can eliminate the sense of fragmentation (Grosz, 1990:33, 39). A simple glimpse of the body in its totality allows for a moment’s mastery over the fragmented form, a moment that is premature to real mastery and still evokes a sense of relief from fragmentation (Van der Merwe, 2010:32). The main purpose of the ego is to uphold the illusion of unity (Homer, 2005:26).

Identification with the mirror image or the development of the ego during the mirror stage leaves a constant fear of returning to a fragmented state indicating that fragmentation is not wholly overcome during early childhood development but persists throughout life. This is because the identification is with an external image creating only an illusion of coherence (Mollon, 2001).

The human being’s first experience with a mirror constitutes the beginning of a libidinal relationship with one’s own physical body. This relationship is primarily narcissistic and shows humanity’s fascination with the visual image (Zwart, 2015:5).

2.4 Narcissism as a result of the mirror stage
The eternal presence of fragmentation anxiety gives rise to narcissistic passion; a passionate desire to instil the ideal image in reality. The dual relation between the specular image and the ideal ego is primarily narcissistic, making narcissism a key
attribute of the mirror stage (Evans, 1996:84). The ego is also constituted through a process of fantasy. Lacan, speaking of the ideal ego, states (1949:503): “…the important point is that this form situates the agency of the ego, before its social determination, in a fictional direction, which will always remain irreducible for the individual…”

The term narcissism was coined from the mythological story of Narcissus and Echo by the Roman poet Ovid in his third book *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) and was subsequently further developed into a focused psychoanalytic term (Konrath, 2007:1). Narcissus was cursed by the goddess Nemesis to fall in love with his own reflection. Narcissus came across a pool of water during his stroll in the woods where he caught a glimpse of his reflection and instantly fell in love (Petek, 2005:6). Unable to ever touch his reflection or remove his gaze from the water, Narcissus wasted away from hunger, thirst and grief, inevitably perishing. All of his body vanished, leaving only a single flower in his wake (Ovid, 2000:16).

It seems that Narcissus was infatuated with his reflection because he failed to grasp his own self, feeling alienated from this image situated external to him. The folklorist James Frazer (1854-1941) has provided evidence, to some extent, that one’s

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4 The myth speaks of a beautiful baby boy born from the nymph Liriope and the river god Cephisus. Liriope enquired a seer Tiresias about the longevity and fullness of her son’s life. The blind seer reassures Liriope that her son will live to a ripe old age “if he does not discover himself” (Ovid, 2000:151). At the age of sixteen, Narcissus was desired by both men and women alike, but never returned their adoration. While wondering the woods, the nymph Echo – so named due to the curse placed upon her by the nymph Juno for spreading cunning stories, her only way of communicating now by echoing or repeating the last words of conversations – spotted Narcissus and she too fell in love. As with all other admirers, Echo was rejected by Narcissus. She sent him away with shame and a broken heart until nothing remained but her voice (Petek, 2005:5-6).

Narcissus was admired by all. One day a defeated admirer raised his hands to the goddess Nemesis and prayed “so may he himself love, and so may he fail to command what he loves” (Ovid, 2000:155). She heard his plea and cursed narcissus to fall in love with his own reflection. His reflection mirrored his every move but eluded any physical touch. Narcissus could not steer his gaze away ultimately causing his death. Only a flower remains where he once wasted away.
reflection or shadow can and has often been employed to serve as a representation of the soul (Mollon, 1993:34); this idea suggests that Narcissus, by reaching towards his reflection, was perhaps trying to understand and grasp his own soul or at least a deeper sense of self.

The use of the term narcissism begins, in the history of psychoanalytic literature, with a study of the sexualisation of the self (Konrath, 2007:1). The term narcissism appears in 1898 when psychologist Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) describes autoerotism with the term ‘narcissus-like’, employing the term to refer to a psychological attitude (Petek, 2008:7).

Another theory of narcissism was introduced to psychoanalysis through Ernest Jones (1879-1958) when he wrote about the God-complex in 1913, describing traits such as self-admiration, autoerotism and overconfidence (Konrath, 2007:2). In general, narcissism is the projection of the libido onto the self, resulting in satisfaction gained from viewing an image of one’s self or observing a reflection of one’s self (Van der Merwe, 2010:14).

For Lacan, Freud’s work establishes the ego as a libidinal object; both analysts correlate ego formation with the development of narcissism. According to Lacan (1949:505), narcissism is associated with both aggression and the erotic. The former refers to the tension between the specular image and the uncoordinated real body which threatens the subject with the fear of becoming once again fragmented, and the latter refers to the subject’s sexual attraction to the specular image (Evans, 1996:123). The lingering fear of fragmentation and the sense that something is missing when observing an image of the self, indicates that narcissism cannot only rely on stimulation from one’s own image but rather consists of the idea or illusion that one’s
image transcends the ideal specular image which is found to be lacking (Smith, 2010:18). It should be noted that narcissism can move from one extreme to another in that profound self-love can evolve into self-hate, or what is termed ‘narcissistic suicidal aggression’ (Grosz, 1990:40).

Lacan (1949:507) defines narcissism, with the influence of Freud’s concept of primary narcissism, as an ‘erotic attraction’ to the specular image; therefore, the ego is formed by means of an erotic relation to the specular image during the mirror stage (Lacan, 1949:507). Lacan (1948:79), like Freud, also describes the existence of a shift from primary narcissism to secondary narcissism which takes place the moment the infant identifies with other people and places them as imaginary rivals (as opposed to identifying with his or her own image in the mirror). In other words, in Lacan (1949:505) as in Freud (Smith, 2011:2940), secondary narcissism evolves from the investment of the ego from the self to external objects (Rabaté, 2003:29). This shift primarily forms when the infant experiences jealousy and aggressive tension towards another.

