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Relational choreography as a means of negotiating white masculinities within, and through, the work of selected white male South African artists


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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation, which I herewith submit for the research qualification

Magister Technologiae: Fine Art

To the University of Johannesburg is, apart from the recognised assistance, my own work and has not been previously submitted by me to another institution to obtain a research diploma or degree.

Matthew James Hazell ______________________

Date  __________________
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The appreciation and acknowledgement of all those involved in the journey of this project cannot begin to be expressed as there have been so many individuals who have helped and guided me throughout.

I would like to extend the greatest amount of gratitude to my supervisor, Leora Farber, without whom I would not have been motivated and driven throughout this process of exploration and learning. Her unwavering efforts and time given to me have been invaluable. To my co-supervisor, Shonisani Netshia, for her enthusiasm and encouragement.

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To my friends and family who have been both a source of endless support and inspiration.
ABSTRACT

In this study, I consider how essentialist notions of white masculinities can be negotiated within, and through, artwork by selected white male South African artists, specifically, Brett Murray, and myself. The impetus for this study are my experiences as an English-speaking, white male South African in his twenties and the complexities I have experienced in expressing myself with regard to politicised issues in South Africa, such as race, sex and gender, both verbally, and through my artwork. My experiences contributed to my growing awareness of the ways in which an essentialised identity can be imposed on an individual and the potential responsibilities that come with whiteness in post-Apartheid South Africa.

The manner in which the research is conducted is imperative to my study in that it establishes the authorial voice that contributes to the potential approaches in negotiating the ideologies of whiteness and masculinities. I therefore introduce narrative inquiry and autoethnography as the primary methodologies used to engage with my research topic.

Within these methodological frameworks I establish my positionality, as a white, South African, English speaking male. I base my discussion on Stuart Hall’s (1989) conception of cultural identity, which explores identity as being fluid, complex, and multiple. Creating an understanding of my positionality is done so as to further develop the idea that essentialised notions of identity can potentially come with responsibilities and a sense of self-awareness. I suggest that these responsibilities and sense of self-awareness requires negotiation to create a space in which nuanced experienced by an individual can be shared through artmaking practices. I suggest that ‘relational choreography’ is one such means.

Relational choreography – a term coined by Shona Hunter (2015), is explored as a potential means of negotiating ideological identities, specifically whiteness and masculinity. I unpack relational choreography and explain the various processes that contribute to the approach and how these processes can be utilised in forming a practice of self-reflexivity.

Relational choreography, is then applied to aspects of artist Brett Murray’s lived experience and artmaking practice. Following the trajectory of Murray’s career as an artist and the narrative that forms within his life, I propose that the approach of relational choreography can be seen to manifest and evoke Murray’s resistance to forms of censorship and essentialised identity.

The final section of the study explores how relational choreography functions within and through my lived experience and artmaking process. By utilising experiences, memories and anecdotes to enact the methods of narrative inquiry and autoethnography and exemplify how
relational choreography can be used in a pragmatic manner. The practical component of the study manifests in an exploratory collection of paintings that attempts to convey my fears and anxieties as a white male in South Africa. The paintings grapple with the dichotomous notion of the responsibilities that come with essentialised concepts of identity and the desire to express myself in a wholistic manner with the complexity and multiplicity that I experience as an individual.

**Key words:**

Whiteness, masculinity, relational choreography, narrative inquiry, autoethnography, negotiation, Brett Murray.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In this study, I consider how essentialist notions of white masculinities can be negotiated within, and through, artwork by selected white male South African artists, specifically, Brett Murray, and myself.

The impetus for this study are my experiences as an English-speaking, white male South African in his twenties and the complexities that I have experienced in expressing myself, both verbally and through my artmaking, with regard to politicised issues in South Africa, such as race, sex and gender. My experiences contributed to my growing awareness of the ways in which an essentialised identity can be imposed on an individual and the potential responsibilities that come with said identity. Due to my fear of being defined and perceived in an essentialised manner, I have previously enacted a form of self-censorship within both my artmaking and life in general. This has led me to question whether I, as a young white male living in contemporary South Africa, have complete freedom of expression? Moreover, do I have freedom of expression with regard to my artmaking practice? The immediate answer could be to state that constitutionally, all South Africans have the right to freedom of expression. However, due to historical, social, and political reasoning, freedom of expression is not simply a constitutional right; there are nuances and responsibilities that come with an individual’s identity. Furthering this line of questioning, if I accept that I have freedom of expression, how do I go about expressing my views through my artmaking practice?

The post-colonial theorist, Stuart Hall (1989) explores two different notions of cultural identity, namely, ‘identity’ and as ‘positionality’. Hall’s notions of cultural identity expound upon the complexity and multiplicity of an individual’s identity to formulate a more nuanced approach to discussing and understanding practices of identification (Hall 1989). According to Hall, ‘identity’ is an ideological definition emphasising shared histories and cultural codes that group individuals together, providing a sense of ‘oneness’ and an ‘essence’ that forms an individual’s identity. Hall sees this definition as providing benefits when it comes to uniting individuals towards a common cause, but, as he points out, the definition is limiting as it is fixed and does not allow for intricacies that occur within an individual’s life. Hall therefore introduces a different definition of identity, which he later terms ‘positionality’. Positionality, as described by Hall (1989:706), accounts for both the similarities individuals share, as well as the critical
points of deep and significant difference, therefore, allowing for a form of identity that constitutes “what we really are” or, as he points out, “what we have become” after history has intervened. The latter definition of identity accounts for a wholistic approach towards each individual’s lived experience. Forming a richer understanding of the way in which identity functions beyond constructs of identification, whilst focusing on the ontology of each individual. For these reasons I employ positionality as a possible beginning towards negotiating essentialised notions of identity.

To further develop a more comprehensive understanding of positionality, I introduce Shona Hunter’s (2015) concept of ‘relational choreography’ as an approach to unpacking one’s positionality through dynamic interactions, with the potential of exploring practices of self-reflexivity and self-awareness. I show how application of relational choreography can facilitate a productive means of engaging with the various dynamics at play with regard to the artist’s intention, and the processes of making, reading, accessing and viewing of selected works by white male South African artist, Brett Murray. Furthermore, I demonstrate how relational choreography can shed light not only on the understanding of positionality, but also the responsibilities that come with this understanding, particularly in relation to oneself. In my artmaking practice, I explore ways of enacting the concept of relational choreography as a potential means of negotiating my white masculinity and the possible essentialised versions thereof.

1.1 Context of the Study

1.1.1 Introduction and background

South Africa is a product of its histories which, arguably, still operates within a structure of hegemonic power and white privilege. The legacies of colonialism and apartheid, with their histories of inequality and injustice, are, in my view, an ever-present reality. Their lingering presence results in the need to question the hegemonic systems and facilitate productive change with regard to the essentialisation of identity. On 9 March 2015 student protests began at the University of Cape Town, which culminated in the movement known as #RhodesMustFall. Protestors sought to have the statue of the colonial leader, Cecil John Rhodes, removed from the university campus (Kros 2015:151). The protestors’ agenda later extended to a call to action demanding the decolonisation of tertiary education in South Africa. This event highlighted a myriad of inequalities that still exist in South Africa due to its aforementioned legacies. The protests resulted in a massive outpour of opinions and debates, which were shared across a
multitude of platforms, including social media. I, a white male with British parents, born and raised in South Africa, had the desire to engage in conversation, debate, and to express my opinions regarding the #RhodesMustFall movement. However, it seemed to me that I could not engage with this discourse as I would be faced with criticism, regardless of what I said. I feared being defined according to an essentialist\(^1\) version of my identity; I felt angered by my ancestral history and the actions of oppression committed by my forefathers; and confused as to whether I could express myself in response to any politicised action that may occur in South Africa.

Given these emotions, and the uncertainty as to what and how I could make art in South Africa, I silenced my artistic expression through a form of self-censorship – by avoiding socio-political content related to race, gender, and/or sexuality. Nevertheless, I continued to question the responsibilities that I, as a young white male South African, have when making and exhibiting art in a country that has been dominated by the ideologies of patriarchy and whiteness. Furthermore, in what manner do these responsibilities allow me to produce art? Do I even have the right to make art, or by extension, ‘speak’? And, if so, how can I negotiate my identity, which is so integrally tied to those complex histories that afford my current position of power and privilege?

Through an investigation of the career and work by the white male artist Brett Murray I explore how I experience the apparent problematics and responsibilities that arise when working within this particular demographic in South Africa. I focus on the potential adversity that occurs, particularly when one’s work deals with politicised issues, such as race, gender, sexuality or the political climate itself.

Murray’s painting entitled *The Spear* (Figure 1), exhibited on his *Hail to the Thief II* exhibition (2012, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg), depicts President Jacob Zuma in a Lenin-esque pose with his fly open and genitals exposed. Paralleling the tale of ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, the work critiques the South African government and its running of the nation (Ndebele 2012; Blignaut 2012). Peroshni Govender (2012) notes “[*Hail to the Thief*] takes a provocative look at ANC heroes and highlights public perception that there is growing corruption in government, with officials abusing positions to amass wealth”. Murray’s bold and poignant statements

\(^1\) The practice of regarding something (such as a presumed human trait) as having innate existence or universal validity rather than as being a social, ideological, or intellectual construct (Essentialism 2018 Merriam-Webster).
resulted in a wide range of controversial responses and reactions. *The Spear* was met with a great deal of criticism and controversy – Murray was labelled as racist and consequently received death threats towards him and his family (Crawley 2015; van Graan 2013). Furthermore, Murray was defined by an essentialist notion of white masculinity (see for instance, Malefane 2012; Jasper 2014) that did not account for any other of Murray’s lived experiences that could inform his awareness and understanding of the responsibility that comes with producing a work with such political content. It became evident that an individual can be publicly labelled without full consideration of their positionality. Such essentialism overlooks the complex criticality that artists often undertake when producing work with potentially contentious content.

![Figure 1 Brett Murray, The Spear, 2011, Acrylic on canvas, 185 x 140cm.](image-url)
Thus, in this dissertation and my practical body of work, I explore how relational choreography could be used as an approach, wherein white male South African artists can negotiate their identities in non-essentialist terms.

I subsequently investigate how art produced by white male South Africans, in a space that resists essentialised identities, can give rise to creative tensions and what value these tensions may have in facilitating productive dialogue and action.

1.1.2 Rationale and Motivation
Research surrounding whiteness and masculinity is often linked to criticism and controversy. These criticisms and controversies manifest in many ways, with some academics (see, for instance, Morrell 1998; Nayak 2007) who argue that these fields of study foreground the experiences of whites or males over those that do not fit within these classifications, thereby perpetuating both the oppressive power of these hegemonic groups and re-establishing essentialised notions of identity. Other critiques include the apparent self-deformation and guilt that these fields of study promote (Vice 2010:324). However, critical whiteness and masculinity studies aim to facilitate research that critically engages with these identities and does not perpetuate oppressive actions or essentialist versions. It is my view that research of whiteness and masculinity is necessary and can be done in a manner that is self-critical and self-reflexive, whilst still engaging with the multitude of experiences and histories of individuals living with these identity markers. I believe that in order to discuss whiteness and masculinity, and in my case white masculinity, it is necessary to develop a means of understanding the position from where one speaks and how interactions occur with this voice in mind.

Hall’s (1989) concept of ‘positionalty’ facilitates a multi-faceted understanding of identity that accounts for the complexity and multiplicity of the self. Hall writes within a post-colonial context, and accounts for an identity that cannot be defined by the binaries of ‘self’ versus ‘other’. His understanding of identity as non-essentialist is particularly effective if read in and applied to a South African context. Hall’s conception of positionality begins to provide a means for artists, such as Murray and myself, to express the complex biography of each individual – a biography that includes both an historical background and an ever-changing lived experience. It is important to consider how concepts such as positionality can be applied in lived experience
and not just read as a theory. In this respect, I suggest Hunter’s theory of ‘relational choreography’ as a potential means of enacting positionality, and as a potential means of negotiating my experiences with regard to essentialising white masculinity.

Hunter’s theory focuses on engagement and interaction between multiple positionalities. In my view, as a visual artist in the process of creating work, it is important to think critically about one’s positioning in relation to the work’s content. However, this process should not hinder the artist’s freedom of expression. A continual consideration arises for artists in the form of a negotiation between perpetuating oppression and censoring their artistic process. In doing so, I suggest that complexity arises when the artist grapples with oppressive histories and multiple narratives. Investigating the selected works by Murray through the lens of relational choreography, I suggest that it may be possible to produce and receive art that evokes response and critique, especially with regard to politicised issues in South Africa, yet still remain self-critical and avoid self-censorship. Furthermore, I explore the value of relational choreography in my artistic process as a means of understanding the various multidirectional positionalities at play and what these dynamics of interchange may give rise to in the processes of making, reading, accessing and viewing of my work.

1.1.3 Project Description and Scope
The study includes a body of practical work consisting of varying sized oil paintings that reflect a self-exploratory and self-reflexive investigation of my positionality and lived experience as an individual who is identified and identifies as a white male. The integration of relational choreography into my artmaking process reveals the dynamics of interchange in the intention, making, reading, accessing, or viewing of the work.

I utilise both the visual and material qualities of the oil paint medium to express these conceptual concerns. The visual qualities refer to the work’s imagery, its interpreted concepts and concerns, and that which is represented on canvas. The material qualities point to the physical aspects of the work, such as the application of paint, the texture, the tactility and the mark or trace of the artist. In this manner, I produce work that negates illusion – the presence of the artist permeates the work due to its painterly traits, such as the use of mark making and the transgression of the canvas’s boundaries. Consequently, this prompts the viewer to take into consideration the artist’s presence when engaging with and discussing the work.
I use metaphor as a tool for exploring aspects of my personal life and lived experiences that relate to being a white male. The metaphor I have chosen to use is that of water. I use the actions that are associated with water such as swimming, drowning, floating, sinking, splashing, cleansing; and the experiences and events that relate to water such as family holidays, birth, baptism, evolution, and the very reason that humans exist on a habitable planet, to explore my experiences as a white, male, South African. I have always had an affinity for water and many memories and anecdotes from my life that evoke strong emotions revolve around it. The translation of water through the medium of paint is also of importance as different processes of transference, interpretation, understanding, translation, recollection and physicality are evoked. In many of the works I do not attempt to realistically reproduce images of water as I feel this relates to the methodologies and the approach of relational choreography used in my research. I prefer to translate the imagery through processes of thought and emotion as I am able to engage with academic theories and concepts as well as experiences and interpretations simultaneously. The simultaneity of utilising academic knowledge and experience allows for paintings to be produced that are potentially narrativised or allegorical in nature. The interaction that occurs between myself and my art making process enacts many of the processes involved in relational choreography, which in turn, provides a potential means for me to grapple with and negotiate with my white masculine identity.

1.2 Theoretical Positioning

My research is situated within a post-colonial paradigm and is broadly framed within constructivist identity theory. Concepts related to my identity such as whiteness (Nuttall 2009; Vice 2010; Steyn 2001; Nayak 2007) and masculinity (Zietsman 2013; Morrell 1998) are explored in a South African context. However, the notion of positionality (Hall 1989; 2000; 2011; Bhabha 1994) underpins the theoretical framework of my research. I suggest that Hall’s notion of positionality investigates the multiplicity, complexity, and fluidity of the ways in which identity can be understood. I use Hunter’s (2015) concept of relational choreography as a means of understanding one’s positionality as an interplay between emotion, self-objectification, power dynamics, and other individuals’ positionalities. Furthermore, I investigate how the work of Murray has been responded and reacted to, with particular

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2 Narrative inquiry and autoethnography are unpacked in detail under the methodologies section on page 11.

3 Constructivist theory as described by Leora Faber (2010:304-305) sees identity as fluid, multiple and unstable, yet rendered more complex by the difficulties of fixing these positions in a socio-political environment where the very notion of identity is emergent and contingent upon socio-political terrain and history.
reference to instances where the artist has been defined by an essentialist version of his ‘identity’. Thus, I explore the concept of relational choreography as a means of negotiating white masculinities in South Africa.

1.2.1 Positionality

Hall’s (1989; 2000) understanding of positionality, mentioned earlier, is key to my study, because it accounts for both self-reflexive practice and a complex understanding of the individual’s identity. Hall identifies two ways of thinking about ‘cultural identity’. In the first, Hall (1989:68) defines cultural identity in terms of ‘one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside many other, more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.

Hall argues that common historical experiences and shared cultural codes can be used to label an individual and consequently place them in a specific cultural category. This way of thinking about ‘cultural identity’ provides the individual with an essentialist identity that is predetermined and does not take the vicissitudes of lived experience into account.

Hall’s second conception of ‘cultural identity’ recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which “constitute ‘what we really are’: or rather – since history has intervened – ‘what we have become’” (Hall 1989:70). Hall argues how it is the differences that define one’s ‘identity’ as an ever-changing

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4 The term ‘positionality’ first emerged in the 1970’s in the chronological work of the geographical sciences (Sack & Hirsch cited in Throne 2013). ‘Positionality’, aims to establish less bias in the documentation of historical events, in that understanding the position from where one speaks allows for an awareness of the effect of one’s own placement within the many contexts, layers, power structures, identities, and subjectivities of the viewpoint on one’s research (Throne 2013). In subsequent years, the term ‘positionality’, particularly when used in a research context with regard to the relationship between the participants, researcher, and research setting (Throne 2013), developed to form a method of positioning oneself in relation to the ‘other’. From a sociological perspective, positionality is not only used to position the self in relation to an ‘other’, but used as a means of self-reflexivity; the self is aware of the multiple factors that its positioning comprises, for example race, gender, class, culture, education, age, geographic and temporal context, as well as the power and subjectivities that come with that positioning. The sociological definition of positionality as: “The occupation or adoption of a particular position in relation to others, usually with reference to issues of culture, ethnicity, or gender” (positionality 2016) exemplifies how positionality is formulated in relation to the other, mainly established for research purposes and prompts an understanding of identity that is fixed. Therefore, the sociological definition accounts for self-reflexivity, but not the complexity and multiplicity of identity.
and continuous concept stemming from one’s lived experience. Therefore, when Hall states, “what we have become”, he refers to both one’s shared historical ‘identity’ and one’s personal, lived ‘identity’. Through an understanding of Hall’s second way of thinking about identity, one is able to see how he redefines the term ‘identity’ and establishes the notion of positionality.

Hall’s (1997:33) second conception of identity offers “the point of suture between the social and the psychic. Identity is the sum of the (temporary) positions offered by a social discourse in which you are willing for the moment to invest”. The ‘social’ Hall refers to are collective, or shared histories and the ‘psychic’ is an individual’s lived experience. Thus, an amalgamation of both these elements formulates Hall’s notion of positionality. I utilise this redefined explanation of identity to formulate an awareness of my positioning as a white male and how this may influence where I feel I am able speak from in relation to politicised issues in South Africa.

It is in this manner that positionality, as defined by Hall (1989; 2000), is relevant to my research. This theory allows for identity to be understood in a more complex way that goes beyond essentialism. Although this does offer a more complex understanding of identity, it can be argued that with some histories the essentialist qualities of positionality still overshadow a comprehensive understanding of the individual. For example, as a white male living under the legacy of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa, I believe that sensitivity should be involved when speaking regardless of an understanding of the history and experience that makes up one’s positionality, as the oppressive nature of these markers cannot simply be overcome. Consequently, I discuss how the history of the oppressor and by association, essentialist identity, are central to the reproduction of inequality and imbalance and cannot be understood through positionality alone. It is necessary to re-evaluate the extent to which some histories can be understood and the time it takes to overcome such entrenched hegemonic practices. South Africa is one such example that requires a more extensive approach to the desensitising and renegotiating of white male positionality.

1.2.2 Relational Choreography
Hunter (2012; 2015a; 2015b) develops her concept of ‘relational choreography’ from the idea of ‘relational politics’, and uses it with reference to governance and policy making. Although the concept is relevant in the structured context of governance and policy making, the notion of ‘relationality’ remains key to my research – it is the interaction and interplay between
individuals that is of importance when understanding either the institution or, in the case of relational choreography, the self. ‘Relational choreography’ offers a way through which positionality can be understood in relation to specific situations, often involving power dynamics. Although Hunter uses it primarily in relation to governance and policy making, it can also be applied to varying fields. It is adaptable in that it can be beneficial in many scenarios that involve politicised issues, such as race, gender, sexuality, and their relationships to power. I parallel this way of implementing the concept of relational choreography, in that my research is focused on the work of selected artists.