In the analysis of artworks in Chapter Three, secondary narcissism will be related to the process of art-making. The process of painting will be referred to in terms of the artistic transfer of primary libidinal energy to a secondary source; artists transfer energy into their art – or at least attempt to do so – in a manner that is analogous to secondary narcissism. With this, I suggest a possible reason for humanity’s and specifically the artist’s infatuation with the image of the self.

2.5 Conclusion

Some of the following conclusions can be made from the literature review. Before the mirror stage, at the beginning of childhood, there is no sense of self and, until the age of six months, or until the infant recognises him or herself in the mirror for the first time,
the infant lives in a state of fragmentation; the formation of the self only takes place once the infant identifies with his or her external image of the self; this image of the self may be a mirror reflection, the image of the mother or even another child (Gronçalves, 2012:3).

The mirror stage plays a twofold part in that it firstly proves the difference between the self as an intellectual concept and the self as an object or representation, and secondly, the mirror stage explains the linear biological development of the subject (Van der Merwe, 2010:15). The mirror stage is the genesis of self-awareness and is a pivotal moment in that the infant not only evolves the concept of the self from it but also understands its body as being fragmented (Bedell, 2002). The infant gains a sense of jubilation to the extent that it has control over his or her mirror image. Lacan notes in his mirror stage theory (1949:503), "Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up… he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, …brings back instantaneous aspect of the mirror image." As noted, paradoxically, the infant also gains the sense of alienation and rivalry towards that mirror image, a feeling that is carried on through adulthood as the individual realises that the reflected image is flawed and other to the self, resulting in misrecognition, and reinstating the fear of fragmentation (Smith, 2010,28).

The mirror phase also determines whether narcissistic personality traits or fragmentation anxiety develops during early childhood development and whether it will continue through adulthood. The whole of the mirror stage that can be described as the acceptance of the captivating and developmental purpose of the image as a Gestalt (Hewitson, 2010). Lacan puts it as follows: “I am led, therefore, to regard the function of the mirror stage as a particular case of the function of the imago, which is
to establish a relation between the organism and its reality – or, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt* – the subject’s inner and outer world (Lacan, 1949:505).

I propose that the search for an understanding of the self is perhaps what drives artists to study the human body, specifically their own image, resulting in a narcissistic obsession to find wholeness and unity in their reflected image. In other words, it is a common misconception that one enters the mirror stage during early childhood development and arrives at the end with a fully developed ego or identity. The mirror stage is merely a process aiding in the formation of the ego and may be an incomplete or unsuccessful phase for certain individuals. With this in mind, I suggest that artists continuously engage in the process of art making, studying their own bodies, in an effort to complete the formation of an identity.

In Chapter Three, I aim to discuss a few examples of art from Lucian Freud, Jenny Saville, and my own work to illustrate how fragmentation and narcissism manifest in art as artists search for the self or identity in studying their own image. This will, in turn, aid in understanding the captivating power the image of the human body has upon humanity in general.
CHAPTER THREE: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ARTWORKS BY LUCIAN FREUD, JENNY SAVILLE AND MYSELF

In this chapter, Lacan’s mirror stage theory together with the concepts of fragmentation and narcissism are applied to visual examples comprising selected self-portrait paintings by artists Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville. The same theory and concepts are then applied to an analysis of my own artistic practice. This chapter focusses on the application of psychoanalytical theory to the act of painting a self-portrait in an attempt to understand the compelling nature of the human figure.

There are many theorists and writers who have given psychoanalytical interpretations of art, most of whom agree that art plays an active role in an artist’s life, both as a primary artefact of the artist’s psychological experience and as the embodiment of the artist’s subjectivity. The esteemed psychologist Sigmund Freud himself examined the portraits of many artists and scientists upon visiting London’s National Portrait Gallery during 1909 to understand aspects of their character (Laganà, 2016:15). He recognised that the creation of a work of art is a human activity which culminates in the production of a product representing complex psychological and behavioural processes (sublimation). Schumacher (1990:84) describes the process of art-making as a uniquely human activity which he terms ‘creative communication’. He further explains: “A work of art has been brought into existence by a human artist for a human audience, the worth of which derives from its clear articulation of significant human experience” (ibid:86). An artwork is a culturally acceptable object, a result of the human need to redirect and defend inner disturbances and desires; all artists attempt to create a world, to externalise an inner world as an art object (Hagman, 2010:18-19).
3.1 Self-portraiture as a means to establish identity

The word portraiture stems from the Latin word ‘portray’, meaning to bring about and realise one’s self. Simply put, a self-portrait is a portrait an artist creates by him or herself, of him or herself and, although it is typically a painting created by means of looking in the mirror; contemporary art has shown that the nature of the self-portrait is only limited by our imagination (Dalton & Blunden, 2006:7). Through self-portraiture, the artist attempts to represent and understand the ‘self’ (Suler, 2015:2). Even though a self-portrait is based on the artist's subjectivity, it is not necessarily equivalent to it. It is, however, the artist's way of externalising human subjectivity and enables the artist to alter and perfect his or her image (create an ideal self-image). One can say, then, that a self-portrait is a subjective object (Hagman, 2010:22).

In order to understand an artwork and the artist's creative and psychological processes when making a specific artwork, one must consider that every artist invests cultural, psychical and intersubjective elements in his or her art (Hagman, 2010:25). This means that, to a certain degree, no artist is completely (psychologically) inseparable from his or her work. Self-portraits in particular display the uniqueness of humanity among other species through humanity’s advanced self-awareness. No other species attempt to capture their own image or identity on an external object to be reflected upon later (Suler, 2015:2).

The human being continuously questions his or her own place in the world, their sense of identity and individuality; the ultimate goal is to reach an inner or psychical harmonious state. There is a wide belief that the practice of art making allows the artist to situate him or herself in society and establish an identity as an individual, finding a sense of unity and wholeness (Taylor, 2015:1). Dehhan (2000) suggests that such this type of self-contemplation may allow the artist to understand the self and find relief
from fragmentation anxiety, albeit temporarily. With the help of image stimulation and a slow, continuous construction of the self, the illusion of wholeness could possibly be maintained (Gay, 1986:70).

Self-portraiture is a way of studying the self and reflecting on the self through capturing one’s own likeness or by distorting that likeness. According to Dahhan (2000), “every self-portrait is a dialogue with the ego,” as the process of creating a representation of the self relies heavily on self-analysis, honesty and the strength to lay bare one’s own image for critique by others (and by oneself). It allows the artist to confront a tangible object which portrays, for example, the artist’s fear of fragmentation anxiety, death and disintegration and, in turn, the artist is for a moment able to master his or her fears instead of letting the fear control the artist. In other words, self-portraiture allows the artist to step back and reflect on the self from an objective position. Suler (2015:11) sums up that “[i]n all cases, creating a self-portrait is the construction of a tangible, external representation of you,” and enables the artist to depict inner feelings and experience otherwise difficult to communicate.

The self-portrait could be considered a form of communication between both the artist and the spectator and between the inner communication of the artist and his or her represented (other) self (Xuan, 2012:4). Thus, the self-portrait is a means of constituting the artist’s self. Self-portraiture can, therefore, be compared to Lacan’s mirror phase through which the infant identifies with a specular image of the self, in turn, constituting the self through this image that bears the individual’s likeness.

As stated, this study of the human body’s representation in art, with the specific evaluation of self-portraits, is greatly informed by Lacan’s mirror stage theory. His theory refers to the manner in which the fragmented subject (the infant) attempts to
achieve mastery of his or her own body through the identification with an image of the self. I propose, therefore, that the mirror stage is re-lived during the creation of a self-portrait. The self-portrait is seen as a recreation of the pivotal moment an individual first misrecognises his or her external self-image (Xuan, 2012:31). The self-portrait is a tangible reflective object with which the artist can identify and constitute the self in the pursuit of achieving wholeness. By examining the artist’s rendition of his or herself and connecting what is being represented to information of the artist’s life, theories can be developed toward the artist’s psychological state during the time the artwork was created (Xuan, 2012:28). In other words, an artwork can narrate, through visual communication, an artist’s psychological processes and serves as an autobiography of sorts. As mentioned in Chapter Two, self-portraits are generally introspective, however, Lacanian theory implies that there is no such thing as a true self; rather, there is only an illusion or ‘artificially created’ self.

With Lacan’s mirror stage theory in mind, the art object can be interpreted as the artist’s way of compiling psychological fragments of him or herself into a unified, external object. The artist’s inner world now externalised can be observed and reflected upon, aiding as a coping mechanism, facilitating self-understanding (Hagman, 2010:19). The self-portrait, thus, provides some sort of mastery of the self or over the image of the self, just as the specular image does for the infant during the mirror stage.

3.2 A brief overview of Lucian Freud’s early career

Lucian Freud (1922 – 2011) was the grandson of the great psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud. He was born in 1922 in Berlin. At the age of ten, Lucian and his family fled Berlin, following the Nazi takeover of Germany. The family moved to London where Freud formally became a British citizen in 1939 (Stigh, 2008:3). At age fourteen, Freud
created a sculpture which afforded him a place at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in 1938 (Hughes, 1988:11). Subsequently, he studied at Cedric Morris’s East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing (Stigh, 2008:3). Freud became a full-time artist by 1942, having his first solo exhibition at Lefevre Gallery two years later.

Figure 1: Lucian Freud, *Girl with a kitten* (oil on canvas), 1947, 41 × 30.7 cm, Tate Gallery, United Kingdom (Tate, 2008).

Figure 2: Lucian Freud, *Woman smiling* (oil on canvas), 1958-59, 60 × 51 cm, Private collection, unknown (Christie’s, 2011).

The first change in the appearance of his painting came about in 1958 with *Woman smiling* (Figure 3, 1858-59): his artworks changed from smooth and flat (Figure 2,
to life-like and textured (Hughes, 1988:18). In comparison to his earlier works, the change in texture is the most striking element to Freud’s painted skin (Corbin, 2011:42). To achieve this effect of leaden skin in his art, Freud painted his famous bodies using Cremnits white paint. It added a luminescent appearance to the painted skin. Cremnits white was a specific white oil paint the Freud incorporated into his paintings and only used it on flesh or the hairs of a dog; never on anything that is not alive. The paint was much heavier and thicker than other white oil paints (Esplund, 2001:26). Although Freud’s style of painting changed, he remained focussed on the human figure as subject matter for the duration of his career (IMMA, 2016:5).