Relational choreography begins with a process of self-reflexivity, in which the individual begins to understand his own positionality. However, this kind of understanding is not passive; rather, it establishes what ‘just is’ in relation to one’s positionality in a specific situation, requiring the individual to have a subjective loss (Hunter 2015a:16). The term ‘subjective loss’ refers to a loss of power that is necessary in establishing change in the way one views one’s positioning. For example, a white male admitting to the power that whiteness affords him and implementing change will mean giving up that power.

Thus, Hunter explains that relational choreography is a continuous process, by which one is able to shift ways of thinking, feeling and doing; however, this process must involve some degree of antagonism. I unpack ‘relational choreography’ by breaking the theory up into ‘relational’ and ‘choreography’ demonstrating how these components can be understood and consequently work together. Hunter (2015:54) states that “the ‘relational’ in relational choreography is understood through emotion”. If the term ‘relational’ is understood as the way in which two or more people or things are connected (Waite 2013), one can understand ‘relational’ in relational choreography as interaction initiated through emotion between two or more individuals. Emotion, as Hunter explains, is the catalyst for this short-term self-objectification which begins the interplay between individuals. Furthermore, Hunter (2015:54) notes, “the choreography involves a dynamic interactive pulling together of a particular self into a particular configuration at a particular time, via affective orientations, to multiple points of view”, illustrating that depending on multiple factors including time, place and the other selves involved in the interaction, one’s positionality can be altered.

As Hunter (2012:3) states: “ideas of intersectionality, relationality and feeling work can, when taken together and connected to understandings of experience and subjectivity, enable an
analysis of the everyday practices”. Through this understanding of relational choreography, in my written and practical research, I explore how the process of self-objectification and awareness of the role of both one’s emotions and positionality can facilitate a negotiation of white masculinities. I argue that relational choreography can manifest in a practical means through the process of artmaking and the resultant work that is produced. I explore this through my own practice as this process allows me to access an ontological understanding of myself, whilst still making my categorical positioning apparent. I investigate how relational choreography functions in the process of artmaking, highlighting aspects of self-reflection, critical understanding, and a practical manifestation of these negotiations that manifest in a product that can be interacted with facilitating antagonisms and possible creative tensions.

1.3 Methodology
The research paradigm used in this dissertation is qualitative. Narrative inquiry is my primary research methodology. Narrative inquiry is defined by Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (2006:375) as

… the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study.

Therefore, in my case, narrative inquiry presents an appropriate means of utilising experience as a research methodology. My lived experience as a white, male, South African thus forms the backdrop for the research and the manner in which theories are interpreted and understood.

Autoethnography forms an important part of my use of narrative inquiry, as “narrative inquiry does not privilege one method of gathering data. Because the research is life as it is lived on the landscape” (Trahar 2009). Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000:739) state that autoethnography is an

Autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations.
The definition is congruent with narrative inquiry in that both methodologies engage in intense and transparent reflection and questioning of their own position, values, beliefs and cultural background. There is, therefore, much potential for such articulation of self-awareness and self-reflexivity to be used in and to enrich research in intercultural communication (Trahar 2009).

Allan Munro (2011) extrapolates on the method of autoethnography noting that,

The term itself contains the threefold dynamics at play: ‘auto’ refers to the ‘self’ …, ‘ethno’ refers to culture …, and ‘graphy’, which speaks to the act of writing (or, speculatively, any act that commits form to idea). For autoethnography the key data gathering and analytical process is captured in the practice of narrative. Because design is emergent, that is to say the product emerges from the process of designing, and because such emergence occurs over time, in essence what comes about is a narrative of design.

Herein, the personal experience that is utilised in autoethnography as method is emphasized. The utilisation of personal experience brings about the major critique of autoethnography and introduces one of the major reasons for the use of autoethnography as one of my research methodologies. The major criticism of autoethnography is the potential to fall into solipsism or self-indulgent forms of research. Catherine Russell (1999) notes that “As literary genres, autobiography and ethnography share ‘a commitment to the actual’”, which is important in that autoethnography utilises these genres to form its own and thus continues the emphasis on committing to the actual. Therefore, autoethnographers must explore ways to withhold the commitment to the actual. The autoethnographic method uses consistent self-critique and self-reflection to utilise the author’s experience to inform and contribute to cultural investigation and interpretation. Therefore, the author implementing self-critique and self-reflection minimise the chances of self-indulgent writing, thus forming a rich interaction between lived experience and socio-cultural inquiry.

Through my exploration of the methodologies of narrative inquiry and autoethnography, I discovered how these methods could be appropriate for my research and benefit many of the concerns I sought to address. The main reason for my decision to adopt narrative inquiry and autoethnography was the focus on storytelling and lived experience, and particularly how both methods seek an insight into the complexity of human lives and allow for a potential visual form of communication (Trahar 2009:1).
Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (cited in Trahar 2009:4) note that, “Thus I came to know ‘something’ without claiming to know everything”. For me, this phrase emphasises a crucial dimension of narrative inquiry as used in my research, as it allows the researcher to be informed through literature, theory, and experience, but not claim all knowledge of a subject, especially when considering the experience of other individuals.

The manner in which narrative inquirers obtain and interpret information, be it in the form of literature, visual analysis, theoretical interpretation and so on, is also important when discussing this choice of methodology. As stated by Stefinee Pinnegar and Gary Danes (2007:4), "Narrative inquiry embraces narrative as both the method and the phenomena of study". By this they mean that through narrative inquiry the researcher is able to include informed personal readings of theory, artwork, and other individuals’ experiences. The researcher can also be influenced by the process of undertaking the study and can therefore change ideas and opinions from the initial conceptions of the research. The inclusion of personal readings and interpretations can inform a more relatable means of accessing complex topics and issues, which are arguably present in my study.

As mentioned, autoethnography has been subject to critique concerning potential of self-indulgent or overly subjective writing. Due to the similarities and overlaps of these methodologies, these critiques are closely related and can be apparent in both methodologies, however, the following is written specifically in relation to narrative inquiry. There are three major areas of critique. The first is that the author could become more focused on the therapeutic nature of storytelling rather than that which is being studied. Trahar (2009:6) notes that the therapeutic nature of storytelling is of vital importance as it contributes to the reasoning for using narrative inquiry as method (through lived experience, including emotions and feelings, theoretical knowledge can be seen in a pragmatic manner), whilst still placing emphasis on remaining critical and analytical methods when engaging with theory, literature and other forms of academic knowledge.

The second area of critique is that of narrative inquiry as being seen as less ‘authentic’ than other forms of research (Trahah 2009:6). The idea that any form of research could be seen as more or less authentic than another is a fallacy, in that no research method can be viewed as a finite truth or as being objective. Quantitative methods are often thought of as more authentic or accurate, however, even quantitative methods have been debunked in light of new
discoveries and/or advancements in research. Therefore, to critique the authenticity of a research methodology could only be seen as legitimate if a methodology could prove to be objective. However, no methodology can be seen as truly objective as all research is done with human subjectivity and understanding (Adams, Bochner & Ellis 2011).

The third manner in which the method of narrative inquiry is often critiqued is due to the focus on storytelling and lived experience as being related to a single individual’s narrative and can be seen to outweigh the experience of a collective group of individuals and disregard shared histories and experiences, potentially ignoring existing narratives in favour of the individual’s experience (Trahar 2009:6). If the researcher overlooks the context and histories applicable to the research, criticality is lost, and the researcher falls into solipsism – self-indulgence. To avoid falling into solipsism self-criticality and self-reflection plays an integral part in the method. Through a sense of self-criticality and self-reflection the researcher is able to situate personal narrative into a larger social context and thus formulate research that utilises personal lived experience as a means of understanding more complex and dynamic socio-political issues.

I use narrative inquiry and autoethnography as methodology in both the written dissertation and my practical body of work. The research is done in this manner to place emphasis on my personal perspective and interpretive methods of understanding, rather than employing an analytical approach. I do not attempt to construct a discursive theoretical argument as there has been research conducted in this manner (see Zietsman 2013; Passmoor 2009). In order to contribute to the knowledge and study of race and gender in South Africa, I utilise my lived experiences and interpretations as a pragmatic reading of existing theory and research. In the dissertation, I conduct discourse analysis surrounding the theories of positionality and relational choreography to inform personal understandings. I expound these theories by investigating their value in relation to the negotiation of white masculinities and the resisting of essentialisation. An exploration of the work and career of Murray is also done through the lens of narrative inquiry and autoethnography, which is further detailed in the next section. In the practical work, I use narrative inquiry as a means of exploring, reflection and interpreting the theory of relational choreography and how it can be a potential means of negotiating white masculinity within and through my artmaking process.
As narrative inquiry is the main methodology for my research, it could be argued that there is the potential to lose a sense of objectivity and criticality within my research. In my case, for example, there is the potential for me to lose a lack of objectivity when discussing Murray’s, or my own work. Therefore, I have engaged with practices that allow for criticality to remain paramount, including expansive engagement with literature pertaining to Murray, and continued self-critique of my practical work done through periodic re-evaluation of work and focus on the process of artmaking and not necessarily a finished product. Extensive literature on Murray’s work and career includes catalogue essays, chapters in books, articles, reviews and online content (see for instance, Jamal 2015; Passmoor 2009; Dubin 2013). Several texts are dedicated to his work *The Spear* (2011) and the events surrounding the exhibition of it (see Dubin 2012; Powell 2002; O’Toole 2005). I reference Murray’s writings on his own work and process, as these provide insight into Murray’s thoughts and concerns regarding the impact of his work in South Africa. The inclusion of an interview conducted between Murray and myself (Appendix B) also forms part of my methodological approach in an attempt to access some of the artist’s lived experience and personal opinions. The interview questions posed to Murray were formulated through an informed knowledge of previous questions asked and topics discussed in interviews conducted with Murray by academics and reporters (see Jamal (2017); Dubin (2013); Powell (2013)), so as to only ask questions pertaining specifically to my research.

1.4 Aims and Objectives

1.4.1 Aim

To explore how white masculinities can be negotiated within, and through the work of selected white male South African artists.

1.4.2 Objectives

- To investigate the possibilities of relational choreography as a means of challenging perceived white masculine essentialist positionalities.
- To discuss Murray’s artistic practice, considering reactions and responses to the work, illustrating the essentialisation of white masculinities and considering relational choreography as a productive means of understanding the various multidirectional positionalities at play.
• To explore my artmaking process through an autoethnographic investigation, revealing the dynamics of interchange in intention, making, reading, accessing, or viewing the work.

1.5 Chapter Outline and Associated Literature

Chapter 1
Chapter One serves as an introduction to the contents of the dissertation. Focusing on the context of the study, theoretical positioning, methodology, and the aim and objectives of the study.

Chapter 2
In Chapter Two, I position myself as the author, in an attempt to provide a context to the reasons for researching white masculinity in South Africa. After positioning the authorial voice, the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity are explained to establish working definitions of concepts such as ‘hegemonic culture’ and ‘master narrative’. Thereafter, I describe how whiteness and masculinity exist beyond these ideologies and can be understood as whitenesses and masculinities. By exploring the plurality of white masculinities, it becomes apparent that there is no single ‘white masculinity’ but rather, that this essentialised category encompasses a set of more complex and fluid identities. To reach a point of re-establishing white masculinity as a term that is understood to be multiplicitous, it is necessary to find a means of achieving this understanding. Shona Hunter’s approach of relational choreography is introduced and unpacked to explore a potential means of negotiating the ideology of white masculinity within my artmaking practice.

Chapter 3
In Chapter Three I explore how relational choreography functions within and through the work of Brett Murray. The processes of ‘positioning’, ‘pricking’, ‘self-objectification’, and ‘flipping’ that make up relational choreography are unpacked in relation to Murray’s artistic practice, including the production of artworks, responses to his works, the interaction with audience and how these are entwined in and through his lived experience. Relational choreography is offered as a potential means of negotiating ideologically constructed identities of whiteness and masculinity.
The primary themes and concerns that emerge within his work are explored by Steven Dubin et al. (2013) in essays and supporting visual material commenting and discussing Murray’s artmaking practice and broader concerns such as race and gender that are interlinked to said practice, much of which is included in the catalogue, entitled *Brett Murray* (2013), which chronicles Murray’s work from 1983 until 2012. *The Spear* elicited heated critical responses from multiple individuals, including members of South Africa’s then-ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC). The work was criticised as being degrading and insensitive in its rendition of the then-South African president, Jacob Zuma with his genitals exposed (Malefane 2012). The responses and reactions to the painting culminated in it being vandalised and defaced. Murray was deemed racist and accused of ignorance with regard to the portrayal of the black body. The critique went as far as to include Murray receiving death threats and possibly facing legal action (van Graan 2013). *Brett Murray* (Dubin et al 2013) contains some responses to *The Spear* and numerous additional articles and responses can be found on Murray’s website (Brettmurray.co.za 2016) and other online sources. The articles published by the *City Press* (Blignaut 2012; Thambo 2012; Güles 2012) and other publications provide examples in which the artist was reduced to an essentialist notion of identity.

Chapter 4

In Chapter Four I break down relational choreography into the processes discussed in previous chapters – positioning, pricking self-objectification, and flipping – and discuss each in relation to lived-experiences and anecdotes as well as artworks I have produced. Through the discussion of relational choreography within my life and art practice, I introduce the notion of how relational choreography has been a way for me to negotiate my whiteness and masculinity.

Synopsis

In the final part of the dissertation I do not attempt to conclude my research, as this would contradict the theories, processes and approaches discussed throughout. Instead I review what I have experienced through the process of writing and producing the practical aspect of my research by presenting points of contemplation and continued resolve in my practice.
CHAPTER TWO
TOWARDS WAYS OF NEGOTIATING WHITE MASCULINITY

The ‘I’ who writes here must also be thought of as, itself, ‘enunciated’. We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always ‘in context’, positioned. (Hall 1989:68)

In this chapter, I establish relational choreography as a potential means of negotiating the essentialist ideology of white masculinity in South Africa within and through my artmaking practice. Relational choreography is explored as a possible method which could shift ideological forms of whiteness and masculinity from the theoretical to more pragmatic understandings and representations thereof. I begin the chapter by positioning myself, as the author, in an attempt to provide a context to the reasons for researching white masculinity in South Africa. I utilise personal narrative to obtain rich data that can be explored and critiqued with the intention of formulating an existential and individuated view of a white male narrative in South Africa. Furthermore, by utilising personal narrative, I ensure that the research is conducted through the lens of my experience and interpretation, and as such, does not perpetuate generalising or essentialising practices. After positioning the authorial voice, the constructed ideologies of whiteness and masculinity are unpacked to establish working definitions of concepts such as ‘hegemonic culture’ and ‘master narrative’. Thereafter, I describe how whiteness and masculinity exist beyond these ideologies, and in reality, can be understood as whitenesses and masculinitiies. By exploring the plurality of white masculinities, it becomes apparent that there is no single ‘white masculinity’ but rather, that this essentialised category encompasses a set of more complex and fluid identities. To reach a point of re-establishing white masculinity as a term that is understood to be multiplicitous, it is necessary to find a means of achieving this understanding. The approach of relational choreography is introduced and unpacked to explore a potential means of negotiating the ideology of white masculinity within my artmaking practice.

I am an English speaking, white, male, South African. I was born in 1992, two years before South Africa was declared a democracy. Both my parents are British immigrants to South Africa. I grew up in a middle-class household in Johannesburg. I view my artmaking practice as an attempt to question my responsibility and complicity in hegemonic systems, such as whiteness and masculinity, within contemporary South Africa.
The above description of myself functions in two ways: firstly, it establishes my ‘positionality’ as the ‘I’ that writes this chapter; secondly, it provides reasoning as to my investment in the negotiating of white masculinities. My motivation for the research stems from a subjective position, using my (personal lived experience) as a point of departure for my investigation. The impetus for this subjective exploration was the experience of being defined by an essentialised and constructed notion of white masculinity. Thus, establishing some of my personal narrative and context is necessary in that the premise for the investigation and explanation of relational choreography as a potential way of negotiating white masculinity in South Africa is reliant on a nuanced understanding of individuals.

2.1 Whiteness

While ‘whiteness’ can and is often used to describe skin colour, it is rather a constructed ideology that comes with systems of beliefs, values, behaviours, habits and attitudes. By drawing from different sources, I have explored varying theorisations of the ideology of whiteness (Hunter 2015; Kelly 2008; Nuttall 2001; Passmoor 2009; Steyn 2001; Zietsman 2013) and some key features present themselves. These features are unpacked in the discussion to follow.

Although whiteness is not a ‘skin-colour’ or ‘race’, it is innately linked to these concepts. As stated by Claire Kelly (2008:115):

“The colonial endeavour was based on the ‘superiority’ of the colonizers, which was physically marked by their paler skin colour and socially by their ‘civilized’ customs. Conversely, the ‘inferiority’ of the colonized was marked by darker skin colour and less ‘civilized’ customs.

The above quote demonstrates how, under colonialism, race was used to mark power – ‘white’ was seen as superior or dominant. The colonial endeavour constructed whiteness as a socio-political system to establish dominance over the indigenous population that lived on the lands that colonists conquered. The constructed system of whiteness cannot function without an ‘other’; whiteness can only exist in relation to something else and therefore, whiteness defines itself. The arbitrary categorisation of people within racially ordered hierarchies continually reinstates the power and privilege of whiteness (Zietsman 2013:18). In this way, whiteness becomes naturalised. As Samantha Vice (2010:324) puts it, “Society is so engrossed in the hegemonic system that is whiteness that it becomes accepted as ‘the way things are.’”

Here
Vice means that there is an unconscious invisibility that whiteness thrives off, as it is often unquestioned and accepted as the ‘norm’. Through all of these features, whiteness becomes the ‘master narrative’ (Kelly 2008:116; Hunter 2010:46) – “the framework from within which all other versions of reality, narratives, [are] interpreted” (Kelly 2008:116) – meaning any and all forms of narrative, including but not limited to race, gender, sexuality, and nationality, are read through a lens of whiteness.

2.2 Masculinity
Masculinity, like whiteness, is a constructed ideology. Theorisations of masculinity demonstrate how the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity function in similar ways and therefore share some key features (see Kelly 2008; Morrell 2001; Ratele 2014a; Zietsman 2013). The constructed nature of masculinity is similar to that of whiteness as both ideologies hold a normalised power, however, the construction of masculinity is in relation to gender. Although masculinity is stereotypically related to the notion of being biologically ‘male’, masculinity should not be seen as synonymous to being biologically male. ‘Male’ is therefore biological and ‘masculinity’ is an abstract construct that is not inherent to the male biology. The relational quality of masculinity also parallels whiteness in that masculinity is always in relation to the ‘other’, namely ‘the feminine’ construct. The relational aspect of masculinity directly links to the privilege, power, and normalisation of masculinity, which manifests as a particular system called patriarchy. Patriarchy, as defined by bell hooks (2004:17-24) is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence.

This subordination is arguably extended to include a whole hegemonic system of the white masculine ideology which benefits cisgender⁵ heterosexual men above any other gender or sexuality. Hegemonic masculinity can be seen in institutions such as government, legislation, and education, as well as in personal or private realms or systems such as the family and the home.

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⁵ The definition of cisgender according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary states: “of, relating to, or being a person, whose gender identity corresponds with the sex the person had or was identified as having at birth.” (Merriam-Webster 2018).
2.3 Hegemonic White Masculinity

The master narrative of whiteness is closely followed by the narrative of masculinity. The combined ideologies of whiteness and masculinity formulate the power structures of most societies. Therefore, white masculinity can be referred to as hegemonic – the domination of cultural, sexual and gender in diverse societies by the ruling class who manipulate the culture of that society – the beliefs, explanations, perceptions, values, and mores – so that their imposed, ruling-class worldview becomes the accepted cultural norm (Bullock & Trombley 1999).

It is important to note, as Robert Morrell (2001) describes, that hegemonic whiteness and masculinity constantly shift and change to re-establish and maintain power and privilege. The maintenance of power is such that if a minority identity gains power, the hegemonic system will find a means of utilising the shift in power, be it through support or coercion, to re-establish power. A constant inequality and injustice must be upheld by hegemonic systems to gain and sustain power over the ‘other’ (Morrell 2001:8).