His large, elaborate nudes reflected his captivation with the human body. He frequently placed emphasis on hands and feet by painting these larger than would be proportionate. According to Walter (2015:6), Freud was ‘notoriously private,’ painting only those who were familiar to him, such as friends, family, and lovers. Some of his most recurrent sitters were his mother, daughters, Leigh Bowery (an Australian performance artist popular in London nightclubs (Figure 5, 1992), and Sue Tilly (who was known as Big Sue, a London nightclub host (Figure 6, 1994) (Stigh, 2008:3).
Freud's 'naked portraits' usually display his sitters in unflattering, but comfortable, 'natural' positions on weathered sofas or on an unmade bed, fully nude and vulnerable.
His subjects, including himself, are often depicted in a state of deep thought or introspection. He observed and studied his sitters as if they were animals: “a naked portrait is a person, a human animal with their clothes off” (Freud a, 2014). “My preferred subject matter are humans. I’m merely interested in them as animals, and part of liking to paint from them naked is partly for that reason” (Freud, 2017).

3.1 The mirror stage and the paintings of Lucian Freud

This section aims to understand how the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism manifest in the later (textured) painted works of Lucian Freud. His detailed studies of the naked human body stand out even among his wealth of other figurative studies. In my opinion, Freud’s paintings seem to epitomise the human being’s obsession with his or her own form, since the human figure is central to his paintings. As previously mentioned, Freud only paints what is familiar and interesting to him (family, friends, and lovers), perhaps in an attempt in avoiding anxiety of the unfamiliar which would threaten to fragment his comfortable state of mind.

Before delving into Freud’s self-portraits, let us first examine some of his other figurative paintings. Either ignorant or indifferent to incestuous connotations, Freud painted his daughters in the nude, as illustrated in Figure 7 (1979) and Figure 8 (1995) below. A third alternative, of course, is that he is completely aware of the incestuous implications and simply ignored public opinion.
Figure 5: Lucian Freud, *Rose* (oil on canvas), 1978-1979, 91.5 x 78.5 cm, Private collection, unknown (Bridgeman images, 2017).

Figure 6: David Dawson, Lucian Freud in his Studio *painting his daughter, Bella* (photograph), 1995, Private collection, unknown (Hamer, 2015).
It is a challenging task to interpret such artworks because the viewer tends to focus on the disturbing incestuous aspect, rather than anything else. During an interview with Freud’s daughter Annie, Greig (2013) notes that Freud’s children are, “[a] good subject for any artist, but one with a psychological edge, questioning the line between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour by a father toward his pubescent daughter.” The painting of his daughter Annie *Naked child laughing* (Figure 9, 1963) was the first of Freud’s full body nude paintings and set in motion “a career defined by his naked portraits” (Greig, 2013). Annie, quoted in this interview with Greig (2013), states: “We actually had a wonderful time; it is the picture of me by Dad that I most admire.” Freud was, however, indifferent to how the paintings of his daughters affected either them or the public. He saw objections as bourgeois; the product of conventional, distorted (fragmented) minds (Greig, 2013).
Self-portraiture allows for artistic freedom in the sense that the artist has full control over the image of the self, and over what the rest of the world is ‘allowed’ to see of this self (Suler, 2015:10). It is perhaps this artistic freedom to depict the self that inspires Freud’s many self-portraits. Hewitson (2010) interprets this phenomenon from a psychoanalytical point of view and suggests that many artists who paint multiple self-portraits, including artists like Freud, remain ignorant about the misrecognition of the image of the self; accepting its falseness will once again awaken fragmentation anxiety. A troubling aspect of creating an artwork of the human figure, particularly a self-portrait, Pearl (1994:22) adds, is the question of its completeness. If in accordance with the mirror stage theory, the artist identifies with the image of him or herself as represented in the artwork, the artist will continuously misrecognise the self and will not be able to escape fragmentation anxiety.

Narcissism manifests in the work of Freud not only insofar as he only chooses to paint what is familiar to him, but also in terms of the fact that he completed a total of twenty-two self-portraits throughout his lifetime. This number is arguable, as most of his paintings, including landscapes, were considered self-portraits by some (IMMA, 2016:48). When observing Freud’s self-portraits, the spectator assumes a position in front of the canvas, similarly to where Freud himself stood when creating the painting. Indeed, this is the case with all paintings. However, as with many self-portraits, Freud’s eyes return the spectator’s gaze,\textsuperscript{5} peering back him or her just as his own mirror image.

\textsuperscript{5} Self-portraits can also be interpreted in terms of what Lacan calls the gaze. The gaze suggests that the object being observed by a subject is always already looking at the subject, much like a self-portrait seems to be observing the spectator as much as the spectator is observing it. According to Stijn (2011), “the gaze is the reflective dimension from which an individual is driven to create images of his own identity in relation to others, and from which ego ideals are adopted.” Lacan understands the formation of a social and sexual identity to be connected to the gaze, or rather the desire aroused by the gaze (Dehhan, 2000). The gaze is, therefore, recognised as an integral component of the ideal image that artists attempt to achieve.
stared back at him (Bond, 2015:2). In this sense, the canvas acts as a form of mirror. As is the case when looking into a mirrored surface, the spectator is in position to identify with the image in front of him or her.

Freud’s self-portraits can be likened to the mirror from Lacan’s mirror stage theory, in that the painter identifies with the image he has created. Freud himself describes his work as autobiographical, suggesting that some part of his work contains an essence of his inner self, or is, to some extent, reflective of him (Stigh, 2008:3). Freud thought that painting self-portraits would become easier over time, but they never did, as he explains: “There’s also an important point; you can’t see yourself like you can see other people. All you can see is a reflection. I’ve tried to paint the actual reflection that I see; that is why I call them reflections” (Freud b, 2014); see Figure 8 (1985) and 9 (1981-82) below.