White masculinity exists as a hegemonic ideology within which there is a potential essentialisation of individuals identified as white males. Therefore, to establish a more holistic understanding of lived experiences and positionalities of individuals identified as white males, a redefining of whiteness and masculinity should be considered. As there is not one white masculinity, the term must be seen in plurality – using the terms whitenesses and masculinities. Reconceptualising whiteness as whitenesses and masculinity as masculinities allows for a more nuanced understanding of individuals defined by these ideologies. Whitenesses and masculinities also allows for a contextual specificity to be investigated, as is the case with regard to my own white masculinity in South Africa. In what follows, I unpack the concepts of whitenesses and masculinities to allow for an exploration into the complexity that surrounds these constructs.

2.4 Whitenesses

The idea of numerous whitenesses as opposed to a singular, universalised, essentialised whiteness accounts for the lived experiences of each individual and for multiple subjectivities by those who identify as white. Whitenesses also explores the nuances, idiosyncrasies, complexities, anxieties, responsibilities and complicities of individuals who identify more specifically as ‘white males’, as the term whitenesses accounts for other identities to be
included in how individuals identify themselves. To provide a specific narrative for investigation, I have previously introduced my identity as a white male South African. Writing about white masculinity as a white male potentially presents problematics around speaking for other individuals, particularly those who have historically been deemed as ‘other’. South African art historian, Liese van der Watt, voices these concerns, questioning the potential problematics of a white person writing about personal experiences of whiteness as follows:

Is this not, one may ask, yet another attempt to foreground the experiences of white people over those of black people, as South Africa’s disgraceful history of colonialism and apartheid attests to? Is this not, like the politics of apartheid, once again a view that sees nothing but colour? (van der Watt 2001:64)

Hunter (2015a or b:45) also notes the potential for white self-writing to reinforce (neo)colonial generalising force of hegemonic whiteness. This is an apprehension I share, but, following authors such as Sarah Nuttall (2001), Hunter (2015), and Derek Zietsman (2013), I suggest that the importance of white authors’ continuing contribution to conversations surrounding identity lies in the potential of these narratives to form a richer pool of knowledge to draw from when attempting to understand how race, gender and sexuality function in contemporary society. According to Nuttall (2001), the importance of white subjectivities is key in the development of multiple, fluid, complex formulations of whitenesses. As mentioned previously, achieving a discourse surrounding white subjectivities comes with potential problematics, such as perpetuating essentialist, generalising constructions of whiteness that reinstate white hegemony. To avoid such problematics, Nuttall (2001:135) proposes the necessity for self-narrative, in other words, speaking of and from one’s own lived experience and subjectivity. One of the key reasoning’s for self-narrative is to reveal “powerful tropes of watching and looking, visibility and invisibility” (Nuttall 2001:135). While the tropes Nuttall describes look at the Western practice of ‘unmasking’ whiteness, they can, however, be discussed in a contemporary South African context in a manner that exposes normalised practices of inequality.

A crucial notion in Critical Whiteness Studies⁶ is ‘unmasking’, which begins the process of studying an ideology that is often thought of as normative and unremarkable (Vice 2013). In

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⁶ Critical Whiteness Studies is a field of research developed in the United States in the late 20th century that aims to examine the social construction and moral implications of whiteness. Some of the seminal authors include Richard Dyer (1997) and Vron Ware (2005).
particular, Zietsman (2013:17-18) writes: “Whiteness studies unmask how whiteness was, and often still is, essentialised as the norm, ‘an unchanging and unproblematic location, a position from which all other identities come to be marked by their difference’”, which describes the normalisation of whiteness and how the study thereof seeks to expose these constructs, questioning and deconstructing notions of race. Van der Watt (2001:65) points out that the premise of unmasking is not applicable in South Africa, as race was arguably unmasked in the Apartheid era through legislation that forced individuals to be identified according to race. However, as I discuss below, unmasking can be seen as important in revealing how whiteness functions and differs in the South African context.

The significance of unmasking whiteness is emphasised by Nuttall (2001); Steyn (2001); Vice (2010); Van der Watt (2001) and other South African writers (inter alia, Kelly 2008; Zietsman 2013; Passmoor 2009). The unmasking of whiteness exposes normalised racial inequalities that continue to occur in South Africa. Given these, I believe that there is still the need to study whiteness in a critical manner so as to create self-awareness and self-reflection of the practices of inequality that are enacted by individuals identified as white. Furthermore, the notion of unmasking whiteness can be seen as a means of drawing attention to the “particularities” (Nuttall 2001) of whiteness in South Africa. The particularities of whiteness in South Africa should not be seen as “exceptionalism” (Nuttall 2001:116), but rather an indication of the specific historical and demographical context that exists in South Africa. With regard to the demographics of South Africa, it is important to note that ‘whites’ make up the minority of the population, unlike white populations of Western nations (Zietsman 2013:20). Therefore, unlike nations in which whites are the majority, in which whiteness as a predominant ideology can be seemingly more justifiable as the hegemonic power, South Africa poses a thought-provoking case as the minority white population used legislation to take power over the majority black population and the inequality brought about by said legislation still haunts South Africa’s socio-political climate.

The power of a minority white population and the particularities of whiteness in South Africa are “irrevocably linked to apartheid” (Zietsman 2013:20) – a system that institutionalised racial segregation and discrimination in South Africa, clearly marking individuals as ‘white’ or ‘non-white’. As Melissa Steyn (2005:122) suggests, “the particular historical and political configuration in South Africa has meant that whites have never experienced their whiteness and the advantage it afforded them as invisible”, a concern echoed by Van der Watt (2001:65),
who, writing in 2001, states that, “In South Africa, now more than ever, whiteness is neither ‘non-raced’ nor ‘invisible’ as Dyer puts it elsewhere\(^7\), but constantly prioritised in political and cultural debates”. Steyn and Van der Watt therefore suggest that although it is a critical task of whiteness studies to unmask whiteness, in a South African context it is not so much about unmasking, but rather a consciousness of whiteness as the status quo/unacknowledged norm (Vice 2013:326). Therefore, it is suggested that different whitenesses can still consist of a sense of “self-deception” (Vice 2013:326) and a lack of consciousness with regard to the deeper workings of the ideology of whiteness within South African culture. A possible cause of a lack of conscious understanding of hegemonic whiteness is privilege and the fear of losing this privilege. Privilege can be seen as being one of the most prevalent and apparent manifestations of oppression and inequality that is imposed by white normalisation (Vice 2013:329). In the years between 2015 and 2017, there has been a reaffirmed awareness of white privilege in South Africa, as student movements such as #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall critiqued the ongoing injustices of a legacy of colonialism and apartheid that continue to shape South Africa (Mbembe 2016:36). The critique of constructed systems of oppression foregrounds how the education systems in South Africa still favour whites and the lack of reform with regard to how knowledge is accessed (Mbembe 2016:30). The inequality and favouring of individuals and groups identified as white is exemplified in the education system in South Africa, however, it can be argued that these inequalities promoted through the ideologies of whiteness extend to other systems and spaces within South Africa.

The aforementioned demonstrates the complexities of whiteness as a political/public ideology, as well as the multiplicity and complexity that is seen in different whitenesses, much of which is rooted in the private lives of individuals. It is within the private spaces that intimacies, anxieties, fears and other expressions of feeling are embodied. These feelings embodied in the individual contribute to the rich diversity of whitenesses that can be accessed through subjective experience. Vice (2010:323) states that, “For despite our context, no life and no self is only political; no one can think of herself as only a citizen or as only and essentially constituted by factors external to her”. By this Vice suggests that although individuals are, to an extent, defined by societal systems of identification and understanding, individuals are not defined solely by these practices. Kerry Bystrom and Sarah Nuttall (2013:307) focus on

\(^7\) Richard Dyer explains that whiteness is non-raced in that whiteness is normalised to the point of not being seen as an identifier, but rather something that ‘just is’ and therefore invisible (Dyer 1997:10).
“bodies, sexuality, friendship, home spaces, and other forms and sites of intimacy” to critique ways in which the private lives of individuals inform the political, and vice versa, illustrating how there is an interconnection between ideology and experience. Through acknowledging the interconnection between experience and ideology it can be understood how feelings of guilt and shame have shaped whiteness in an attempt to rectify or take responsibility for the atrocities of apartheid (Vice 2010:327). The feelings of guilt and shame cannot persist in a self-indulgent manner and can instead be accepted as a part of an individual’s narrative to formulate a critical means of understanding identity through alternate progressive feelings, such as responsibility and awareness.

Nuttall (2001:135) asserts how autobiography “is always about secrets and lying, visibility and invisibility”, explaining how when writing with one’s subjectivities in mind in an attempt to express a rich version of oneself and one’s identity, there will always be parts of one’s narrative that will be left out or forgotten. The flaws in an individual’s self-narrative alludes to what is later discussed by Nuttall (2001:135) as a “humanity” (consisting of the feelings, emotions and lived experience of the individual). Humanity is an important factor when thinking about an individual as ever changing and developing. The unfixed nature of an individual’s identity means that even when presenting ideas or theories in a seemingly fixed manner, such as an art exhibition or academic paper, there is still the potential that these concepts could change and develop over time. It would seem that only with an awareness of the potential to perpetuate white hegemony, an understanding of the proposed purpose of whiteness studies and a sense of how even with the intent of being objective there is still the potential for one’s subjectivities to be present; whiteness can possibly be written in a manner that avoids reinstating a white dominant rhetoric (Nuttall 2001). Being aware of the problematics of the subjectivities of whiteness and self-narrative provides a framework to investigate whitenesses. Zietsman (2013:18) states that, “call[s] for analysis and redefinition; decentring white privilege and white power” are necessary in white writing, a central tendency of which is the unmasking of whiteness as normative, defying the invisibility that whiteness takes on.

Through her discussion of the importance of white subjectivities and whitenesses, I suggest that Nuttall provides a vital means of understanding how individuals identified as white can go about expressing their narrative. Nuttall (2001:133) states that:
Perhaps what is left is the capacity or the responsibility to write within and not beyond whiteness, to remain within the terms of the only claim that it ultimately can make: to speak or to write as itself, that is, as the voice of a white person, with the possibilities and limitations inherent in that.

2.5 Masculinities
As noted earlier, the ideology of masculinity, like whiteness, is not holistic in that it does not account for the complexity, intricacy and nuance that come with lived experience of individuals identified as male. The masculine ideology also does not account for the influence of alternative identity markers and how individuals may feel that their identity is affected by the experiences that come with said identities, including but not limited to race, class, nationality and sexuality. Therefore, in order to engage with and discuss the nuances of individuals who identify as male and masculine there must be a reconceptualisation of the ideology of masculinity as masculinities. The concept of masculinities is supported by Morrell (2001:8), who states that, “Masculinity is not inherited nor is it acquired in a one-off way. It is constructed in the context of class race and other factors which are interpreted through the prism of age”.

Morrell (1998; 2001; 2005) centres his writing around optimistic, progressive concepts of masculinity in South Africa, drawing attention to what he calls the “changing” man which theorises a development of masculinity away from the ideology of masculinity that was prevalent in Apartheid South Africa. Morrell (2001:3) exemplifies this by describing the essentialised understanding of masculinity as an “unflattering view of South African men [which] is a stereotype”. By stereotype, he refers to ideologically constructed tropes of masculinity such as father, bread winner, provider, protector, and aggressor (Morrell 2001:3). Morrell’s critique of ideological masculinity is vital to my research as it seeks to reconceptualise the ideology that is ingrained in a society that perpetuates ideals contributing to a white male hegemony.

Morrell (2005) highlights the contradictory, complex and multiplicitious nature of masculinity. Furthermore, Morrell (2001:7) looks at how masculinity – although hegemonic – can have non-hegemonic formations, for example, “Minorities, defined in terms of race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation, all characteristically understand what being a man means differently from members of the ruling class or elite and from each other too”. Morrell discusses how having complex combinations of identities can cause some men to not form part of the hegemonic masculine ideology as some individual’s identities are oppressed due to other
factors such as race, sexuality, or nationality. However, it can be argued that due to the hegemonic power of the masculine ideology, patriarchy and misogyny are aspects of masculinity that are still prevalent in different masculinities. Therefore, many concepts of ideological masculinity maintain the hegemonic status quo and can only be shifted through a means of negotiation. Through an addressing of the question of how men are able to negotiate masculinity, there is the potential for those who identify with a masculine identity to shift the power dynamics of ideological masculinity towards a formation of masculinity that allows for more complex understandings of what it means to define oneself as masculine.

According to Morrell (2005), any attempts at subverting typical constructs of masculinity will be met with resistance – for many individuals fear this loss of power and control – forcing white masculinity into supposed crisis. I concur with Morrell (2001:7) in that masculinities should be seen as fluid, non-fixed and multiplicitous; and individuals associated with any identity markers need to be understood in more complex ways that account for the richness of diverse positionalities. I suggest that despite there being a lack of research done specifically on ‘white masculinity’, how the particularities thereof are dealt with, and the responsibility and complicity that comes with this identity, Morrell does demonstrate some of the problematics associated with white masculinity. That said, I suggest that living as a white male in South Africa is a challenging experience for reasons that I expand upon below.

2.6 White Male Anxiety
Reconceptualising the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity towards achieving a pragmatic and plural understanding of whitenesses and masculinities gives me a sense of optimism in that as an individual, I might be considered with the nuance and complexity that comes with my unique being. However, understanding whitenesses and masculinities in this manner caused me to feel fear and anxiety because even if there is the potential for a white male in South Africa to be understood in a pragmatic manner, one can still be seen in an essentialised way. The anxieties and fears I felt were heightened in 2015 with the protests and events surrounding #Rhodesmustfall – a point I will return to and elaborate on in Chapter Four. The urge to contribute to discussion and action surrounding #Rhodesmustfall, particularly on social media, caused an obstacle to emerge prompting a self-censor on my voice and artwork. The obstacle came in the form of not wanting to be essentialised by stereotypical and ideological notions of white masculinity, whilst still feeling an undeniable responsibility and complicity in the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity. These feelings came with the realisation that I, as an
individual, could be perceived as aggressor and oppressor even if I invest in and enact practices that seek to subvert hegemonic powers of white masculinity. The realisation of possibly being perceived in an essentialist manner led me to question what I am able to say and do; how can I go about living with the responsibilities that white masculinity entails? At what point does one self-censor one’s own voice? Even with the right to a freedom of expression it might still be necessary to remain silent or, at the least, to ‘take a backseat’. If one makes the choice to speak, how does one go about expressing that voice? In consideration of these questions, I do not attempt to eradicate the past atrocities of colonialism or apartheid or express a self-indulgent attitude towards entitlement or privilege in South Africa but rather to enrich discourse surrounding identity and the deconstruction of hegemonic power systems.

Despite my desire for change within white masculinities in South Africa, it is necessary to be aware of the context. In my view, within South Africa, the legacy of apartheid and colonialism is ever present, and for effective change to take place, there must a shift in the ideological constructions of identity and a redistribution of hegemonic power. To achieve such a change and productive action requires not only willingness, but also a means of setting this change in motion. A potential to create progressive action serves as motivation for my attempting to find a means of negotiating ideological concepts of whiteness and masculinity in South Africa. I suggest that one such means is relational choreography.

2.7 Relational choreography
Hunter (2015b) coined the theory of ‘relational choreography’ in relation to policy making and power dynamics. Hunter (2015a) proposes relational choreography as a means of understanding white positionality as being responsible for, as well as resistant to, racialising practices. Presenting a personal response to the photographic works of Black British photographer Vanley Burke (By the Rivers of Birminam, 2014, FADA Gallery, Johannesburg), Hunter (2015a) uses relational choreography in relation to art, and specifically photography, combining an enactment of relational choreography with artistic analysis and visual interpretation. The use of relational choreography in discourse surrounding art develops a potential means of negotiating the ideology of white masculinity within my artistic practice and for further analysis of artists who are identified as white males.

The enactment of relational choreography happens in a continuous and simultaneous manner, shifting through the processes of positioning, pricking, self-objectification, and flipping. The
processes of relational choreography do not occur in a linear sequence. However, for clarity, I outline the processes in a linear order so as to allow for a comprehensive understanding of each process and an understanding of relational choreography as a whole. Relational choreography is based on the concepts of dynamic interaction and interplay, be it between each process, or between multiple individuals. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that some of the processes may be returned to and/or repeated whilst relational choreography is being enacted (arguably relational choreography is always being enacted). I provide an explanation of each of the processes of relational choreography in the sections to follow.

2.7.1 Positioning
Hunter (2015a:44) begins by positioning herself in the context from which she writes, stating that, “My analysis is foregrounded in my positioning as a white person consciously invested in anti-racist practices and resistance to my inevitable unconscious positioning through racist practices in the present”. She thus places emphasis on her whiteness, as well as the history and responsibility that comes with this positioning. She provides a comprehensive foregrounding of her positioning, including information such as her upbringing, her academic underpinnings and personal responsibilities (Hunter 2015a:44). Hunter endeavours not to be defined in an essentialist manner and admits to an awareness of the problematic issues that come with studies surrounding whiteness. Through expressing her self-reflection and self-awareness, Hunter positions herself as affectively, symbolically and materially engaging with, and struggling through, her responsibility to confront a specific past (Hunter 2015a:44). I use this process within my own writing in an attempt to contextualise the subjectivities of the author and the position from where I speak. The subjectivities of the individual express the pluralities that arise from ideologies such as race, gender, sexuality, and nationality; complexities that develop through experience such as upbringing, education and culture; and the time in which one exists in relation to history, politics and society as a whole. Establishing one's positionality serves a specific purpose of enacting one of the processes required of relational choreography. This form of self-awareness entails complete emersion into the problematics, histories, performances and relationships that formulate one’s being.

In relation to whiteness and the particularities thereof, Hunter (2015a:43) investigates ways in which whiteness is “responsible for, as well as resistant to, racialising practices”. The responsibilities are inherent as whiteness functions as the dominant culture and hegemonic power, as previously discussed. Some of the responsibilities of whiteness (and arguably any
manifestations of identity) are to understand the complicities, multiplicities and mythologies associated with it. I have explained the lack of complexity that whiteness as an ideology enforces and in particular, the ideology of whiteness in a contemporary South African context, illustrating the necessity for a cognisance of the lack of plurality that these constructed ideologies provide. Therefore, the responsibility for white male South Africans is to establish practices of self-reflection in the process of exploring how each individual understands his own identity. Furthermore, extrapolating on how relational choreography is a potential way in which essentialist ideological constructs of whiteness and masculinity can be negotiated. Through a continuation of the explanation of relational choreography, the importance of this approach to negotiating essentialised notions of white masculinity will be made clearer.

2.7.2 Pricking

After the initial processes of self-reflection and positioning, relational choreography can be set in motion. The cause of this motion, as Hunter (2015a:43) phrases it, is a ‘pricking’. The process of pricking acts not only as an impetus for relational choreography, but can, rather, occur in a continuous manner as it can also exist as an autobiographical disruption or as prompt for additional self-reflection or re-evaluation (Hunter 2015a:52).

Hunter uses Roland Barthes’s (1981) notion of the “studium” and “punctum” to develop the notion of pricking, describing the different ways in which an individual sees an artwork and how these ways of seeing impact the individual. The ‘studium’ as Barthes (1981:23, 126) describes it, is what exists in the photograph (or image) – there is a common aspect that presents itself, be it “the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions”. What is presented is only of “average” interest but poses no more meaning or investment. However, that which often punctuates a photograph (or image), is, as Barthes terms it the ‘punctum’. The punctum is that which pricks the viewer and causes a more invested or deeper interest. The individual is made aware of something within the image that causes an effective response within them. This kind of response is related to something personal and lived, be it memory or experience. The punctum is not that which exists within the image, but that which the individual interprets which causes a reaction within them.

Pricking can be equated to a prompting or an inciting of awareness and resultant action. In Hunter’s case, the exhibition By the Rivers of Birminam by Vanley Burke pricked her consciousness. Burke’s photographic exhibition or “visual archive” (Hunter 2015a:43)
documents the black community in Birmingham between 1968 and 2011. For Hunter, Burke’s visual archive serves a specific purpose in that Burke’s work deals with recording black narratives in Birmingham – the city where Hunter was born, raised and worked (Hunter 2015a:44). Hunter is interested in how these narratives impact her as a white woman as the artist states that the work is intended as a record of the black experience for the Black British community and not for a white audience. Hunter (2015a:44) however, experiences the work beyond Burke’s intention, stating that it foregrounds “[My] relation to racialised, gendered and classed power, the absent presences enacting my family history, my biography and my whitened subjectivity and agency”. The archival qualities of Burke’s work and Hunter’s response to them are relevant to my discussion, as they explore how an artwork can impact an individual, both in intended and unintended ways, and how an artwork can prompt self-reflection, questioning and even productive change that interrogates hegemonic systems such as whiteness and masculinity. The notion of ‘pricking’ is crucial to my study, as the investigation aims to explore ways of negotiation within artmaking practices; in other words, how a work is responded to, by whom it is responded to, and how and by whom it is received is often as important as the process of making the work. Furthermore, the dynamic interchange that occurs within each of the aforementioned responses and the spaces between these processes is vital as it forms a holistic view of an individual’s identity and the interaction between individuals’ identities. That is to say, an important part of artmaking is process, intention, meaning, and response.