Figure 8: Lucian Freud, Reflection (Self Portrait) (Oil on canvas), 1985, 56.2 × 51.2 cm, Private collection, Ireland (Bridgeman images)
There are numerous aspects in Freud’s paintings which Freud himself, as well as spectators, can identify with. For example, Freud can identify with the image he has created as the image of the self, as the image does indeed bear his likeness. His self-portrait paintings, however, are more easily identifiable to male spectators when compared to female viewers, because Freud’s body and facial features are male (Figure 9, 1993).

![Figure 9: Lucian Freud, Painter Working, Reflection (oil on canvas), 1993, 101.2 x 81.7 cm, Private collection, unknown (Bridgeman Images)](image)

Fragmentation anxiety is generated by images of the body as disintegrating and as having fallen into pieces (Lacan, 1949:506). At first, glance, insofar as his self-portraits seem to realistically document the manner in which his body is ageing, and portray the skin as comprising distinct facets or fragments (different tonal values are painted as distinct facets), his work seems to actively confront fragmentation anxiety. The texture change may imply Freud’s struggle with the fear of death, ageing, and disintegration; all aspects of the changing and ageing body which can be observed in his self-portrait.
studies throughout the years. This view is supported by the fact that Freud (a, 2014) refers to his paintings as “biological facts”. Indeed, Corbin (2011:43) states that “his mature work is a modern memento mori, a hard-eyed stare at the way of all flesh.”

Freud’s works do contain notions of fragmentation, however, in the way he only paints what is familiar and ‘safe’ to him’, some aspects of his paintings may be interpreted as leaning towards narcissism. I propose here that Freud compare his physical body to the ‘more ideal’ self-portraits he has created earlier on in his life, before ageing and the fear of disintegration haunted his mind. The ageing flesh reminds of the constant disintegration of the human body and in turn, reminds of fragmentation anxiety. The prevalence of self-portraits in his oeuvre evokes a sense of a narcissistic desire to create a cohesive and more permanent self. The self-portrait is, after all, an object created by an artist of him or herself meant to last far longer than their own existence (Konrath, 2007:2).

### 3.3 A brief overview of Jenny Saville’s early career

According to Colls (2011:181), Jenny Saville’s work has been likened to that of Lucian Freud in terms of its similarity in subject matter (the naked human body). Both artists are intrigued by flesh and how it behaves. As with Freud, the human body is central to Saville’s art. Her work differs slightly from Freud’s as it is created mostly from a feminine perspective. In terms of the aims of this study, her self-portrait paintings will be interpreted according to a Lacanian perspective, rather than from a feminist point of view.

Born in 1970, Jenny Saville is a Scottish artist who graduated from the Glasgow School of Art in 1992. Charles Saatchi, the owner of Saatchi Gallery in London, commissioned Saville for an exhibition following her graduation which finally took place in 1997 (Colls,
After having completed her studies, and with the patients’ consent, Saville observed a few plastic surgery appointments in order to understand how flesh can be manipulated through the knife; and to study how scarring, swelling and bruising affects the surface of the skin. One can almost say that Saville is fascinated with the fragmentation of others.

Saville’s subject matter includes over life-sized oil paintings of female bodies, some of which were inspired by medical handbooks, and some of which are self-portraits. Meager (2003:23), describes Saville’s massive paintings as portraying “distorted, fleshy, and disquieting naked female bodies.” Her paintings induce certain bodily reactions, elicited only by the knowledge of corporeal experiences of the body as it is (O’Reily, 2009:34). Therefore, monumental nudes, such as those painted by Saville (and Freud) have become acknowledged for their flawed, more naturalistic features, as opposed to the unrealistic utopian ideologies represented by the traditional nude (O’Reily, 2009:18).

Saville’s larger-than-life paintings draw spectators with a sort of intimacy of the flesh and by the lack of boundaries in that the fully fleshed-out and confrontational bodies almost invade the space of the spectator by the sheer scale of the work. The physical features of the painted figures include fleshy mounds such as heavy hanging breasts, rolls of fat, and clenching and grabbing hands. According to Colls (2011:175): “Her paintings of big female bodies are big both in their corporeal form and in their production”. Her paintings produce visceral and instinctual reactions in spectators, such as disgust or shock. To be disgusted or shocked is a natural bodily response to what we find revolting, therefore, one can assume that Saville’s work urges spectators to confront this response. Such reactions may be an attempt on behalf of the spectator
to separate him or herself and be dissimilar from that which disgusts – the fat, undesirable and socially unaccepted body.

3.4 The mirror stage and the paintings of Jenny Saville

Saville materialises the undesirable female body-type by representing the disproportion between how women experience their own physical bodies and how the rest of society perceives them (Meager, 2003:34). In other words, she not only mirrors her own anxieties by representing herself in her art; but also represents feminine anxieties in general. I aim to analyse a selection of Saville’s artworks, in order to demonstrate that the artworks display aspects related to fragmentation anxiety and also the desperate need for a stable, unified, whole identity.

Saville’s self-portraits resonate with spectators because she successfully transcribes the collective female self-image. In comparison to the infant’s identification with the mirror during the mirror stage, spectators, specifically female spectators, can identify with the image presented; and are therefore able to confront fragmentation fears such as vulnerability, death, ageing, disintegration and disproportionate areas of the body. Her self-portraits (and other figurative paintings) merge outer appearance with inner perception and in so doing, illustrates the importance of the transformation of inner self as an element of identity formation (Maioli, 2011:89). By deliberately depicting her own image as grotesque and unflattering, Saville demonstrates her authentic attempt to explore her own inner self (Xuan, 2012:69).
Figure 10: Jenny Saville, *Propped* (oil on canvas), 1992, 213.5 x 183 cm, Saatchi collection, London (Saatchi, 2017).

The mirror plays quite a significant part in the painting *Propped* (Figure 10, 1992), as suggested by the text overlaying the work. The text has been etched into the paint and can only be read through the use of a mirror which entails turning one’s back to the painting (or rather the woman). The sentence is a translation from French psychoanalyst, feminist and philosopher Luce Irigaray’s (b. 1930) paper *Ce Sexe Qui e nest Pas Un* (*The sex which is not one*) (1977) and reads: “If we continue to speak in this sameness, speak as men have spoken for centuries, we will fail each other again…” (Meager, 2003:25).
The painting *Branded* (Figure 11, 1992) shows unease; this is suggested not only through the use of dark greys and blues, but through the woman’s action of pinching of the fat, suggesting discomfort with the largeness of the body presented. Saville makes use of text, only in this work the text is etched in the flesh of the woman presented, instead of comprising an overlay. The words resemble adjectives associated with the ideal female, such as supportive, decorative and petite (Meager, 2003:27). The painting also depicts a large woman covered in scars, suggesting abuse or self-harm, where the latter could act as a “physical release for psychological suffering” (O’Reily, 2009:40). Saville only painted her body in such a condition to serve as a means of exerting control over an aspect of her life. The self-portrait “mirror”, in this circumstance, mirrors inner psychological disturbances; and the painting could indeed be a true reflection of the self, in contrast to the identity she puts forth in the social sphere.
The encircling lines in her painting *Plan* (Figure 12, 1993), appear as surgical lines one would often see drawn on a patient prior to cosmetic surgery. This can also be gathered from her interest in plastic surgery patients, as previously mentioned. The painting evokes the idea that the woman’s identity can be changed and transformed by changing the outer appearance to mirror the inner self (Maioli, 2011:87). This idea of a new identity can be compared to an artist’s rendering of the self-portrait as a means of recreating and representing the inner self on a canvas and, like the infant during the mirror stage, the artist can identify with the newly created image of the self.

Figure 12: Jenny Saville, *Plan* (oil on canvas), 1993, 274 x 213.5 cm, Saatchi collection, London (Saatchi Gallery, 2017).

Saville reflects (through her paintings) her inner discomfort with societal beauty norms. By depicting her own image, she displays the physical and psychical trauma the female body experiences throughout life. I propose that Saville’s fascination with the human body and the study of her own body relates to Lacan’s mirror stage in that she has fragmented thoughts and feelings towards the ideals to which the body is put. The self she portrays is not an ideal self; rather, her work suggests that she is reflecting on her own identity. Her artworks may be regarded as only mirrors of her own inner disturbances but also of societal issues.
In summary, Saville’s self-portraits depict large, undesirable women, materialising Saville’s view of the absolute power the delusion of the perfect female figure has over society. This equates to Lacanian misrecognition of the self-image in that women compare themselves to and assume images society puts forward instead of recognising the self as the image in the mirror.

3.5 A brief background of my own artistic practice

For the last six years, my art, in general, has comprised of portraits of the human body. Since the start of my master’s journey, I have narrowed down my art practice to the painting of oil paintings of the nude human body, and self-portraits in particular. Rather than showing faces, I place emphasis on hands and feet so as to avoid any identifiable characteristics. I have found that removing facial identity allows spectators to relate to my paintings on a more personal level as it is easier to place themselves within an image that lacks identity.

For the most part, I aim to bring forth the feeling of coldness and anxiety in my paintings. Anxiety is and has been an extreme issue throughout my life and art-creation has been the only working therapy for this condition. To illustrate how anxiety affects my body and, in turn, my painting subject matter, I will describe how anxiety attacks feel as follows:

The first onset of an anxiety attack is similar to the feeling of being winded. The heart then starts racing and pounding to the extent that you seem to go partially deaf, only being able to hear a ringing in the ears along with the pulsating heart and rushing of blood through veins. The scalp starts to burn and tingle, almost like boiling water is being poured over your head. The final stage is the pins and needles sensation in the hands followed by an overwhelming need to faint. These anxiety attacks range
anything from once a week to twenty times a day during heightened times of stress and attacks sometimes seem to heighten at events as simple as going to friends or family dinners.

During these moments stopping panicking seems impossible as there is this overwhelming fear of dying. An anxiety disorder impacts other aspects of life as well, such as general communication with others. I am terrified to speak to others as I fear to be perceived as being strange or abnormal. This is why I am always quiet and appear uncomfortable in large groups. I usually tense up my body and clench my arms and ribs to the extent that I feel whiplashed the next day. My body is, therefore, in constant tension and pain. This is why I depict my body in paintings as isolated in darkness with clenching hands, see Figures 13-16 (2018) below.

3.6 Applying Lacan’s mirror stage theory to my own self-portrait paintings.

In this section, I will be applying Lacan’s mirror stage theory to an analysis of my own artworks, as well as discussing how fragmentation and narcissism manifest in my paintings. I have established in the previous section that anxiety haunts my imagination; my art, therefore, reflects many elements of fragmentation anxiety which will be elaborated on.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, fragmentation anxiety fuels the formation of the ego through identifying with the specular image as there is an urgent need to return to a calm, uniform state. My continuous studying and paintings of self-portraits do admittedly ease my scattered, or rather ‘fragmented’, state of mind. In comparison to the way in which an infant barricaded fragmentation anxiety through assuming his or her reflected image as the self, my self-portraits provide me with a sense of structure and order, allowing me a temporary relief from anxiety fears.
Identity is not incorporated in my paintings; rather, an element of Lacan’s body in pieces can be noted here. I do, however, tend to focus more on psychical fragmentation in concept. For example, the human figures in my paintings emerge from and are surrounded by complete darkness, a place without light and, most importantly, a place without reflective surfaces and identifiable objects, emphasising complete isolation. To explain further, my mental figure of the self is unable to experience wholeness and unity, even after outside stimulation. My ego can then be considered to be permanently plagued with disunity and the fear of being stuck in a fragmented state.