Art relies considerably on the interaction and interplay between process, intention, meaning, and response; the artist produces the work with what might or might not be consciously acknowledged intent, imbuing meaning and subjectivities with the work. In turn, the viewer activates meaning and responds to the work. The viewer must be pricked by the work to activate the work, perhaps in the artist’s intended manner, or the viewer can project meaning onto the work. Arguably viewers will always impose meaning onto a work for their subjectivities are embodied within them and the way in which they engage with the work. In reference to relational choreography, the response to the artwork could be considered as being self-reflexive in that there is a process of conscious choice as well as engagement and thought, resulting in an interchange of opinions informed by subjectivities of experience, history, culture, identity and so on. It is interesting to note that an artist can attempt to force the viewer to be pricked and illicit a response, yet this may not work, and the viewer may choose to ignore the work. This introduces an interesting element of choice, autonomy, and criticality with regard to the
viewer-artist relationship. Likewise, it emphasises the complexity of any interaction and how relational choreography may function within these parameters.

“[P]licing can prompt the sort of momentary self-objectification” (Hunter 2015a:43) which acts as the next phase of the relational choreographic method. This is similar to the initial self-reflexive practice; however, self-objectification sees the individual becoming aware of his subjectivities in the understanding of his positionality and affiliated responsibilities and complicities. Hunter expresses differing approaches to prompting temporary self-objectification, each occurring in differing ways in an attempt to distance oneself from the lure of complete subjectivity. There is a distancing from the introspection previously engaged with in this phase of relational choreography – one does not look from the inside outward, but rather from the outside inwards, ‘seeing’ oneself in relation to other individuals, ideologies and contexts.

As previously emphasised, in my research I pay specific attention to how pricking relates to art making and art objects. The shift from Hunter’s study on Burke’s work to my research framework is fairly organic, for Hunter focuses on the visual, particularly looking and the gaze. I stress looking and the gaze to illustrate that there is more complex meaning imbued within these words, rather than simply seeing. In this context, ‘seeing’ is not to do with the mechanics of the eye, but rather the beholder. When ‘looking’ – much like Hall’s (1989:704) concept of ‘enouncing’ – one must always think of the action of being ‘in context’; as ‘positioned’.

2.7.3 Self-objectification

Consideration of a subject’s positionality offers a more complex understanding of identity, which surpasses essentialised understandings thereof. However, positioning oneself is sometimes problematic, for one’s subjectivities influence how one choses to situate oneself. Although one cannot remove all one’s subjectivities, it can be argued that a temporary or short-term objectification of the self can occur, in which momentary perceptions of other readings of the self’s positioning can be imagined. The momentary self-objectification Hunter refers to can be applied to looking and the gaze (the visual) and in so doing, positions the way in which the individual looks and engages with the artwork (Hunter 2015a:53).

Self-objectification as Hunter describes can be looked at in relation to experience or even feeling manifesting as an ‘autobiographical interruption’ (Hunter 2015a:50).
objectification through autobiographical interruption occurs when there is an abrupt emotional/experiential reaction to an occurrence. The reaction is triggered by something within the individual, however, the reaction is interrupted by the individual’s consciousness and questioned in a manner that creates a momentary objectification of their reaction. The momentary objectification provides an opportunity to analyse his own thoughts and emotions in an objective manner determining as to why the individual reacted in said manner and if there is perhaps a different way of acting within a particular situation. This type of interruption can even occur in hindsight by following the trajectory of one’s narrative and then objectively looking at one’s responses and actions, determining if there was an alternate way of interpreting being in said situation.

Another important type of self-objectification that Hunter (2015b:53) explains is to temporarily suspend “aspects of identification such as gendered, classed or sexualised identifications through which [one] may be vulnerable at other points (or maybe even within that moment) as a means to understanding [a different] point of view”. Initially this can sound problematic in that it implies losing part of the self and that one can see from another individual’s perspective.8 However, this is done for a particular reason and can arguably be done without essentialising notions of identity. In enacting a temporary suspension of identification, one needs to realise that in some situations certain ideologies are so ingrained in one’s being and identity that it is difficult to see beyond these constraints. To a certain extent an individual becomes blind to the problematics of his gaze and the only way to see past this is by temporarily negating a part of one’s identity.

Hunter refers to George Yancy’s experience as a black man encountering a white woman in an elevator (Hunter 2015a:48). In Yancy’s (2008:48-50) account, clear attention is paid to the notion of looking and the gaze, with particular reference to a double consciousness that Yancy experiences. This double consciousness comes from being aware of both how he perceives himself and how the woman perceives him. While not unlike the previous concept of self-objectification, Hunter (2015a:53) shifts Yancy’s example in that the white woman’s responsibility is brought to attention placing emphasis on her unwillingness to perceive anything beyond her ‘over-determining’ gaze. The white woman acts in a timid, threatened

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8 The notion that an individual can completely understand another individual’s lived experience contradicts my argument thus far, as it assumes a generalised or essentialised version of the individual’s experience.
manner, fearful of the black man, imposing preconceived notions of the predator and criminal onto his black body. At this juncture, Hunter suggests the notion of temporary suspension of identity, it is required that identity of ‘woman’ be suspended temporarily for this identity allows the individual to be seen as vulnerable and defenceless.

This shift implies seeing herself as an aggressor, as someone who comes out of a history of aggression and as someone who continues to have the potential capacity for aggression and whose body ‘just is’ aggressive in the present in terms of her occupation of space, her apparently (to herself) passive presence, in terms of her gaze, speech, twitches and looks (Hunter 2015a:53).

The reason for this shift in role from ‘victim’ to aggressor is that the individual’s gaze is only through the lens of whiteness. In Yancy’s example, the woman was overlooking that she imposed meaning onto his body for she was only able to see herself as oppressed and powerless, but upon realising that the gaze of whiteness is far more powerful, imposing and dominating the individual could understand herself as aggressor and oppressor. Thus, one is able to see beyond one’s subjectivities for a moment and realise the problematics of other facets of one’s identity. I return to the notion of a temporary suspension of identity in relation to white masculinity as this identity is usually the aggressor.

Self-objectification can go as far as to recognise the contradictions in one’s identity and actions. For example, a white person who is invested in anti-racist practices may be opposed to racism, while still benefitting from (and not questioning) their white privilege.

2.7.4 Flipping

Hunter (2015a:43) describes ‘flipping’ in relation to whiteness as a means of white individuals being able to shift their gaze and see themselves through the black gaze. I contend that no-one can ever completely flip their gaze, as one cannot comprehend and internalise the complexity of another individual. Rather, I suggest that realisation can occur with regard to facets of one’s identity that may be ingrained and overlooked through subjectivities of other aspects of one’s being. Hunter does suggest that the kind of flipping as part of relational choreography is different to a simple Manichean inversion and occurs in a more dynamic manner. I suggest an extension of the idea of flipping (with particular reference to artmaking) as being part of the self-reflexive process of considering queries, reactions, responses, interactions and action, in relation to multiple individuals. Thus, causing a dynamic flipping between multiple individuals.
with varied positionalities consisting of emotion, lived experience, power dynamics (such as age, race, gender, and sexuality) within, and through, the personal process of a dynamic interaction between subjectification and objectification.

Flipping in a manner that centres around the notion of a dynamic interaction between multiple individuals, fuelled through processes of self-awareness – positioning, pricking, and self-objectification – allows relational choreography to shift from being analytical towards a practical, real-world application of the method. Flipping then also facilitates relational choreography as constantly shifting between the processes in a non-linear manner and upon different interactions with individuals the different processes being enacted in a continuous and fluid manner.

Through the process of flipping one is able to consider other individuals in the same self-aware manner that one considers oneself. Therefore, accounting for intricacies, idiosyncrasies, nuances and multiplicities of individuals, both in relation to how one perceives and could be perceived. The flipping of how one interacts with individuals shifts essentialist and dichotomous ways of understanding identity towards a more comprehensive and multiplicitous manner.

2.7.5 Enactment
The enactment of relational choreography in a real-world scenario provides a potential means of negotiating essentialist ideologies surrounding notions of identity. Artmaking can be utilised as one of such real-world scenarios, as it allows for the creation of a space in which the processes of relational choreography can be enacted in a fluid and continuous manner. Artmaking processes offer the potential for an artist to facilitate a dynamic interaction between subjectivity and objectivity that can then manifest in the interplay between multiple individuals. The knowledge and awareness gained through interaction with other individuals can then be brought into the artmaking process and facilitate further negotiation within the artist, the work, and in broader contexts like South Africa. The practical/lived enactment that relational choreography relies on to be actualised is what allows for complex negotiations, such as whiteness and masculinity, to potentially be grappled with and discussed, expressed, or communicated in artmaking processes and works.
To explore how relational choreography functions in a pragmatic way I look at the artmaking process, career, lived experience, and work of Brett Murray. Murray establishes a poignant example in my research as his work can not only be looked at through the lens of relational choreography, but also explores how an individual who identifies as a white male can potentially negotiate essentialised versions of whiteness and masculinity.
CHAPTER THREE
RELATIONAL CHOREOGRAPHY AS IT PLAYS OUT IN THE WORK OF BRETT MURRAY

In this chapter, I explore how relational choreography functions within and through the work of Brett Murray. The processes of ‘positioning’, ‘pricking’, ‘self-objectification’, and ‘flipping’ that make up relational choreography are unpacked in relation to Murray’s artistic practice, including the production of artworks, responses to his works, the interaction with audience and how these are entwined in and through his lived experience. Relational choreography is offered as a potential means of negotiating ideologically constructed identities of whiteness and masculinity.

Relational choreography functions through interaction with multiple individuals. Given this, I provide examples of how individuals enact processes of relational choreography in response to Murray’s work and examples of the way in which relational choreography functions within Murray’s artistic practice with regard to intention, response and interaction. Through these examples, the dynamic interaction between subjectification and objectification is explored in a manner that provides the potential for self-reflexive behaviour on the part of the individual, who, in this case, is Murray.

My exploration of how relational choreography functions in Murray’s work is from Murray’s perspective based on artist’s statements, writings by the artist, and interviews in relation to the production and process of the work, and how it manifests through audience response and interaction. Both are equally important, particularly with reference to specific processes within relational choreography such as ‘pricking’, as relational choreography cannot function without an interaction and interplay between two or more individuals that occur in a dynamic manner.

Debates surrounding self-censorship, freedom of expression, and what is acceptable or appropriate for artists who identify as white and/or male are discussed.
3.1 Brett Murray as the Positioned Artist

Brett Murray is a white, male, South African artist (Van Wyk 2013).

[Brett] Murray is a highly skilled and intellectually formidable practitioner, as capable of layering reference and association in his imagery as he is of cutting unkind metals into the finest of filigrees. But at the same time it is central to his project that he exists, as a feeling and sentient being, in the time and space in which he is making the work (Powell 2013:33).

Both these descriptions can be seen as accurate depictions of the artist Brett Murray. The first, although accurate, paints a particular picture of the individual as defined according to the demographics of race and gender. In defining an individual according to demographic groupings, the nuances of the person’s identity are lost and the ideologies with which they are associated become the main concern. Alternatively, one could argue that negating the titles of ‘white’ and ‘male’ to imply the removal of race and gender from individuals’ identity is immediately unrealistic and overly romanticised. Nonetheless, individuals are not only defined by race and gender, nor any other societal constructs; identities are far more nuanced and complex. Ivor Powell (2013:33) begins to unveil these nuances in his description of Murray as an artist, potentially reaching a point where Murray is understood beyond mere societal labelling in an interaction between both subjective and objective perspectives. I suggest this type of interaction presents itself in the method of relational choreography. As previously explained, the method of relational choreography recognises the individual’s positionality as important in understanding the place from where the individual speaks and how the individual’s lived experience is formed. To illustrate this, in Murray’s case, I present two possible readings of his biography – a reading based on ideological constructs of whiteness and masculinity and a reading that is more nuanced and therefore provides a more comprehensive knowledge of Murray’s positionality. However, neither truly expresses Murray’s positionality in a manner that is as comprehensive as the understanding that is developed through the individual’s own perspective, as no individual can completely grasp another’s positionality. What is required is the inclusion of Murray’s self-awareness in the development of his positionality – even though as previously quoted an awareness of self “is always about secrets and lying, visibility and invisibility” (Nuttall 2001:135) – herein lies the potential for a comprehensive and holistic positionality to be expressed. Through the knowledge of an individual’s personal narrative and lived experience the potential to understand individuals beyond ideological constructions and
consider subjectivities as a space for possible interaction, interplay, and a negotiation of the self a more wholistic understanding is formulated.

While I have pointed to two views of Murray, one of which offers a more comprehensive view, it is crucial in discussing relational choreography to be aware of how the individual reflects upon, understands, and represents himself in the public domain. In Murray’s 1997 biography for his installation piece entitled, Guilt and Innocence (1997) he positions himself as follows:

I was born in December 1961, a few months before the Rivonia trialists (Nelson Mandela and his compatriots) were imprisoned. Being born in Pretoria, into a half-Afrikaans, half-English family, where my father’s heritage extended back to include both Paul Kruger and Louis Botha (Boer presidents), disguised by my grandmother re-marrying a Scottish Murray and my mother’s history reaching back to the French Huguenots, I am a white, middle-class cultural hybrid. This was and is my comfortable and uncomfortable inheritance. The political and social forces beyond the confines of my family formed a system which protected and infringed on me, empowered and disempowered me, promoted and denied me. When I looked beyond my private experiences of loves and relationships, family and friends and of boy becoming man, the contradictions in this system, which divided my life from others, resulted in a cross-questioning of responsibility and complicity. This uncertainty challenged the understanding of what became ambiguous life experiences (Murray 1997).

Although the above was written 20 years ago, it emphasises Murray’s continued self-reflection and provides a more complex understanding of his positionality as opposed to only being seen in terms of categories such as ‘whiteness’ and ‘masculinity’. Murray situates himself as a white male, but also as an individual with lived experiences and subjectivities, thus illustrating an awareness of the subjectification and objectification that is imposed on his being from both himself and others. The process of understanding one’s positionality becomes part of an enactment of relational choreography.

Murray’s awareness of his positionality, and specifically the ideologies of whiteness, masculinity and identity within a South African context, features in his work from the beginnings of his career to the present. One of the first documented instances of Murray’s interaction with identity politics arises in a photograph of Murray taken by his parents (Figure 2). Here Murray, age seven – covered from head to toe in black paint and draped in a loincloth
– is dressed as a Zulu warrior. At the time, the photograph and subject matter may have been considered as ‘innocent’. However, in 2012, Murray reflects on the photograph, stating: “This image encapsulates the tragedy of the times and, in hindsight its comedic absurdity. This duality is a cornerstone of my work” (Murray 2013b:81). Within the image Murray is captured using ‘blackface’, reflecting the normalisation of practices of oppression and inequality towards those deemed as different to regimes of whiteness. The content and context of the image of Murray in blackface presented the artist with a tool with which he could question and engage with his complicities and responsibilities surrounding ideologies of race and gender. In this way, it could be seen as a point of self-reflection of Murray’s lived experience that enacts relational choreography.

![Image of Murray dressed as a Zulu warrior.](image)

**Figure 2** The Artist as a Zulu, aged 6, 1967, Postcard invitation for *White Boy Sings The Blues* 1996

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9 Murray was dressed in this manner because he was performing in the school play (Murray 2013b:81).
The childhood photograph of Murray in blackface appears to have become an integral part of Murray’s artistic practice. It is used as a motif for the frontispiece of the invitation for the exhibition *White Boy Sings the Blues* (1996, Rembrandt van Rijn Gallery, Johannesburg) and was thereafter included in the installation *Guilt and Innocence* (1997, 30 Minutes, Robben Island Museum, Cape Town). Lived experience is an important aspect of relational choreography in that it facilitates an interaction between subjectification and objectification. Furthermore, Murray’s negotiations of whiteness and masculinity are manifest through his life and artmaking. Therefore, the aforementioned photograph demonstrates how Murray’s practice functions in a relational choreographic manner, as it exists as both an archive of Murray’s life and has been incorporated into his art practice. Murray’s response to the image seems to traverse time and contribute to understanding how he incorporates self-reflexivity in his artmaking practice.

Murray studied an undergraduate degree in Fine Art in the late 1980’s at the University of Cape Town (UCT), a space that potentially prompted the politicisation of Murray’s art and actions. Due to the imposed State of Emergency, military conscription, and other forms of state-repression during the late 1980s, protests were staged across the Western Cape in resistance to these forms of oppression – protests that Murray would have endeavoured to support (Van Wyk 2007:46). The military conscription laws in South Africa in the 1980’s meant that, as a young white male, Murray would be forced to join the military from the age of 17, which might have prompted feelings of compliance or avoidance (Van Wyk 2007:46). Murray did not accept the circumstances that would force him into a system of patriarchal dominance and this refusal led to the beginnings of his activist involvement (Van Wyk 2007:46). The activist involvement that Murray began to develop would mean a shift in those who would interact with his art practice from the typical gallery visitor to the broader population of South Africa, therefore contributing to how relational choreography manifests in his work (Van Wyk 2007:48). Murray would have to consider different means of manifesting his ideas that would be accessible to a diverse group of individuals who would engage with his work.

Whist studying his undergraduate degree at UCT, Murray began making protest posters utilising the visual vocabulary evoked by the Russian Revolution and the Soviet Union
These images consequently contributed to Murray’s own artistic vocabulary (Van Wyk 2007:47). Murray’s use of visual formats that provide accessible means of communication and how they are utilised to convey his conceptual concerns speaks to the process of relational choreography in that there is interplay between Murray’s lived-experience and the audience. Maintaining his activist ideals towards anti-conscription and an anti-apartheid regime, Murray went on to undertake a Master’s degree in Fine Art at UCT. The reasoning for this undertaking was not only to continue Murray’s education, but also that it would be a means of avoiding military conscription for a further two years (Murray 1988).

Murray’s work for his Master’s degree was informed by a conflation of the personal and political. Murray endeavoured to create work that commented on how the individual and the country were impacted by the abuses of power and patriarchy in South Africa (Murray 2013b:57). The success of these works is evident in their consistent referral in books, journals and other writings, even after nearly two decades of Murray’s career. The body of work that accompanied Murray’s Master’s dissertation came about as an amalgamation of Murray’s thoughts with regard to the state of South African politics, explorations into his personal narrative and a generic satirical commentary that serves as an access point into the more complex subjects being presented, such as power, corruption and identity (Murray 1988).

Murray’s work entitled _Butcher_ (1988) (Figure 3) – a cast resin and wood painted sculpture depicting a butcher that has cut off his own legs – illustrates his use of satire as a potential means of creating work that is accessible and aware of varied audiences’ readings. For me, although there are potentially complex readings of this work, the notion of a butcher cutting his legs and using his own flesh to stock his shop with meat serves as a clear representation of contradiction and absurdity. Murray’s use of simple but poignant representations of complex but relatable concepts or emotions is arguably where the accessibility of his work lies. Furthermore, Murray’s poignant representations serve as an example of Murray’s awareness of the potentially diverse audience that may engage with his work and the necessity to facilitate representations that are accessible to this broad audience.