Figure 13: Alecia van Rooyen, Angs (Oil on board), 2018, 120 × 90 cm, private collection.
Figure 14: Alecia van Rooyen, *Tempus* (oil on canvas), 2018, 120 × 90 cm, private collection.

A simple glimpse of an image of the body in its totality creates an opportunity for the subject to experience a sense of mastery over his or her body, and steer away from fragmentation anxiety (Lacan, 1949:504). I believe that such a notion is what drives myself and other artists alike to create and re-create self-portraits, albeit only to enjoy a temporary illusion of coherence. The fear of fragmentation is great enough and haunting enough to feed the artistic creation of the self-portrait.

To a certain degree, I believe, human beings are continuously searching for their ideal ego or identity by observing and comparing themselves to images of the human body; this correlates the need to overcome fragmentation anxiety with the state of primary narcissism. In such an image-saturated world it is easy to compare your self-image to those idealistic images put forward by society. There seems to be a great focus on
individuality, however, everyone seems to strive to look the same, to look ‘perfect’. This is another reason for my elimination of identity. Identity is seemingly, in my opinion, non-existent in the modern image-controlled world.

Lacan correlates the formation of the ego with the development of narcissism, as mentioned previously in Chapter Two. My paintings manifest narcissism, not in the case of being infatuated with the self-image, but rather the inverse: with the transformation from self-love to self-hate. The figures in my paintings do not welcome the gaze of the onlooker and, as I am the artist that removes identity, it can be concluded that I am also, to an extent, not fond of looking at my own image. Secondary narcissism is also at play here in terms of me projecting my ego or identity onto an external object.

![Figure 15: Alecia van Rooyen, Unruhe (oil on canvas), 2018, 120 × 90 cm, Private collection](image-url)
Scale and realism are important aspects in paintings or other artworks of the human body, as it resonates with the physicality of the spectator. It is much easier to imagine the self as the image being projected in front of you when there are no specific identity features represented.

Lacan’s body in pieces or the subjective experience of fragmentation is explored through digital prints as seen in Figure .... I play around with mirroring my body-image, to an extent manifesting narcissism by looking at my own image repetitively; trying to understand my own image.
Figure 17: Alecia van Rooyen, *Mirror 1* (Digital print), 2018, 42 × 59.4 cm, Private collection.

Figure 18 Alecia van Rooyen, *Mirror 2* (Digital print), 2018, 60 cm, Private collection.
Figure 19 Alecia van Rooyen, *Mirror 3* (Digital print), 2018, 60 cm, Private collection.

Figure 20 Alecia van Rooyen, *Mirror 4* (Digital print), 2018, 60 cm, Private collection.
Painting and continuously studying my own human form, to some extent, helps me understand my body and cope with seemingly mundane issues. I can identify with the human figures featured in my paintings, not only because they are self-portraits, but because of the subjective experience evoked by the paintings. I am a human being, experiencing human anxieties through other humans and objects around me.

In conclusion, this chapter has demonstrated how psychoanalytic theory, specifically Lacan’s mirror stage theory, can be used to inform an analysis of self-portrait art. Self-portraiture is a uniquely human activity; a creative way of communicating complex psychological and behavioural processes. It can, therefore, be said that a self-portrait is an artist’s way of externalising their subjectivity; taking their subjectivity and transforming it into a tangible object which can be studied and improved upon to reach an inner harmonious state.

Lacan’s mirror stage theory was applied to the self-portrait paintings of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville to demonstrate how the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism manifests in art containing images of the human body. These two artists were specifically chosen because both artists epitomise the human body as their subject matter. Taken together, Freud’s work did contain elements of fragmentation anxiety in terms of dealing with the inevitable disintegration and aging of the body, however, his work displayed more elements of narcissism in his meticulous and numerous self-portrait studies, as well as in the fashion of only painting what is important to him. Saville on the other hand, combined fragmentation anxiety from a collective female perspective rather than focussing specifically on her own subjective experiences.
The same theory was then applied to my own artistic practice in an attempt to better understand how fragmentation and narcissism manifests in my own work. I have concluded that my works displays mostly elements of fragmentation anxiety. This process has therefore helped me better understand myself and how to use my artistic practice to calm fragmentation anxiety and find a sense of unity.
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

The main aim of his research study was to apply Lacan’s mirror stage theory towards an understanding of the manner in which the subjective experiences of fragmentation and narcissism manifest in the artworks of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville. Inasmuch as artistic representations of fragmentation and narcissism have been analysed, this dissertation has explored why these artists have been fixated on painting the human body; the topic was formulated around the subject that also inspires my practical art making: the human body and its captivating power. My interest in the discovery of the self through artistic practice is connected to my own need to establish an identity in an ever-changing, image-dominated world that is continuously influenced by societal expectations and stereotypes.

In Chapter One I provided the background for this study by providing a brief overview of the various factors involved in the artistic fascination with the human form, and the manner in which the human figure has been a predominant motif throughout history. The historical prevalence of the human figure in art, was surveyed: from carving out the stone figures, to cave paintings and the renaissance period; this artistic contemplation of the human figure continues in contemporary art today. The main aim of this research, namely, to analyse the manner in which Freud and Savile’s artworks may represent the psychological states of narcissism and fragmentation, was formulated in this chapter. Chapter One comprised a brief literature review and explained the use of a qualitative research methodology, where case studies of the artists form the basis of the research.