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10 The posters were often vivid and brightly coloured with reds, golds and black, using “text that accompanied each poster was a clear and explicit message for the public, while the use of specific techniques (photo manipulation, deformity, and amplification) would indirectly and subconsciously transmit a message in favour of or against an opinion, a person or a political choice” (35 Communist Propaganda . . . 2014); (Russian Revolutionary Posters 2017).
Each subsequent show of Murray’s references one of his past exhibitions, be it a conceptual link, or a formal technique that is pulled through to another artwork, or even a device such as satire or tragedy. The blackface makeup seen in the photograph of Murray as a young boy also forms a trope that reoccurs in subsequent exhibitions and works (for example Rich Boy (1995, Scurvy, The Castle of Good Hope, Cape Town); and the Now and Then Series from the 2008 exhibition Crocodile Tears (Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg)). The Russian Revolution-style posters Murray drew inspiration from in works from the 1980’s, find their way into his vocabulary used to critique the then-governing party of South Africa (the National Party). In this way, Murray utilises protest posters to critique the corrupt and unequal powers that be through the bold manner in which said posters function. The constant use of self-representation in his artworks – be it the form of the sculptures which are short and stout, and mimic Murray’s stature, or the naughty boy that likes to tell ‘dick jokes’, perhaps a slightly unrefined version of Murray today – reflect the artist’s presence within the work. Each one of these repeated
themes, tropes or motifs is not chosen at random, but through a process of analysis (Murray 2013a). Through Murray’s critiquing of his work, editing out of work he deems less successful, contemplating the audience’s response and seeing what made an impact or should be reconsidered for being deemed too crass, he exemplifies how relational choreography functions within his work. Murray particularly focusses on the importance of being aware of his position and how he interacts with other individuals from this position.

Tracing Murray’s trajectory throughout his artistic career is of importance to my research, for it reveals the idiosyncrasies in Murray’s thought processes and awareness, an awareness that extends from self-critical observations and negotiations, to means in which audiences are able to engage with the subject matter and debate that Murray wishes to convey. Murray (2018) admits to his injections of self-representation into his work, stating:

I embed myself within the unfolding narratives of my work. I am often both the perpetrator and the victim of my satire. I am well aware of my privileged position in the South African context … race … class … and economic … and I will continue to reflect on these privileges on myself and in others … satirically. Also … I find the processes of sculpture making therapeutic. The act of making … sanding … filing … is also meditative and deeply personal. Hopefully this abstract sense of making will be imbedded in the resulting sculptures and begin to communicate who I am and how I view the world … if that makes sense. Personal and hopefully idiosyncratic.

Examples of Murray’s self-injections into his work appear in his animal figures seen in multiple exhibitions, including *Hail to the Thief* (2010, Goodman Gallery, Cape Town; 2012, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg) and *Again and Again* (2015, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg; 2017, Circa and Everard Read Galleries, Cape Town) which mimic the artist’s short stature. The animal figures are also reminiscent of animals depicted in cartoons watched by Murray’s children (Corrigall 2017). Murray states (2018) that this is an attempt at:

Combin[ing] the personal and the political with these reflections on the tragedy and the comedy that is South Africa. For me it is not only about politics and the arrogant assumption that what I make can effectively make a difference. But in my work … if I can gather like- minded people around me through a collective guffaw or snigger … then shifts in people’s perceptions can be affected and the target of my satire belittled and undermined. I often try to gently tug the rug of complacent attitudes and preconceptions from under the feet of my audience … and often, but not exclusively, this is done through humour.
Yet, despite Murray’s self-awareness and the awareness of his potential audience, he admits there is still the potential for misreading of his work (Murray 2013a), as there is no clear-cut manner in which his work will be read, interacted with, or responded to, even if there is a strong attempt at exposing a particular issue.

3.2 ‘Pricking’ in Murray’s work

Thinking of Brett Murray as the artist who made The Spear is a bit like remembering Ludwig von Beethoven as the composer who wrote the tune for Ode to Joy. It’s not untrue but it doesn’t tell the whole story (Powell 2013:25).

In my view, Powell’s above-cited statement encapsulates Murrays career to date. While I agree that Murray is, as Powell states, ‘a highly skilled and intellectually formidable practitioner’, producing work on multiple occasions that hits the proverbial nail on the head with regard to socio-political state of South Africa, Murray will always be linked to ‘The Spear Saga’ (Jamal 2017). The Spear (2012) (Figure 1) and the events that surrounded this painting exemplify the processes of relational choreography, particularly the process of ‘pricking’. Although other works by Murray can be used as examples of pricking, The Spear is of particular interest to me, for it not only illustrates the process of pricking but also the interaction with this process in the form of documented audience responses, artist’s intentions and responses to the reception of the work.

In 2010 Murray’s exhibition entitled Hail to the Thief opened at The Goodman Gallery in Cape Town. In the work on the exhibition, Murray commented on corruption within the South African government with particular reference to the state president, Jacob Zuma (Jolly 2010). The exhibition consisted of variety of works in a diverse range of mediums including bronze sculptures, aluminium cut-outs, silkscreen prints, flags and paintings. Throughout the work, Murray utilises a Soviet propaganda poster aesthetic with bold revolutionary poster colours of red, black and gold. Satirical renderings of Soviet insignia with dollar signs and the dapper figure synonymous with Johnny Walker whisky can be found in a few of the works (Jolly 2010).

Responses to the exhibition in Cape Town appeared typical with regard to Murray’s work – the work was successful in inducing shock and contemplation simultaneously (Jolly 2010). As Powell (2012) states:
It is what he does – as is the case with many artists functioning at the cutting edge of contemporary art, the work does not end with the production of the object: it is, so to speak, completed in the public domain, in the responses it provokes, how it is taken up or contested in the arena of culture.

After showing in Cape Town, the exhibition travelled to the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg for a second edition entitled *Hail to the Thief II* (2012). There were some new additions to the second exhibition (Murray 2013a). One of these was a painting on canvas entitled *The Spear*, depicting the South African president Jacob Zuma in a Lenin-esque pose using a typical Soviet era aesthetic characterised by predominant use of the colours black, red and yellow. Although closely resembling a poster of Lenin (Figure 4), Murray’s depiction consists of the president with his trousers undone and his genitals exposed (Jolly 2012).
In an interview with Sean O’Toole, Murray (cited in O’Toole 2005) states that he “desires to prick consciousness”, echoing Hunter’s theorisations surrounding the pricking of consciousness in relational choreography, and expressing the ‘desire’ to impact and interact with the audience or viewer. The Spear provoked varied reactions and responses in viewers. In what follows, I unpack examples of how different individuals are pricked by The Spear and the resultant responses, reactions or opinions that are evoked. Although Murray cannot predetermine how different viewers respond to his work, he can attempt to prick the viewer, therefore enacting one of the processes of relational choreography. Pricking occurs for Murray as the artist, manifesting as the impetus for creating the work, but also in the form of the provocation that is evoked in the audience.

When Hail to the Thief II opened to the public, the South African newspaper, City Press was there to report on the exhibition. A resultant article was published featuring a photo of Murray’s painting The Spear. The article saw the beginning of what became known as ‘The Spear Saga’. Shortly after the article was published, Director of the Goodman Gallery, Liza Essers received a call from special advisor to the minister of arts and culture Mduduzi Mbata, in which Mbata asked Essers what her thoughts on the exhibition were (Dubin 2012). Essers invited Mduduzi to see the exhibition, but he did not keep his appointment. What followed was a press release and subsequent court injunction from the ruling party, the African National Congress (ANC), requesting the removal and destruction of The Spear.

The press release serves as an example of the resultant pricking The Spear evoked. The opening statement reads as follows: “The African National Congress is extremely disturbed and outraged by the distasteful and indecent manner in which Brett Murray and the Goodman Gallery in Johannesburg is displaying the person of Comrade President Jacob Zuma” (Mthembu 2012). The press release illustrates how members of the ANC were ‘pricked’ by Murray’s painting and, the resultant response and interaction initiated by the ANC. Furthermore, the press release outlines the ANC’s reasons as to why the painting should be destroyed. These statements serve as a point of reference for any other responses, reactions and opinions that may be made under the guise of an official response from the ANC. The main order of complaint is “that this distasteful depiction of the President has violated his individual
right to *dignity*\textsuperscript{11} as contained in the constitution of our country” (Mthembu 2012). Therefore, readings, interactions and responses that do not see that problematics of the painting as being related to dignity can be understood as being independent, but in relation to, the ANC’s statements surrounding *The Spear*. The response from the ANC towards *The Spear* served as impetus for the entire debate surrounding the painting. The interaction between the painting, the ANC’s response and all subsequent responses exemplifies one possible way in which relational choreography can manifest – not necessarily being choreographed through multiple initial interactions, but instead all interactions are spawned from one initial action.

In relation to the debate around *The Spear*, Justice Malala (2012) states that: “Perhaps, in my defence of the freedoms to express oneself, the freedoms to artistic creativity, I missed something. Perhaps I – and many of the people who have been batting on this side of the field – forgot that these freedoms cannot be exercised in a vacuum”. Malala’s statement describes his response after being pricked by *The Spear* as well as demonstrating how his subjective experience overlooked how other individuals might have viewed the work. Therein lies an important part of relational choreography and how individuals are pricked – as previously described, pricking is related to Barthes’ theory of the *punctum* in so far as an image pricks the viewer’s consciousness and causes a response that is evoked by the individual’s lived experience. In Malala’s case, he responded to debate surrounding freedom of expression, and that through the abolishment of the apartheid regime, South Africa become a democratic society in which freedom of expression is of utmost importance for, in the past, during apartheid, certain segments of the population were legally denied freedom of expression. However, he points out that these opinions cannot be looked at in a vacuum or out of context and that the entrenched oppression of the black body as hypersexualised and dehumanised could also be read in relation to Murray’s work. Therefore, there is a considered interplay between Malala’s experience, the potential experience of other individuals and the context of South Africa, demonstrating relational choreography.

The consideration of how one’s positioning can influence the interpretation and experience of how an individual is pricked by an artwork can be seen in Barbara Harmel’s (2012) reading of *The Spear*. Harmel demonstrates how, as a white person looking at *The Spear*, there are

\textsuperscript{11} My inclusion of italics is to emphasise the reason for the ANC’s court appeal and call for the painting to be destroyed.
intricacies and understandings that she may overlook. Harmel’s (2012) engagement with *The Spear* also exemplifies how according to an individual’s positionality an artwork may prick them various ways. Therefore, the factors that contribute to one’s positionality such as race, gender, sexuality, culture, as well as one’s lived experience directly impact the manner in which the individual interacts with the artist and artist’s work.

Harmel (2012) states: “I saw nothing deriding his [Zuma’s] blackness in that painting”, while admitting to her potential ignorance: “No doubt as a ‘white’ person, there is much else that I don’t see”. Harmel therefore reveals that what pricked her consciousness when looking at *The Spear* was not issues of race, but rather, I argue, that alternate issues of patriarchy or corruption caused her to be pricked by the work. Harmel’s reading of the painting does not mean that the painting cannot be read as dealing with issues of race, but rather shows that depending on an individual’s positioning, different aspects of an artwork can potentially prick the individual.

Representations of the black body throughout history have been fraught with violence and suffering, depicting numerous examples of enslaved, lynched, maimed, degenerate and imprisoned bodies, or representations in which racial fantasies underpinned by abjection, eroticism, exoticism, and erasure (Farber 2017). Therefore, when a white artist chooses to depict a black body, specifically the black body with exposed genitals, the artist must be hyper-aware of the potential ramifications, even if the intention of the work is not to comment on issues surrounding race. Moreover, to depict a high standing individual in South African society in such a way compounds the awareness that is required on the part of the artist.

The way in which responsibility and consideration shifts depending on an individual’s identity can be seen in the example of Ayanda Mabulu, whose depictions of Zuma with exposed genitals in the painting *Ngcono ihlwempu kunesibhanxa sesityebi* (*Better poor than a rich puppet*) (2010) (Figure 5) arguably did not receive the same kind of controversy as Murray’s *Spear*. Murray and Mabulu both depicted Zuma with exposed genitals within the context of South Africa, however, Murray is identified as a white male and Mabulu is identified as a black male. Mabulu’s painting received critical comment when it was produced, however, the reasoning for critique was not centred around the portrayal of the black body, for Mabulu is a black male and reproductions of white oppression on the black body are minimised. The reasoning for the painting’s removal was focused on the manner in which the president's term lasted from 9 May 2009 until 14 February 2018.
2012). It can therefore be argued that conceptions of identity caused differing reasoning for the removal of paintings depicting Zuma in an exposed manner. It is important to note that Mabulu (cited in Butana 2012) went as far as to “[Praise] Murray for his ‘powerful’ portrait and said there was no room for ‘phoney metaphors’ when it came to social commentary, but for artists to ‘depict the situation as it is’”. Mabulu therefore emphasises the importance of artist rather than his gendered or racial identity. Following Mabulu’s reasoning, one could argue that the intentions and responsibilities of an artist outweigh issues of race and gender. However, there may still have been an oversight on Murray’s part, in that although his intention may have been to comment on the corruption and power of the individual portrayed in The Spear, the content of an artwork will be interrogated when ideologies such as whiteness and masculinity are in play. Intention and context can be looked at as important parts of the process of pricking and relational choreography as a whole. The intention and context may be clear to the artist, however, relational choreography functions within the space of an interaction and therefore even with a particular intent on the part of the artist, and with an awareness of context, different responses and readings can emerge. Therefore, with the knowledge of potential interactions between the artist, the artwork, and the audience, what must then be questioned is the responsibility of the artist.
To illustrate how pricking and relational choreography are influenced by intention, context, and responsibility, I introduce a brief example of Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmett Till, entitled *Open Casket* (2016) (Figure 6), focusing on the controversy surrounding the display of the painting at the Whitney Biennale in 2017. The work and surrounding debate can be discussed extensively, however, I only include the example to further illustrate how pricking functions within differing contexts and through differing positionalities. Therefore, I do not attempt to present any in-depth or conclusive argument surrounding Schutz’s work.

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13 Schutz is a white, female, American artist who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.
Figure 6 Dana Schutz, *Open Casket*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 99 x 135 cm; Collection of the artist; courtesy Petzel, New York.

The following two descriptions of the painting exemplify how individuals with differing positionalities are potentially pricked in different ways by this work. Calvin Tomkins, a white male American author and art critic (2017), describes the painting as follows:

Measuring thirty-nine by fifty-three inches, it is smaller than most of her recent paintings, and more abstract. The buildup of paint on the face is a couple of inches thick in the area where Till’s mouth would be. Although there are no recognizable features, a deep trough carved into the heavy impasto conveys a sense of savage disfigurement, which is heightened by the whiteness of the boy’s smoothly ironed dress shirt. His head rests on an ochre-yellow fabric, and deftly brushed colors at the top suggest banked flowers.

The above quote provides information as to the material quality of Schutz’s painting and provides scant information as to the content of the work. However, Hannah Black (2017), a black identified biracial British artist, provides a different description of the work:

[T]his painting depicts the dead body of 14-year-old Emmett Till in the open casket that his mother chose, saying, ‘Let the people see what I’ve seen’. That
even the disfigured corpse of a child was not sufficient to move the white gaze from its habitual cold calculation is evident daily and in a myriad of ways, not least the fact that this painting exists at all. In brief: The painting should not be acceptable to anyone who cares or pretends to care about Black people because it is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun, though the practice has been normalized for a long time.

Black’s focus is on the content of the painting rather than on its formal or material qualities. The pricking here is based on the individual’s lived experience and influences how the artwork is understood, regardless of the artist’s intention. Black’s description particularly eludes to her lived experience as a black woman, as her reading of the work highlights the depiction of the black body and associated histories as what has pricked her consciousness (Black cited in Muñoz-Alonso 2017).

Schutz is a female white American and works within that context. Open Casket, similarly to Murray’s work, caused considerable controversy, with protests and calls for the painting’s destruction. The controversy brought Schutz’s intentions to the fore, with Black and her supporters questioning Schutz’s right, as a white female, to paint the image of Emmitt Till, which later became an icon of the Civil Rights Movement, in an open casket of his mother’s choosing.14

What became apparent in the debate surrounding Schutz’s painting, similarly to the debate around Murray’s work, were issues of censorship, and debates around what could and could not be painted by a white individual. In an interview with Tomkins (2017), Schutz states: “There was so much uncertainty with this painting. You think maybe it’s off limits, and then extra off limits. But I really feel any subject is O.K., it’s just how it’s done. You never know how something is going to be until it’s done”. Schutz does not posit a sense of responsibility with this statement. Arguably, the notion of uncertainty that she expresses eludes to a lack of control and ownership over the painting, which contradicts the notion of how something is painted as this re-introduces the artists’ technique and control over the artwork. This brings into question whether the manner in which something is painted makes it appropriate to depict

14 Two white males in Mississippi lynched Emmitt Till in 1955. The brutal murder took place in response to false accusations of Till looking suggestively at a white woman. The two perpetrators were later acquitted of all charges. Till’s mother decided upon an open casket so as to show the mutilated corpse and the brutality inflicted by the perpetrators. Images of Till in the open casket were seen across the country, Till posthumously become an icon of the Civil Rights Movement (https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-death-of-emmett-till).
any image, or if it is acceptable to paint any subject. This comes with further questions as to what responsibility and what ownership comes with what an artist chooses to depict.

Black’s letter received varied reactions – calls for the painting to be burned, arguments that Black is promoting censorship and the destruction of art, and questioning of black anguish, white guilt, and who does or doesn’t have the right to use certain sacred images in works of art (Tomkins 2017; Fusco 2017).

The relevance of the debates around Schutz’s painting is paramount in the investigation of how white individuals negotiate censorship and freedom of expression. Schutz (cited in Tomkins 2017) states that, “[She] knew the risks going into this, what [she] didn’t realize was how bad it would look when seen out of context. Is it better to try to make something that’s impossible, because it’s important to you, and to fail, or never to engage with it at all?” As such, she alludes to the prevailing idea that artists should be able to portray anything in so much as it is done to inform an interaction and engagement regardless of context. Schutz’s example alludes to the relevance and responsitivity of context and how this manifests a pricking that an artwork may provoke.

In my opinion, artists producing work in a South African context must consider the history of institutionalised racism and inequality, whilst negotiating the potential censorship of one’s artwork. Murray asserts (2018) his consideration of self-censorship in stating that,

I consider self-censorship to be more crucial in unbundling than censorship. Freedom of expression is enshrined in the constitution … Salman Rushdie has said that this includes the freedom to insult … so I will take my chances. Within this are various levels of editing and refining that all artist [sic], poets, stand-up comics etc will do … It is up to these artists to decide what is or isn’t appropriate. Each will be guided by their own conscience. For the state, or anybody for that matter, to attempt to ban or decide what can or cannot be said is censorship. These attempts at censorship that were made so soon after the collapse of the Apartheid regime … are chilling, frightening and eye opening.

Within this context … I will fight the obstructive veil of self-censorship going forward.

While Murray’s statement depicts a clear resistance to any form of censorship that may be imposed onto an artist, he also asserts the importance of an individual’s decisions as to the appropriateness of what is conveyed in their practice. Arguably, Murray adopts a pragmatic
approach to negotiating self-censorship in both being against any form of limitation on an artist’s practice, but also showing his belief that an artist has a stringent responsibility to the context in which work is produced. The responsibility that Murray eludes to can be seen in how audiences respond and are pricked by his work, particularly *The Spear*.

One such response is that of Gwede Mantashe, the secretary-general of the ANC: “From where I am sitting, that picture is racist. It is disrespectful. It is crude and it is rude” (Sapa 2012). Here Mantashe explicitly labels Murray’s work as ‘racist’. A statement such as Mantashe’s overlooks any complexity and understanding of Murray as an artist and merely depicts a racist, white, male, painting an insensitive, even offensive, depiction of a black man in power. However, Mantashe does express one possible reading of the work and how it could be considered racist – one Murray might well have, or possibly did, consider. As discussed previously, Murray is highly aware of the ways in which his artworks can be read and the socio-political commentary he is making, as well as having the desire to prick the consciousness of the audience. It is therefore questionable as to whether there is an ‘appropriate’ way of achieving socio-political commentary in art.

In defence of Murray, Tselane Tambo (2012) states that, “Art should elicit a strong response”, and goes on to list examples throughout history where artists have caused offence through depictions of exposed genitals and nudity, even pointing to some cases where nudity was seen as a symbol of strength and pride. Is Murray’s depiction of Zuma’s penis not just another example of nudity in art? There are differing stances that can be taken, none of which can be seen in isolation. In my opinion, art should be able to push boundaries and express opinion freely, however, one must consider the context in which the work is made and displayed. The context in which Murray’s work exists is post-apartheid, post-colonial South Africa, and in this context, when producing art that works on a socio-political level, issues cannot be seen as either/or. For example, Mantashe (Sapa 2012) states that Murray’s painting is “un-African” and although this is a loaded statement for it raises questions about what or who can be called ‘African’, the cultural aspects here cannot be overlooked or disrespected, especially with an awareness of the privilege and position afforded Murray by virtue of his whiteness. However, as Tambo argues, art is about freedom of expression and this may sometimes disrupt or counter cultural practices, but, in my view, it does not mean that the work should not be produced and that the artist should be silenced or censored. Therefore, the way/s in which each individual is
pricked determines how relational choreography is enacted and as a part of this enactment, specific subjectivities and objectivities are pulled into a dynamic interaction.