In Chapter Two, in a more focussed attempt to form an understanding of humanity’s fascination with the human body, the psychological formation of the self was examined. This led me to the field of psychoanalysis, where the most prominent theory
relevant to this theme was Lacan’s mirror stage theory. Chapter Two encompasses an in-depth review concerning the development of the mirror stage theory, starting with key concepts from Sigmund Freud such as sublimation, narcissism and the split subject; these form the basis of Lacan’s understanding of subjectivity.

Lacan’s mirror phase theory provides an explanation for the manner in which a person’s sense of self is formed, in relation to visual images. The mirror stage theory which formed the foundation of this study was employed in order to demonstrate the manner in which the subject’s sense of self develops in relation to the specular image. It was noted that the image of the self can be formed on the basis of the image in the mirror, the mother’s gaze, or even the sight of other infants. Chapter Two therefore outlined the process whereby the ego is formed in relation to external images, tracing its development from early childhood through to adulthood. The self-portrait was compared to the specular image of the mirror phase, so that the act of self-portraiture was understood as involving the same subjective processes which are relevant to ego-formation.

The process of ego-formation was described in Chapter Two as involving the child’s identification with the specular image, where the specular image reflects the body as a Gestalt (Mollon, 2001). The child, in fantasy, creates an image of an ideal self which it aspires to become, based on the coherence of this mirror image (Lacan, 1949:502). This ideal ego serves to protect the subject from fragmentation anxiety (Mollon 2001).

Fragmentation anxiety also develops during the mirror phase (Kerren, 2012:8). An aggressive tension develops when the infant comes to perceive his or her own body as being distinct from the mirror image; the child sees his or her own body as being incoherent, whereas the image in the mirror is a Gestalt. The coherent reflected image
seems to threaten the child’s own body with fragmentation (Lacan, 1948:15). The confrontation with the external image of the self as a whole therefore paradoxically serves to evoke in the subject a constant subliminal fear of reverting to a previous fragmented state, which persists into adulthood (Bedell, 20000).

In Chapter Three, the application of Lacan’s theory to an analysis of the art of Lucian Freud and Jenny Saville allowed for a better comprehension of artists’ fascination with the body. The chapter provided short introductions to the early careers of the artists but mostly consisted of the application of Lacan’s mirror stage theory to their self-portrait paintings.

I have found that Freud remains ignorant about the misrecognition of the image of the self; accepting the falseness of the external, painted image and continued awakening fragmentation anxiety. In other words, due to the continuous identification with the painted self-image, he was unable to ever escape fragmentation anxiety which led him to create numerous self-portraits. Fragmentation anxiety was made visible in his paintings insofar his self-portraits documenting the aging of his body.

Narcissism manifests in the repetition of self-portraits and in the act of preserving the self-image for much longer than his life span. His self-portraits can be likened to the mirror stage theory in that he identifies with the image he has created.

Saville confronts fragmentation anxiety (through her paintings) by reflecting her inner discomforts with social norms. Narcissism does not manifest in her work other than painting her self-image to emphasise these discomforts. Her work relates to the mirror stage theory in that she experiences fragmented thoughts towards the ideals to which the female body is put. Her work equates to Lacanian misrecognition of the image of the self and in the manner in which females, including herself, assume unrealistic
body-images as the ideal-self displayed in every-day life instead of identifying with realistic female bodies.

I subsequently applied the same Lacanian theory (the theory of the mirror stage, and the attendant concepts of fragmentation and narcissism) to the analysis of my own art practice. I have found that there are many psychological facets which encourage my study of the human body, particularly my own body, relating to fragmentation anxiety and a general search for a more unified sense of self.

An artist’s subjectivity is constructed not only from identifying with an image of the self but is also influenced by social, cultural and relational elements. The making of a physical interpretation of the self as an external object allows artists to confront, understand and ultimately to improve upon that self-object / self-image. In other words, a self-portrait is the manifestation of human subjectivity in a self-object.

It is my opinion that the possibility of unifying a fragmented self, by means of creating an external object, is what nourishes an artist’s continuous drive to create art, particularly art which represents their own human body. Like the infant identifying with the mirror during the mirror stage, a self-portrait allows the artist to identify with his / her external image and, for a moment, gain mastery over his / her anxieties. Another possible reason for mankind’s continuous fascination with the human body is because of the ever-changing nature of the human experience, which means that the continuous study the human body aids in re-forming one’s evolving identity. This means that artists no longer rely on nature for identity / ego formation, but rather create it themselves; but it also means that fragmentation anxiety is never fully overcome as one’s identity will constantly change, due to social and environmental circumstances.
Granzoil-Fornera (2017:72) explains that the infant will only experience a sense of wholeness when an image of the self is reflected back to him or her, as is the case with a mirror reflection, or, in the case of this study, a self-portrait by an artist. The human being needs to physically see him- or herself, to maintain the illusion of being whole or complete, just as the infant experiences his / her body as a unified whole during the mirror stage. An image of the self is thus important in the process of continuous identity / ego formation and, as Cobb (2013:2) states, “art is the remedy for our psychological incompleteness.”

The view of the mirror stage, narcissism and fragmentation provided in this study provides a necessarily limited explanation for humanity’s fascination with its own form. Further research should be conducted, to examine the diverse other aspects which are involved in mankind’s captivation with its own image.

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