3.3 Self-Objectification of *The Spear*

The process of self-objectification in relational choreography takes place as the individual momentarily sees themselves through an alternate gaze, disrupting the subjective self-understanding and considering alternate ways of interacting, specifically to an artwork in this instance. In each of the examples in the previous section I focus on events surrounding *The Spear* and how these expound the process of pricking. However, the process of ‘self-objectification’ can also be unpacked in relation to *The Spear* and to Murray in how he enacts the process of self-objectification.

In his article, Malala (2012) enacts the process of self-objectification through consideration of how his positioning as a black man in post-apartheid South Africa has granted him a space in which he can consider *The Spear* as a comment on a deeply flawed president. Malala explains how he experiences South Africa as a democracy with a constitution that allows for freedom and dignity, however, when momentarily shifting his perspective from his present experiences to the experiences of others and the experiences of his past, there is a space that allows him to consider how others may view *The Spear* (Malala 2012).

Similarly, Tambo states her opinions as to how *The Spear* should not be destroyed for it acts as an example of freedom of expression. However, she enacts the process of self-objectification when she momentarily experiences subjective loss of her perspective as a supporter of freedom of artistic expression to comprehend her African identity. Tambo’s self-objectification allows her to consider how the painting can be considered ‘un-African’ because it depicts an elder in the community in a manner that demeans and exposes them in a manner that is not done in African culture (Tambo 2012). Tambo’s self-objectification contributes to how she enacts relational choreography and in turn, strengthens her argument for freedom of expression, in that she can define art as not being bound by culture as it is meant to push boundaries and inspire (Tambo 2012).

In Harmel’s case there is also a sense of self-objectification in her admitting to seeing through the lens of her whiteness. Harmel questions the controversial responses around the dignity of
Jacob Zuma and queries whether the focus of the painting is not perhaps on an issue that is far more universal in that it alludes to the idea that the president has not lived up to his presidential responsibilities towards South Africa. The direct address Harmel makes towards Justice Malala in her letter allows her to enact self-objectification with the understanding that as a black man, Malala may potentially feel there is more poignancy with regard to dignity than there is towards the misdoings of the president.

Examples of how individuals respond and react to the work are paramount to the explanation of relational choreography. However, central to *The Spear* Saga and how relational choreography functions therein is the artist, Murray. Within debates around freedom of expression and dignity, Murray is still present as a white male South African artist, but also as an individual with lived experience inclusive of family, emotions and personal narratives. Murray’s position within *The Spear* Saga is complex and difficult to negotiate, for, as he puts it,

The various debates and positions that were discussed and taken regarding the painting. [sic] The more measured conversations ultimately came down to where freedom of expression ends and the right to dignity begins. I am well aware of our shameful history that necessitated this right to dignity to be included in our eloquent constitution. The arguments that the work perpetuated postcolonial visions of oversexed black males are equally important. We all have to be constantly reminded of these issues and our context (Murray 2013a).

From the inception of the work, to the execution, exhibition and response, Murray is present as the artist. The process of self-objectification is key to how Murray choreographs his interaction with himself, the work and the audience. As a white male artist, the essentialised ideas surrounding Murray’s identity hold the potential for problematics, particularly when dealing with subject matter that depicts individuals of diverse races and genders. In the case of *The Spear*, Murray chose to deal with subject matter that had the potential to illicit offended responses, and this is part of Murray’s agenda: making social commentary and political satire (Murray 2013a). However, that is not to say that Murray chose to do this in a manner that was devoid of understanding of what it means for a white male to depict a black man in power with his genitals exposed or negate knowledge of the ways in which the black body has been depicted historically. His intention in the making of *The Spear* was to comment on the corrupt and womanising behaviours of the president (Tambo 2012). Murray (2014) himself questions his inclusion of the president’s exposed genitals, stating:
It [the painting] nearly didn’t see the light of day. I was ambivalent about adding the dick to the painting. I thought then, and still do now, that it might have been a stronger and a more layered work without it. Specifically in the context of the rest of the show where I was parodying the pseudo-Soviet iconography and Comrade-Viva-Viva language of the new pigs at the trough. MasterCard Marxists, at best. But I stuck with it once it was painted more out of laziness than anything else.

Murray’s choice to include the genitals in the painting and his hesitance to do so is important for two reasons – the first being the possibility that without the inclusion of the exposed genitals, the painting may not have caused such a controversial reaction; the second being the internal dialogue that continues within Murray’s subjective negotiations (Murray 2013a).

Murray’s process of producing The Spear, shows the process of self-objectification. The process of self-objectification can be seen to function in Murray’s initial conception of the work; in the contemplation of what he intends to comment on within the work; and how this can be actualised. The conception is interrupted by the process of self-objectification as Murray contemplates the inclusion of the genitals through a suspension of his identities of whiteness and masculinity, understanding himself as artist with freedom of expression and the freedom to make socio-political commentary. The suspension of the identities of whiteness and masculinity allow for a consideration of possible ways in which an artwork can manifest and what potential responses and dialogue it might elicit. The inclusion of the genitals as a device to make the work stronger and more layered conceptually was chosen by Murray through the lens of an artist with freedom of expression and the desire to comment on the corruption of South Africa’s government (Murray 2013b). However, when self-objectification shifts to the suspension of the identity of artist, then the inclusion of the genitals could be considered as an oversight, for it negates the context from which Murray produces work and excludes responses that relate to the portrayal of the black body. Therefore, it can be argued as to whether Murray, even when employing the process of self-objectification, overlooked the importance of his identities of whiteness and masculinity. Perhaps the use of satire, one of Murray’s older modus operandi, could have granted him the space in which to further engage with ideas of self-objectification and potentially negotiate some of the backlash faced with regard to The Spear.

Murray’s positionality is an important part of his creative practice, in that he produces work exploring a conflation of personal narrative and the political context of South Africa, through
the use of humour and satire. Works in which Murray explores his personal narrative require an awareness of his own identity and the context within which he is situated, whereas his humorous works require not only an awareness of self and context, but also knowledge of a collective understanding of ideas and concepts that he interprets visually. In Murray’s Master’s Degree dissertation (1988:4), he unpacks how to successfully utilise satire and the importance of understanding the artist and audience:

In order for the satirical arrow to hit the collective funny-bone, satire has to be easily understood. There are therefore constraints on iconographic range and on forms employed. Figuration takes precedence over abstraction where concepts need to be presented in palatable ways. Satirical evaluations of assumed social privilege can only be shared if metaphors and symbols are collectively understood. Personal fantasy is limited by constraints of clarity where the audience is exposed to ideas by means of familiar or revitalised metaphors. Audience and audience participation (in unravelling puns and hidden messages) are central to the satirical process. The artist meets the viewer half-way and the resulting mirth is a kind of covert collaboration between the two.

In the above quotation Murray describes a process which, I argue, is relationally choreographic, in that there is an awareness of the self as the artist and individual, but there is also an awareness of the choreographed interaction between audience, context and content that exists. The interaction manifests in a back and forth motion between the individuals’ subjectivities and lived experience, and the audiences’ collective understanding. Satire then can be said to reflect relational choreography in that it requires that the artists are aware of their positioning, formulate an idea that will potentially prick the consciousness of the viewer, whilst employing a process of self-objectification in order to negotiate that varying manifestation which makes up the individual’s identity and, finally produce a space of interaction that potentially shifts the consciousness of the audience.

3.4 Flipping Call and Response

“Throughout [The Spear Saga] Murray was silent. He didn’t grant any interviews, offer any rebuttals, defend or explain the artwork” (Corrigall 2017), nor did he stop producing work. In years subsequent to the controversy surrounding The Spear, Murray launched his book (2014) and exhibited a few works but did not comment on The Spear Saga itself. At the time of writing it, five years since events surrounding Murray’s Hail to the Thief exhibition, he has a new
exhibition in Johannesburg\textsuperscript{15} entitled \textit{Again and Again} (2017, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg), which can arguably be read as a highly-anticipated response to the last one.

There is some consensus that, in this exhibition, Murray seems to have “dialled the political commentary back a notch” (O’Toole 2015; Jamal 2015), with much of the work commenting more generally on socio-political issues in South Africa, rather than on specific individuals or specific events. As O’Toole (2015) notes, “Murray’s latest solo sees him return to a more generic brand of political satire”. One may ask: Is this for reasons related to \textit{The Spear}? In response to this question, O’Toole (2015) says: “Maybe”. Ashraf Jamal (2015) similarly notes the show’s title is reminiscent of combat fatigue. “Repetitive, concussive, numbingly familiar, it’s as if the artist is telling us that life is bog-ridden, repetitive, implicitly futile”. This raises the question of whether Murray decided to self-censor for fear of the consequences that may occur if he was to make comments in his artworks that echoed those from \textit{Hail to the Thief}.

Murray’s work entitled \textit{Call and Response} (Figure 7), exhibited as part of the \textit{Again and Again} exhibition, serves as a particularly potent departure point with regard to Murray’s response to \textit{The Spear} debacle. \textit{Call and Response} is a text-based work presenting two statements. The first reads: ‘I must not make political art’, which is repeated to fill the expanse of a block, whilst the second expresses a contradictory statement, reading: ‘You are a corrupt fuck’ (Corrigall 2015). As Mary Corrigall (2015) puts it: “It’s as if Murray has decided to go for the jugular in such a straight line that his sentiments could not be misinterpreted”, which is interesting considering Murray had declined to give interviews or respond to the press for five years subsequent to the debacle surrounding \textit{The Spear}. \textit{Call and Response} speaks to many of the processes involved in relational choreography. The way in which relational choreography functions within \textit{Call and Response} can, by extension, be applied to the exhibition, \textit{Again and Again}, and potentially to Murray’s broader career as an artist. I now move to an exploration of how relational choreography functions in \textit{Call and Response}.

\textsuperscript{15} Like \textit{Hail to the Thief}, the exhibition was originally displayed in Cape Town, and then moved to Johannesburg. It marked Murray’s first return to Johannesburg where the events surrounding \textit{The Spear} took place. Prior to the \textit{Again and Again} exhibition in 2017, Murray declined any interviews for the press.
The title of the artwork, *Call and Response*, points to one of the processes that makes up relational choreography, that being interplay or interaction. In my unpacking of the work, I argue that the word ‘Call’ refers to the audience, be it the call for political art, be it the call for Murray’s comment on *The Spear* debacle or be it a call for the removal of Murray’s work or ‘artist’ status. ‘Response’ refers to the artist, Murray, and what he will say in relation to the ‘Call’. As stated, the words ‘call’ and ‘response’ can be interpreted in many different ways, however, as part of relational choreography the reading of an artwork relies on an interaction between audience, artwork and, artist, and the differing responses and reactions that may manifest.

The process of ‘flipping’ can be discussed as part of the relational choreography that manifests in Murray’s work, through an awareness and desire to act within the interaction between different individuals, himself as artist, and his artistic practice. Flipping in relational choreography is not understood as a simple inversion, but instead, as a dynamic interaction between subjectification and objectification intersecting with interaction and interplay with multiple individuals (Hunter 2015a:43). Flipping manifests in Murray’s work in that he produced artworks commenting on and responding to his experiences and opinions surrounding...
The Spear Saga. The process of producing an artwork to address the responses and reactions received by another artwork made by Murray is an action that is done through the awareness that an artwork cannot be expected to exist in isolation or ignore the audience participation aspect of art (Murray 2013a). Murray must then enact the processes of positioning, pricking and self-objectification to facilitate the flipping of his narrative and decide what his response will be. Possible responses could include emotions such as fear, ambivalence, anger, self-censorship or more analytical responses.

Murray has arguably responded in the manner that encapsulates relational choreography, pulling his objectivities and subjectivities into a dynamic interaction from which he can formulate self-reflexivity within his artistic practice. Murray’s artistic practice encapsulates multiple responses as well as differing potential interpretations, something that could not have been done without a certain nuanced and dynamic approach towards negotiations of whiteness and masculinity. Nuance may not be a notion that Murray is generally associated with, however, it can be argued that it is in the balance between controversy, shock factor, poignant statement and deft use of medium that the value of his work lies.

Call and Response may not seem nuanced in that it uses profanity and exposes Murray’s self-censorship quite bluntly, but in it he does not make any direct mention of the ANC, Jacob Zuma or his likeness, and, in fact, does not even reference its South African context. One could read Murray’s having made a strategic decision not to cause controversy or public outrage due to previous events surrounding The Spear. Furthermore, as Corrigall (2015) discusses, by not making mention of any specifically named figures, organisations or nations, the work seems to make even more mention of them, for the audience can subconsciously wonder if the work references events surrounding The Spear. It is then important to determine how Murray evokes these potential subconscious connections between this work and The Spear debacle. The key to determining this is an understanding that the main debate that arose around The Spear was freedom of expression versus the right to dignity. Murray was forced to consider what may cause potential outrage and be deemed as inappropriate for a white male to portray, causing the potential to self-censor himself.

In response to his freedom of expression possibly being infringed upon, Murray chose to utilise his artmaking process as a means of expressing his opinions and potential grievances. Accessing his well-established vocabulary within satirical and humorous fields, Murray takes
the idea of school punishment, when a learner is made to write a phrase repeatedly that exposes incorrect behaviour and offers the opposing positive behaviour that should be aspired to. By writing out the phrase ‘I must not make political art’ repeatedly, a bold statement is made. It both exposes the censorship Murray faces as well as immediately contradicts the phrase in that by stating that the artist should not create political art, the artist is producing political art. The repetition of this phrase alludes to Murray’s struggle to self-censor even whilst self-censoring himself. By juxtaposing the statement ‘You are a corrupt fuck!’ with ‘I must not make political art’, Murray reveals a multitude of interactions and readings that can be made (Jamal 2015; Corrigall 2017).

The use of profanity here is jarring in that it evokes a potentially aggressive emotion, as well as one of humour, whilst providing a finality to the statement that removes the potential of the phrase being seen as question or debate, but rather stating that which is. One of the prominent devices Murray uses in his work is self-reference in conjunction with an antagonistic political figure with the same statement, phrase or visual device. In the case of Call and Response, ‘You are a corrupt fuck!’ could refer to both Murray’s intentional contradiction of his sentiments eluding to work that is not political in nature, or possibly referring to the corrupt government officials in South Africa, perhaps even a subtle referral to president Jacob Zuma, who comes with the added layer of being the protagonist of The Spear Saga.

However, none of the possibilities clearly denoted this and thus allows for a continued relational choreography as there is an interplay between the artist’s self-reflection, the potential readings of the work, the audiences’ responses and the artist’s overall response to audience reaction. These nuances become of particular instance when placed in the broader context of the exhibition as a whole and then even broader still when related to The Spear Saga and Murray’s experience thereof.

There is some difficulty in relating relational choreography to lived scenarios such as Murray’s, in that the method promotes simultaneity in subjectivities, objectivities, audience responses, and personal responses. However, writing about these processes simultaneously can become complex and confusing. Much like the work Call and Response, Murray’s exhibition Again and Again brings about nuance, complexity and negotiation, all of which feed into relational choreography and how this method can potentially be used in negotiating one’s identity, in Murray’s case whiteness and masculinity, and facilitate discussion of intricate issues such as politics in South Africa.
The title of the exhibition *Again and Again* is relevant to the method of relational choreography as it refers to the repetition of something, again and again, which is how the method functions, as it continuously progresses and changes. The links to relational choreography and the title, *Again and Again*, do not stop there either, for there is nuance and complexity much like the way in which relational choreography functions. In reference to the title Murray states: “[South Africa has] come kind of full cycle”, referring to Karl Marx’s assertion that, “History repeats itself, first as tragedy, second as farce” (Murray cited in Corrigall 2017).

Given the complex history of South Africa, it is interesting to consider which histories may repeat themselves and to what end will the above-mentioned farce take form. Perhaps some of these histories are more recent and applicable on a more personal level for Murray. Having a career spanning nearly 30 years, Murray has witnessed the changing South Africa, but also that which is stuck on repeat. Many of the works seen in the exhibition *Again and Again* allude to the slow moving repetitive cycle South Africa finds itself in. For example, *The Golden Revolution* (Figure 8) is a golden snail symbolic of the South African revolution, which, although shiny and rich, moves slowly, in a way that is reminiscent of post-Apartheid South African hopes for a better future that are seemingly only manifesting at a slow rate. The work *Dark Days* (Figure 9) reflects Murray’s thoughts on South Africa’s future, perhaps the nation’s future is not as bright as some might believe. Or the work *The Visionary: Portrait/Self-Portrait* (Figure 10) depicts, what is, in my view, an accurate picture of South Africa, an ape with its face against the wall, blind to its surroundings, but responsible for seeing the way to a better future. All these works reflect Murray’s personal concerns as well as contribute to the audience’s musings as to the state of affairs in South Africa.
Figure 8 Brett Murray, *The Golden Revolution*, 2016, Polished Bronze, 11.5 x 10 x 21 cm, Edition of 6 + 2 AP.

Figure 9 Brett Murray, *Dark Days*, 2016, Wood and plastic, 150 x 150 x 4 cm.
Figure 10 Brett Murray, *The Visionary: Portrait/Self-Portrait*, 2015, Bronze, 60 x 63 x 45 cm, Edition of 6 + 2 AP.

Perhaps the most telling of works on *Again and Again* is the work entitled *Dead Canary* (Figure 11), in which Murray reflects on some of his more private opinions and emotions. The ‘canary in a coal mine’ is a portrait of the artist – a metaphoric representation of himself that functions as an early warning system or a sign of the conditions. Murray (cited in Matthews 2017) asserts that, “I can’t solve any of those problems. I can just look and try to reflect and articulate my horror at those kinds of things in an abstract way, for my own therapy, otherwise I might go mad”. Murray’s sentiments can be seen to exemplify the method of relational choreography that presents itself in his practice – a constant self-reflection that is used to interpret that which surrounds him, projected in a way that an audience can engage with and respond to, a continued cycle, again and again.
Figure 11 Brett Murray, *Dead Canary*, 2017, Bronze, 32 x 12 x 8 cm, Edition of 6 + 2 AP.
CHAPTER FOUR
AN EXPLORATION OF RELATIONAL CHOREOGRAPHY WITHIN AND THROUGH MY ARTMAKING PROCESS

4.1 Impetus
When I began my research for this study, I started thinking of a way to convey what I felt I could (or could not) depict as an artist in South Africa. I promptly became aware of the fact that I am a white male artist in South Africa and that there are problematics and responsibilities that are associated with whiteness and masculinity, particularly in this context. Theoretically, an artist can depict anything he/she wants to in any manner he/she chooses, but what are the repercussions and responsibilities that come with these choices? There are some topics and subject matter that come with sensitivities and potential problematics when chosen to be depicted by white artists or male artists or the doubly problematic white male artists. This is not to say that there is a legal precedent as to what an artist can or cannot depict, however, there are certain subjects that come with racial and gendered sensitivities, and consequently, responsibilities. Examples of some artists and their works that have broached subjects that have caused varying degrees of controversy are Brett Bailey’s Exhibit B (2014, The Barbican, London); Brett Murray’s The Spear (2012, Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg); Ed Young’s All So Fucking African (2016, The Armory Show, New York); Ayanda Mabulu’s Yakhal’inkomo – Black Man’s Cry (2010, Worldart, Cape Town); and more recently Dana Schutz’s Open Casket (2017, Whitney Biennial, New York). In these examples, the artists do not necessarily attempt to directly grapple with issues of race or gender, however, they can be and have all been responded to through these lenses, which come with a potential accountability. Bailey, Murray, Mabulu and Schutz have long standing careers as artists and are likely to have developed an awareness when it comes to the potential problematics that can be caused when dealing with issues such as race and gender, especially in certain socio-political contexts. They have all faced criticism for choices they have made regarding their work. Looking at these examples of experienced artists producing work that still faced controversy and severe public repercussions only added to my anxiety with regard to how I might be able to produce art as a white male in South Africa.

The question of what one is able to depict as an artist is fraught with complexity and debate, to which there cannot be a conclusive answer. However, the question of how one negotiates identity still presents room for discussion. The question of how something is accomplished
proposes a variety of choice and options with potential for diverse results and approaches. I suggest that relational choreography is one such approach that can be taken and I have attempted to enact this approach within my artmaking process. I argue that relational choreography is a potential way of negotiating an individual’s identity in a manner that allows for consideration of the responsibilities that come with certain identities whilst still creating a space in which individuals, particularly artists, can express themselves and contribute to a dialogue of self-reflexivity whilst resisting essentialising identity practices and ideologies.

Within this chapter I write, as in the entire dissertation, through the methodology of narrative inquiry. However, in this chapter, I specifically write from an autoethnographic perspective. Autoethnography is a method that focuses on personal narrative and storytelling to engage with cultural analysis and interpretation (Chang 2008:43). There are varied definitions of autoethnography (see for instance, Chang 2008; Munro 2011), but Catherine Russell (1999) describes autoethnography as “the moment when the writer starts to understand his or her personal history to be implicated in larger social formations and historical processes”. I find Russell’s description to be relevant to my approach because it outlines both the personal element of autoethnography and the interplay with broader socio-political constructs and concepts. There is some critique as to the potential for autoethnography becoming overly personal or tending towards generalisations, for, as Andrea Stöckl (2006) posits, “If we create ourselves as an ego in the text, we should be aware that it is not always ourselves we are talking about”. Heewon Chang (2008:52) outlines the benefits of autoethnography as follows: i) it offers a research method that is user-friendly to researchers and readers; ii) it enhances cultural understanding of self and others; and iii) it has a potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building. If the benefits Chang outlines are implemented, autoethnography can function as “[s]elf-representation [that] shims into something much more fluid and open, discursive and intertextual, even fictional and fantastic” (Stöckl 2006), which enriches research practices and knowledge.

An autoethnographic approach ties into relational choreography in that both approaches focus on lived-experience as a means of engaging with sociocultural frameworks, be it politics, psychology, sociology, or anthropology. Because I take an autoethnographic approach to this chapter, my tone is less formal than in previous chapters. I write from personal experience, resulting in inclusions of anecdotes, memories and subjective accounts of lived-experiences. The less formal tone is not intended to make light of the issues such as race, gender, or freedom
of expression being discussed, but to emphasise the complex manner in which each individual engages with these issues. I experience my artmaking practice as being difficult to discuss in a strictly formal capacity and therefore utilising autoethnography to express this part of my personal narrative allows for the idiosyncrasies to emerge and relate to concepts such as whiteness and masculinity.

In what follows I break relational choreography down into the processes discussed in previous chapters – positioning, pricking self-objectification, and flipping – and discuss each in relation to lived-experiences and anecdotes as well as artworks I have produced for the purposes of this degree. Through the discussion of relational choreography within my life and art practice, I introduce the notion of how relational choreography has been a means for me to negotiate my whiteness and masculinity.

The anecdotes taken from my lived experiences function doubly as a means of expressing my experiences as a white male in South Africa and exemplifying relational choreography. I posit that through interpreting anecdotes and experiences into paintings, the emotions and feeling that I remember can be engaged with through differing subjective processes. The dynamic interaction between my lived experience, theoretical understandings and awareness, my painting process and critical reasoning, facilitates a means of understanding of the problematics and responsibilities I experience as a white male. Therefore, I include descriptions and information surrounding the process of some of the paintings I have produced to illustrate the interpretation and interaction that occurs through my painting practice.

As I write in an autoethnographic manner the content of this chapter is my subjective opinion, which is open for disagreement, discussion, interrogation and questioning. I do not presume these to be the experiences of anyone other than myself but acknowledge that there may be points that others can relate to, and that those may facilitate a dialogue around concepts such as whiteness and masculinity.

4.2 Positioned Through My Artmaking Process

One of the key processes of relational choreography is positioning oneself or establishing one’s positionality (Hunter 2015a:44). I can list aspects of my positionality, for example white, male, South African, but that only serves as an essentialised version of my identity that ties into the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity. To establish my positionality, it is necessary to give
more of a background as to what has formed my identity up until this point in my life (Hunter 2015a:44).

I was born in 1992, 2 years before South Africa became a democracy, in Johannesburg. Both my parents are British and moved to South Africa for short-term job opportunities. They met here, married and did not return to Britain. I grew up in Kensington, a suburb in the East of Johannesburg. I attended schools nearby – Kensington Hebrew nursery school and then from grade 0 until matric, Bishop Bavin St George’s School. I cannot say that I particularly enjoyed school, but it was never a struggle; I had a good academic record, played every sport available and spent my matric year in a white blazer as I was made head boy. My interest in art leads back into the furthest reaches of my memory, but the first moment when I really thought of pursuing art in any capacity is a tale that has been repeated by members of my family time and time again, to the point where I am unsure if it is a memory or just a story ingrained into my head.

The story goes that my mother came to school to collect me from aftercare and upon arriving at the classroom found the two Grade 0 teachers staring at a drawing I had done. The task had been to draw yourself and your reflection in one of the ponds on the school premises. At the age of 5 I had quite convincingly depicted myself standing on the edge of a pond looking down at my reflection. Most of the other students had struggled as to how to draw their reflection, some stacking a duplicate of themselves underneath their feet or others doing an exact mirror image reflected on the horizontal axis. Where my drawing differed from theirs was that I had managed to work out that I was drawing water beneath my feet that had reflected a blurred version of myself. The teachers were astounded as to the ability at which I had grasped this concept. I regale this anecdote not to bring forth ideas that I was a child prodigy or genius, nor do I attempt to gloat at how talented I was at a young age, but to present the anecdote as an interesting point of development with regard to how relational choreography functions within and through my artmaking process and life. I return to this anecdote to explain how positionality can be understood through personal experiences and integrated into my artmaking process, serving as a means of negotiating essentialised notions of identity.

To continue positioning myself beyond my school years leads me to a point at which I began developing a sense of agency, which impacted my ideas surrounding my identity, as well as my art. My parents never found a reason to move to a new house and currently still live in
Kensington. Consequently, I did not move house or school until I went to university in 2011. I went to Rhodes University, or the ‘university currently known as Rhodes University (UCKAR)’, where I began studying towards my Bachelor of Fine Art. Although I had studied art as a matric subject, it only seemed to become something more than a hobby when I reached university. Each year I would experiment with different mediums and techniques, with oil painting finally becoming the medium I found most engaging. The rich surface and material qualities of paint, paired with the visual and representational qualities provided me with what I felt was a means of depicting an endless range of topics in a manner that was, for me, visually stimulating.

The experience of studying at Rhodes University did not only have an impact on my artistic practice, but also formed the backdrop for a transitional phase in my life from nurtured child to a more independent being. The process of becoming more independent and forming a growing self-awareness meant experimenting with aspects of my identity and making decisions as to what kind of identity I would like to express or convey. The process of making decisions with regard to my identity had, until I went to university, been primarily influenced by my parents’ beliefs, values and understanding of the world, and so the new-found independence and personal agency seemed both confusing and daunting. I find it strange to think of identity as being linked to decision making, for so much of who I am is predetermined. I believe there is some choice with regard to identity, however, for me, there has always been a negotiation between that which has been or is imposed versus that which I have developed and chosen to be a part of my identity. As mentioned earlier, Hall (1989) discusses two different ways of thinking about identity, the first being in relation to a ‘shared culture’ which is formed through a sameness of history, culture, or place which situates an individual’s identity in a group. The second way of identity that Hall discusses is in relation to ‘difference’, focusing on the lived-experience of an individual and how identity is a matter of ‘becoming’, rather than being fixed.

The question of who am I can never be answered, but some spaces tend to be linked to the notion of transition and development, potentially as those in which the question of who am I can be explored. My alma mater, Rhodes University, provided me with one such space. Within the town centre of Grahamstown, where Rhodes University is situated, the population consists mainly of students¹⁶ and the infrastructure of the town centre focuses on the students and the

¹⁶ From Rhodes University as well as other high schools in the area.
institutions they attend, I found there was an undeniable sense of privilege within this space, which I was part of. The responsibility that came with privilege would be something that I learned throughout my university career.

For the first two years of university I stayed in student residence. There were 51 other young men in the residence, from across the country, each one with a different upbringing, culture, race, sexuality, and a myriad of other factors that contributed to their identities. The space was by no means free of prejudices, but there was some degree of equality. I was exposed to more diversity than I had ever experienced before and at the same time sought a sense of belonging within a group dynamic – these groups often manifesting through mutual interest, understanding, history, culture, or religion. Although many of my beliefs and interactions transcended concepts of race or gender, I found a subconscious sense of identification with white men. The group of people I befriended were not outwardly racist or misogynist, but with the privilege afforded them came a sense of entitlement and a lack of introspection and responsibility when it came to inequality present in their immediate environment and South Africa as a whole. I suggest that these white men’s attitudes can be seen as an illustration of ideological concepts of whiteness and masculinity in South Africa. After some time, I began to question my association with these beer drinking, rugby supporting, white men. The sense of belonging and comfort that I associated with them completely went against my politics and ideological beliefs.

As an artist, stories and communication were of importance to me. However, I felt that befriending this group of white men and conforming to a narrative of hegemonic power would not lead me to any greater interest in or understanding of the world. I am not attempting to suggest that I need to befriend individuals who have different identities to me to understand diversity or the complexity of identity. I intend to interrogate my conformity with an essentialised white male narrative and attempt to negotiate what it means to me being a white male. Without this kind of interrogation and process, I felt a sense of stagnation within my identity and art practice. In order to overcome a sense of conformity to ideology and essentialisation, I sought to shift my process.

Over the subsequent years my personal narrative and artistic practice began to collide. I began questioning what, as a white male I might, or wanted to, make art about and what imagery this might involve. The process of exploration led me to an unexpected juncture in creating work
that distanced the personal connection to the subject matter being dealt with in my artmaking practice. After producing a series of what I felt to be banal and detached works, I realised I was censoring myself from depicting certain imagery/content due to a sense of fear and anxiety in relation to being perceived in an essentialised manner. To re-inject personal narratives into my works, I began drawing on lived-experiences and memories to express my feelings and thoughts with regard to my whiteness and masculinity within the context of South Africa. In this way, I began positioning myself within and through my artworks.

“The practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write [or make art] – the positions of enunciation” (Hall 1989:68). Positioning oneself is a complex process, it is continuous, changing, sometimes within one’s control and at other times not. The context in which one is in influences one’s positioning, as does history, politics, sociology and psychology. With so many intricate, entangled factors, it is difficult to form an understanding of one’s positionality, let alone understand the positionality of another person. Thinking back to the drawing I did of myself and my reflection as a young boy, I have gained a sense of understanding with regard to how one positions oneself and how one understands other individuals’ positionalities. The practices of representation Hall (1989) mentions also function in a practical manner in relation to my painting process, in that through the imagery I select to convey in my paintings I represent aspects of myself. Through the process of painting and producing certain images I became aware of a failure in representing myself, as I felt the images lacked the complexity and emotion that I wished to express. Upon critical reflection I came to the realisation that the production of a ‘fixed image’ was what was preventing me from conveying the complexity of emotion and feeling within my work. Therefore, I began to shift my work towards more process driven works, focusing not on the final product of image, but rather the development and process of painting. Shifting my painting in this manner provided a space to explore the fluidity, change, and continual development of how I formed my identity. In some ways each painting contains a narrative of my lived experiences interspersed with emotion, memory, thoughts, and the physical act of painting.

The telling of some of my life story in this manner may seem an odd inclusion in a research paper. However, my story serves to illustrate two points: firstly, that the complexity of my identity and positioning can quickly be shifted from the initial description of being a white, male living in South Africa, towards an intricate understanding of my identity; secondly, through the exploration of storytelling, memory and experience, one can position oneself, gain
a greater self-awareness and extend one’s awareness of other individuals as being positioned through their own narrative in complex ways.

Thinking back to the drawing I mentioned earlier of myself and my reflection, I am made aware of how this image provides an example of the way in which positionality functions. The drawing is, in actuality, a self-portrait, but unlike a traditional self-portraiture there is more to it than just the copying of my likeness. The inclusion of the mirrored self on the water’s surface creates another source of information – a source of information that I liken to the process of positioning myself. The reflection may form an understanding of the self in that a version of me is formed on the surface of the water, an image that is seen through my subjective gaze. Therefore, I form an idea of who I am through looking at my reflection, filling in the intricacies through understandings of experience, personal history, beliefs, thoughts and values. Whilst doing this, the water surface ripples and changes, changing the image of myself that I can see. This is similar to the external forces that shift and change my understanding of my positionality. The water is what forms my positioning in this instance, much like the constructs of my identity that I do not have control over or cannot make a choice about. The pond containing water provides a context in which my positionality is determined, although there are fixed concepts such as the history of place, the water is ever changing and shifting within the space, much like theories and understanding within different societies. My artmaking practice provides a critical distancing through which I am able to formulate the knowledge I have gained through exploring experiences or even previous artworks and stages within the process of producing a work.

In the work produced for this study, I explore my positioning and, in so doing, have come to realise through this process that even though I speak and paint from my positionality, there are still discovered nuances within my identity that I had not been aware of previously, or that have changed and developed over time. As mentioned earlier, I was previously preoccupied with the idea of a finite image that encapsulated the entire concept I attempted to express, however, upon reflection I began to emphasise the process within the paintings as it provided a space in which I was able to engage with the ever changing or ‘becoming’ that happened when positioning myself (Hall 1989:706). The paintings I began to produce in light of this reflection prompted an engagement with the process of layering and adding within the painting, through which I negotiate the surface of the canvas, much like the negotiations that occur when developing and learning more about my positionality. With the knowledge that even I do not
fully understand my positioning, I am aware that I cannot expect or even attempt to have other individuals completely understand my positioning. However, through the interaction with my paintings and artmaking process, some of the complex notions surrounding my positionality, and identity in general are revealed. Through looking at some of the process images (see Figures 12-15) some of the negotiations which occur when formulating my paintings become evident.

Figure 12 Matthew Hazell, Sink or Swim (process 1), 2017-2018, Oil on canvas, 225 x 136 cm.
Figure 13 Matthew Hazell, *Sink or Swim (process 2)*, 2017-2018, Oil on canvas, 225 x 136 cm.

Figure 14 Matthew Hazell, *Sink or Swim (process 3)*, 2017-2018, Oil on canvas, 225 x 136 cm.
Through producing these paintings and positioning myself through experiences, memories and thoughts I noticed the re-occurring theme that water has played in my life and how it related to my feelings as a white male South African. I have chosen to use experiences and memories that relate to water as an impetus for the development of my paintings and as a metaphor for the processes of relational choreography, as exemplified in my anecdote about my first experience of desiring to be involved in making art. Water also has poignant means in which it can be interacted with such as fluidity, changeability, floating weightlessly, a powerful engulfing, swimming, drowning, floating, sinking, splashing, and cleansing. There are also a number of events and experiences that relate to water, such as family holidays, birth, baptism, evolution, and the very reason that humans exist on a habitable planet; all of which encapsulate aspects of my lived experience and can potentially be interpreted into my paintings. Accessing memories and experiences related to a specific motif also provides some critical distance when looking at my lived experiences as it forces an intricate thought process when selecting stories, engaging with emotions and feelings experienced at the time, and relating each scenario to my current and ongoing feelings as a white male.
4.3 Pricked by the Blank Canvas

While living and growing up in Johannesburg, the popular holiday destination of Durban was a consistent adventure away from the city.\(^{17}\) To this day, driving over a hill to be met with the view of a thin dark blue line on the horizon that forms my first glimpse of the sea gives me the feeling of butterflies in my stomach as the excitement builds. When thinking about the Durban coastline and surrounds, I have fond memories of fishing in rock pools, collecting shells, flying kites, running along the sand and swimming in the warm Indian ocean. I have always been a strong swimmer, probably from the hours of swimming lessons which I had a love/hate relationship with. I would even go as far as to say the confidence I have in my ability allows me to feel at home in the water, regardless of whether I am in a bathtub, swimming pool, lake, or the ocean. My confidence on one occasion would evidently teach me a sharp lesson in respect towards the power of the ocean. At the age of around 10 or 11, while playing on a beach in Ballito, I ventured out beyond the foamy wash of the waves to a deeper point where I could dip in and out of the water, ducking between waves. The longer I spent in the water, the more confident I became, to the point where I would wait until the very last moment before the waves came crashing down on me to duck out of the way. The beach that I was playing on was a beach break, meaning what was causing the waves to form and break was a steep step in the sea bed that was only a short distance from the beach. Occasionally the water would be pulled away entirely and leave behind the exposed sand right until the drop off point. On this occasion, with my over-confident demeanour, I ran after the disappearing water, only to realise that I was about to meet with a wall of water that rose at least two metres above my head. In an instant that slab of water crashed down on top of me. I was knocked over and pushed into a sort of backward somersault, my head almost touching my feet in the process. I was bashed around underwater, the air in my lungs crushed out of me. I could not see anything, but I knew I had to somehow try to break the surface and have a gasp of air. Disorientated, I swam in any direction I could, hoping to feel the air on my fingertips as I clawed my way through the water. Eventually I managed to see a glimmer of light and knew that was my ticket out; I swam to the surface and finally managed to gasp for air, only to be met with another wave crashing down on my head. While being tossed around again, I managed to control my reactions and instead of fighting the force of the wave, I was dragged along with the wave, knowing it would eventually slow and allow me to be free of its grip. Finally, I was washed onto the beach, out

\(^{17}\) It is interesting to note that Johannesburg is one of the few major cities in the world that is not built on a water source, but rather built due to natural mineral resources.
of breath, battered and bruised; my back felt as if it had nearly been snapped, and although I knew I had nearly drowned, I managed to crawl out of the water and flop down onto the dry sand.

Through a continued exploration of my lived experiences and how they can be utilised as a means of engaging with the processes of relational choreography, I unpack how my near drowning experience described above furthers my understanding of how pricking works as a means of prompting awareness, reflection, and interpretation.

The experience I felt as I was knocked over by a wave and dragged underwater, nearly drowning as I struggled to get a breath of air prompted a range of emotions and feelings that came with further realisations. The fear of drowning, the exhausted sense of relief after making it out of the water and the sheer surprise in the ability to fight through a high-pressure and high-risk situation all came with a heightened self-awareness. My self-awareness manifested through a new-found respect for the power of the ocean, an awareness of my own fragility and mortality and an overwhelming sense of transcendence when the only thing left to strive for is survival. I was pricked by the knowledge that with all the complexity that I experience clarity can be drawn from my experiences.

I began *Sink or Swim* (Figure 16), by depicting a boy suspended underwater surrounded by masses of water moving according to the waves above the surface. I painted in a manner that revealed painterly marks that make up the shapes and forms of the water, responding to my near-drowning experience in a fictionalised and contracted manner. I noticed that I could only imagine what I looked like tumbling underwater in a struggle to reach the surface as there was no photograph and no-one else could have seen me in the churning water. For this reason, I have conveyed the figure in the painting as being blurred and lost; he is the only individual that is able to understand the experience. Similarly, the process of pricking one’s consciousness can only completely be understood through each individual’s gaze that is formed through lived-experience. To determine what formed my desire to negotiate my white masculinity and the essentialised ideas thereof, I felt it necessary to determine what it was that pricked my consciousness.
Initially I thought what pricked me and drew my attention to essentialised ideologies of whiteness and masculinity that are fixed to my identity, were the #Rhodesmustfall (2015) and #feesmustfall (2015) movements and the actions surrounding these events. However, upon consideration, I realised that these movements and associated events did heighten my awareness of the perceptions I and other people had of my identity, what actually prompted me to consider notions of my identity were more closely linked to my artmaking practice. Sitting and staring at a blank canvas I realised that I was unsure what to paint, not for lack of ideas or imagery, but for fear of what responses and reactions might be provoked by my work.

The fear that pricked me as I was tumbled across the seabed as a young boy on the beaches of Ballito was similar to the fear I felt when considering how I, as a white male, would be responded to when producing art. I felt overwhelmed with the inability to do something about being grouped into the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity, whilst being aware of the more complex nature of my experience as a white male. In relation to being caught in a wave, there was very little I could do as I was facing a force of nature, but when considering what to produce as an artist, the situation is somewhat different. I could imagine multiple ways of producing work and different images that I could depict, but it seemed that with each came a potential flaw or problem. For example, I could potentially develop a narrative that expresses...
sentiments towards the difficulties of being a white male South African, which would be absurd with any kind of knowledge of the privilege and power granted to white men through colonialism and Apartheid. Alternatively, I could deal with issues that do not pertain to any kind of political or societal framework, which would lead to a sense of detachment and meaninglessness within the work, and the potential for a sense of deliberate avoidance of confronting the problematics of whiteness and masculinity in South Africa.

The confusion and uncertainty that overcame me with regard to my artmaking is reminiscent of the disorientation I felt inside of the wave – not knowing where to go but knowing that I needed to do something to alter the situation. I felt the same sense of necessity within my art practice – to tell my story and communicate my experiences as a white male I needed to alter my practice somehow, but I was uncertain as to how to make a change. I even questioned whether my story is one that should be told at all.

Figure 17 Matthew Hazell, Day at the Beach 1, 2018, Oil on canvas, 30 x 20cm.
Figure 18 Matthew Hazell, *Day at the Beach 2*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 20 x 20cm.

Figure 19 Matthew Hazell, *I Can’t Float*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 150 x 120cm.
For me, the experience of being washed onto the beach and making it out of the wave, resembles the moment that comes after having my consciousness pricked. After being pricked there is a sense of awareness and enquiring that occurs. In relation to my artmaking practice, the awareness did not come in the form of a conclusive answer, but rather implied a negotiation and alteration that would have to take place. Through producing paintings, I began to explore concepts, ideas, and made attempts at resolving how to express ideas visually and actualise them pictorially. Through the process of painting various images of different sizes (see Figures 17-18) and using a range of differing techniques (see Figures 19-20), I attempted to assemble my thoughts and feelings towards being a white male and how to produce art within the white male demographic. The process led me to feeling a sense of despair and failure, as I felt that in each work I had only begun to grapple with my thoughts and experiences. Only when considering the works at a critical distance did I begin to realise that each of the works expressed parts of my thought process and mindset, whilst chronicling my negotiations through the amassed information and experience I collected throughout my research process. I decided
then to shift my paintings away from creating conclusive images towards work that exposed the process of making and thinking. I attempt to achieve this by utilising the larger paintings and smaller paintings in conjunction with one another, sticking smaller canvases onto other paintings and painting over images to add layers of process to the works, altering and/or losing parts of the images, whilst allowing some of the original layers to still show through (see Figure 21). Through some of the photographs taken of the paintings throughout the process, I illustrate how the paintings develop and change (see Figures 22-24). The way in which my paintings began to take shape became far more aligned with the methods of narrative inquiry and autoethnography, as well as the relational choreographic approach, which in turn allowed for the complex and process driven nature of my experiences as a white male to be expressed. The paintings allowed for a sense of fluidity and continuity, perhaps even inconclusive, incomplete, or in progress, which felt more like the process of negotiation that I was grappling and still grapple with.

Figure 21 Matthew Hazell, Boys Will Be Boys, 2018, Oil on canvas, 220 x 136cm.
Figure 22 Matthew Hazell, *Smile and Wave (Process 1)*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 225 x 136cm.

Figure 23 Matthew Hazell, *Smile and Wave (Process 2)*, 2018, Oil on canvas, 225 x 136cm.
Depending on the context of the work, displayed in a gallery, studio, home, or public space, different interactions take place, shifting the work’s meaning and the way in which individuals are pricked by the work. The variation of meaning and reaction is compounded within other processes of relational choreography in the form of interplay within particular contexts and audiences.

4.4 Self-Objectification Through Reflection

A particular swimming pool that has featured prominently in my life is that of a family friend’s that was within walking distance from my childhood home. The other children and I, that formed a tight knit group of friends and, whose parents had all lived together in communes in the 1980’s, would spend most weekends in the summer swimming for hours on end. Games of Marco Polo, swimming races and breath holding competitions would dominate my interactions with this pool, but a memory that presents itself clearly in my mind does not entail some of the typical events that surround a swimming pool.

This particular memory occurred one day when I had gone with my mother to feed the owners’ dogs, as they were away on holiday. I took the opportunity to explore their garden and jump on the trampoline whilst my mother was busy feeding the dogs. After a time, I found myself...
staring into the pool and wondering what it would be like to deliberately fall in fully clothed. I ventured to the edge of the pool and slowly leaned forwards, each time my subconscious forcing me to pull back in an act of self-preservation. I repeated the process of leaning forward, each time resulting in a swinging of arms to correct my balance and prevent myself from falling into the water. As I continued to repeat the process of leaning over the water’s edge, I got closer and closer to falling in, until I leaned one bit too far, lost my balance and plunged fully clothed into the water.

The anecdote of my first recognition of my artistic ability, as explained earlier, comes to mind here as being linked to the idea of deliberately falling into a swimming pool. Both experiences consist of being at the water’s edge and confronting a reflection of myself. The first experience of drawing my reflection as a young boy brought about self-reflection and self-awareness of my own positioning. The experience of deliberately falling into a swimming pool fully clothed shifts the experience from simply viewing and being aware of the self; rather, it causes the self to momentarily lose control and crash into its own reflection, shifting to the mirrored self’s perspective.

The process of self-objectification centres around the idea of shifting one’s perspective away from a subjective understanding of the self towards other perceptions of oneself that another individual may have. When looking at my reflection on the water’s surface, I see myself in a positioned manner, illustrating the complexity, nuances, and idiosyncrasies I experience through my subjective gaze. However, if I fall towards the water my perspective of my reflection is momentarily changed. I am no longer observing myself from a curated distance but hurtling towards myself and shifting how I see myself. The brief suspension of my subjectivities that occurs when realising I am going to fall through my reflection into the water can be likened to the way in which self-objectification occurs. A brief suspension of my subjective ideas of self allows for other individuals’ perceptions of me to be realised. In a literal sense, as I fall closer to the water’s surface and my reflection enables me to see less and less of my body as gravity pulls me down, I am only able to focus on a specific part of my reflection. In relation to self-objectification I may perceive my identity in a holistic manner, but as I temporarily suspend parts of my identity, I am able to focus on a specific part of my identity without the layers of lived experience. The focused view that forms here provides a clearer idea of how specific identity markers function as an ideology, in a particular context or history, or even psychologically.
4.5 Flipping Through Multiple Points of View

The experiences I have discussed up until this point have centred around my solitary being without interaction or interplay with other individuals. However, an integral part of relational choreography is the dynamic interaction that occurs between multiple individuals. To discuss the interaction that occurs within relational choreography, it is important to speak about my experiences that illustrate how these interactions may occur and function within relational choreography. In discussing individuals other than myself, a difficulty arises as there is the potential to speak for, censor, essentialise or generalise about others and their experiences. One of the reasons for including my ‘voice’ in this dissertation is to prevent essentialising or generalising practices and to avoid speaking for other individuals. However, relational choreography functions within a space of interaction and interplay between multiple individuals which requires the contextualisation of my ‘voice’ in a socially interactive environment. Therefore, I began to contemplate a way in which I could speak from my lived-experience, whilst discussing the dynamic interaction between multiple individuals and how the process of flipping may occur.

A photograph on my Facebook memories pricked my attention. The photograph was of a group of friends and I in the grandstands at an inter-university rugby match. The way in which the photograph is taken and cropped decontextualises the event; it could be read as a group of men celebrating or being rowdy while drinking. What struck me about this image was that there were only white men in the photo. I knew from having actually been there that there was a diverse crowd and not just white men, however, through framing it looked as if there were only white male individuals. After analysing the photograph, three points pricked me – first, depending on context, interactions and relationships develop perceptions of identity; second, that through a certain framing, cropping, focusing or gaze one could alter a context or narrative; and third, the notion of the audience and the different manners in which an audience can be considered.

Each point, I suggest, is of importance when considering how interactions function within relational choreography and how I write about these interactions. The first point I note is an awareness of how there is a multiplicity of contexts and individuals within these contexts. Therefore, even an attempt at perceiving the potential interactions that could occur is limited because of one’s own context and positioning. The second point relates to the first in that it
illustrates how, depending on context, power structures between individuals can shift, narratives can change, and interactions can be fluid, which means that one cannot define or predict an interaction or scenario – it can only be experienced from the perspective of each individual. The third point is that an interaction does not have a set manner in which it occurs. For example, an audience has an interaction with other individuals, however the interaction is not necessarily reciprocal and can be constructed, determining set roles for those viewing and being viewed; or the audience could exist in a more passive manner and the interaction towards the individual being viewed could possibly be facilitated by that individual. There are many other potential scenarios which one cannot predict or determine. Although one cannot perceive of every possible scenario depending on context or interaction, awareness of the potential interactions is important for it forms a comprehensive idea of the intricacy that exists, not only within each individual, but how the intricacy is expounded when considering context and interaction.

Considering the previous points and how they can be thought about in relation to the concept of ‘flipping’, I am drawn to an experience I had of being inside a tank at an aquarium. Typically, at aquariums, the marine life is looked at from outside the tank through the glass. However, I went to an aquarium that offered guests the chance to go snorkelling in one of the large tanks. The experience was awe-inspiring, exhilarating and strange. I was awe-struck by the array of beautifully coloured fish of all shapes and sizes, along with the exhilaration and adrenalin that rose up in me as small sharks swam metres below me. The overwhelming peculiarity of the experience still remains with me.

What was particularly peculiar about the experience was that I was swimming in a constructed tank that mimicked the ocean while it was only a few hundred metres away from the actual ocean. All the while people peered through glass at me as I swam around in the exhibit, with the added peculiarity of the experience being all of my own volition and choice.

The memory of swimming inside of a fish tank while aquarium guests looked on made me think of relational choreography and particularly the process of flipping. I had chosen to enter the strange space of a constructed pool that housed a world that I did not entirely belong in but became a part of. My onlookers could point me out as not belonging but could determine that

18 The sharks could not kill or eat a human, but snorkelers were warned that they could bite and cause injury.
there is an accepted purpose to my inclusion in the marine exhibit. I enjoyed swimming and engaging with the world around me but was conscious of those watching me and considered how they might perceive my decision to swim in the fish tank whilst they stood behind a thick sheet of glass and peered into the same world that I had become an inhabitant of. Some of the aquarium guests might have considered my choice to go snorkelling in an aquarium exhibit as absurd while others might have considered joining me, perhaps some envisioning what I might be experiencing or feeling. I thought about how strange it must be to look into a beautiful underwater environment and suddenly be confronted by another human on the opposite side of the glass, completely out of place and deterring any illusion that what was being looked at was in any way an uncontrolled space.

The similarities that I draw from the shifting of perspectives between myself and those looking through the glass at the aquarium exhibit, and the process of flipping develops through the momentary thoughts that I had as I became aware that I was being watched. Considering how the aquarium guests might have been seeing me is similar to how one can approach the process of flipping in that one’s subjectivities are momentarily suspended in an attempt to perceive how others may see my identity, choices or lived experiences.

In *Smile and Wave* (Figure 25) I have taken the thoughts I have expressed in this section on flipping and explored how I can negotiate through different perceptions of my identity and flip my perceptions of my identity, particularly focusing on ideas surrounding whiteness and masculinity. I used the photograph from Facebook of my white male university friends and I spectating at a rugby match as source material. I have re-contextualised the image within my painting to make as if the group is being seen from my perspective when swimming in the tank at the aquarium. In the painting I attempt to shift between my experiences, memories and different perspectives to flip from subjectification to objectification through the dynamic interaction. In the work, I depict my friends and I in a distorted manner so as to distance specific facial features or markers, in an attempt to draw attention to the potential generalisations that could be imposed on white men, as well as the perpetuation of hegemonic white masculinity. There is a further flipping that the painting evokes as the spectators within the painting look out at the viewer and, in turn, the viewer looks back at the spectator, therefore questioning from which perspective an individual’s identity is being viewed and understood.
4.6 A Pragmatic Enactment of Relational Choreography in My Artmaking Practice

In this chapter I have demonstrated how the processes of relational choreography manifest in my artwork and artmaking process. However, some of the practical concerns can only be discussed when looking at the relational choreographic approach and my artmaking practice as a whole.

I use relational choreography as an approach to create artworks and facilitate my creative process providing a compelling way in which to negotiate, reflect, and interpret my feelings towards the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity, as well as my own experiences and perceptions of whiteness and masculinity. I specifically refer to my experiences and perceptions of whiteness and masculinity and the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity as separate entities. The separation occurs in a way that the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity form part of my personal understanding and experience as a white male, however, through lived experience I formulate my individual whiteness and masculinity. The pragmatic version of whiteness and masculinity that I discuss here plays an important role in my artmaking in that I utilise theory and introspective knowledge surrounding whiteness and masculinity and enact it in a practical manner. The practical manner in which my painting process occurs formulates the space of negotiation that I have sought to explore and utilise in
a way that could facilitate an understanding of how I may be able to produce art in South Africa
as a white male. The continuous and critical manner in which I produce paintings allowed for
me to explore various points that contribute to my discovering of ways in which artmaking can
facilitate the negotiation of white masculine ideologies. In what follows I reflect on how,
through enacting a relational choreographic approach, I was able find ways in which to better
understand how I could use paint as a means of interpreting experience, ideas, images, and
constructions of identity.

In the initial phase of developing my practical body of work I was concerned with the notion
of ‘the image’, that is to say creating some sort of picture through the application of oil paint
on canvas. The purpose of images would be to convey my feelings and experiences of being a
white male in South Africa. Difficulty came about when attempting to choose images that
would allow for my personal concerns to be addressed, along with creating imagery that would
be relatable to individuals who would form my audience. However, as discussed earlier, I felt
that trying to produce a singular image or scene did not express the complexity and nuance that
I experience when negotiating ideologies of whiteness and masculinity. Therefore, I began
producing works that centred around the idea of process and fluidity, opposed to conclusive
imagery. When my work shifted in this manner, relational choreography began to feel
pragmatic and creative tensions occurred in my work that prompted a sense of self-reflexivity
and a potential way to negotiate my thoughts and feelings surrounding my experiences as a
white male in South Africa.

19 The audience is predominantly South African; however, the work could potentially be accessed by a global
audience.
CHAPTER FIVE
SYNOPSIS

I am not going to attempt to formulate a conclusive argument at the end of this study as I believe this would be counter intuitive to the idea of negotiating the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity, as well as the approaches and methods I have utilised in my research process. The study has lead me to a point in which I can reflect on the experience and develop a type of synopsis.

I feel that a recent experience of mine provides an apt illustration of some of my explorations and continues to utilise the motif of water. A group of friends and I had got together over the holiday season (December/beginning January) and began a night of drinking, dancing and general recreational party activities. As the night wore on we became fairly inebriated and increasingly hot and sweaty from the summer heat. To cool off, we decided in a group drunken state that seeing as none of us had swimming pools at our homes, we would break into the nearby public swimming pool and go for a dip. The plan consisted of about 12 people piling into the back of my bakkie, an old wooden ladder in tow, and driving to the public pool, then using the ladder to scale the wall. Already this plan presents a few red flags – drunk driving, overload of people on the back of an open vehicle – however, we persisted. The drive alone was complex as a two-tonne vehicle with 12 drunk people on the back is no discreet thing, so driving the back routes to the least visible access point to the public pool was the first of a few obstacles. The plan still had to go through a few other phases which included sneaking across a field and hiding from a passing security vehicle, going under a wire fence, all the while trying to share the load of a cumbersome wooden ladder and the eventual scaling of the wall. The plan went off without a hitch, however, I am certain we were not as discrete as we thought.

After landing on the other side of the wall I was met by a beautiful sight. The eerie fluorescent light reflecting off the dark waters of the pool surrounded by tall trees seemed as if I had fallen down a hole into some sort of Wonderland, much like Alice. We all stripped off into our underwear and slowly slipped into the pool so as not to wake the sleeping guard or surrounding residents. The experience was incredible, from the cool water on my body, to the feeling of weightlessness as I floated around, I seemed to feel a sense of freedom from the realities of the world. I felt fearless, unencumbered, and carefree.
The anecdote may seem perplexing at first, but something that put into perspective for me was a phrase commonly printed on alcoholic beverages or in advertisements of alcoholic products – ‘drink responsibly’. The experience of breaking into the public pool whilst drunk definitely does not conform to the guideline of drinking responsibly. The list of potential grievances is extensive, from potential legal implications to fatality from a car accident or drowning. I am well aware of these misdoings and potential ramifications, yet I persisted to overlook the responsibilities for what could be considered a cheap thrill. The magnitude of the concept of responsibility becomes clear for me in this instance. Thankfully nothing went wrong, and while I am able to look back fondly at a night of carefree joy, the night could have gone differently and the burden of a lack of self-awareness and a lack of responsibility would have haunted me.

In the context of my research this experience I feel relates to the manner in which I as an artist produce work. I believe that I, as a white male living in South Africa, hold a sense of self-awareness and responsibility at utmost importance. Relational choreography offers an approach that accesses various processes that promote self-reflexive behaviour in the individual enacting the approach. In my experience, relational choreography facilitated a means of contemplating my complicity and rejection with problematic and essentialising notions of whiteness and masculinity. The self-reflexive knowledge gained through the process of relational choreography provided a manner in which I choose to engage with the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity, primarily facilitating an awareness of the multiple ways I enact my whiteness and masculinity within and through my lived experience. The way in which this manifested for me within my lived experience and artmaking process was through the realisation of the significance of self-awareness and responsibility.

An important aspect to developing a sense of self-awareness and responsibility was the manner in which I could negotiate self-censorship. Relating this to the anecdote of breaking into the public pool I am made aware that I enacted no form of self-reflexivity, self-awareness or responsibility, until after the event. Although, I did experience a sense of a achievement and, in some form or another, a sense of freedom. I believe that this is by no means the manner in which I would engage with responsibility in my artmaking practice, however, it does serve as a point of reflection with regard to the varied degrees of responsibility one should take within artmaking and how it can lead to the point of censoring an individual’s practice. Murray (2018) stated in an interview that I conducted with him that “It is up to these artists to decide what is or isn’t appropriate. Each will be guided by their own conscience” and to that end I argue that
an artist should not be censored or self-censor, but rather take responsibility for the work produced. Similarly, in my experience of breaking into the public pool and the eventual sense of freedom could have come with repercussions. If the repercussions had befallen me, I would have made my decisions and would have had to face the consequences and take responsibility for my actions.

Within my artmaking practice the sense of liberation that I felt when not being restricted by my self-imposed censorship allowed for my process to change in a manner that allowed for more freeing choices and an acceptance of potential failures, changes, developments, and even the possibility of never feeling a sense of finality within the works. The manner in which my paintings began to manifest closely related to my experiences as a white male in South Africa, the potential for failures, changes, developments, and even the possibility of never feeling a sense of finality within my identity. Therefore, my negotiations of the ideologies of whiteness and masculinity continue, but through relational choreography within and through my artmaking process I am made aware of the innate necessity of self-awareness and responsibility within my artmaking practice and life.
SOURCES CONSULTED


Accessed 8 June 2017.


Accessed 2 June 2017.


Accessed 14 June 2017.


APPENDIX A

Letter of Informed Consent

Dear Brett Murray,

Thank you for participating in this research study.

This informed consent form is to ensure that you understand the purpose of your participation in the study and that your rights will be protected during the gathering of information through this interview. Kindly read the following conditions and if the terms are agreeable to you, acknowledge your consent to participate in the interview by signing at the end of the consent form. Please note that your involvement in this study is voluntary and you may terminate the interview at any time.

1. The core objective of this study is to research to explore how white masculinities can be negotiated within, and through the work of selected white male South African artists.

2. I will transcribe the interview, and plan to quote from it as well as include it as an appendix to the study.

3. If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me, Matthew Hazell (matt.j.hazell@gmail.com) and/or my supervisor, Prof. Leora Farber (leoraf@uj.ac.za) Director: Research Centre (RC), Visual Identities in Art and Design (VIAD).

I, [Name], have read, understood and accept the terms described above and agree to voluntarily participate in the interview.

Signed

[Signature]

Date

24 April 2018

Place

Cape Town

Signature of Researcher

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APPENDIX B

Brett Murray - Interview Questions

MH: A major part of what prompted my research is the question as to what art I can make and how can I make it as a white male in South Africa, particularly with regard to movements such as #Rhodesmustfall and #feesmustfall. Tell me about your thought process when you begin creating a new work or body of work and the influence of the political climate?

BM: I like to reflect on the shifting South African social and political landscape. I also intentionally embed my personal experiences within this narrative. I want to combine the personal and the political with these reflections on the tragedy and the comedy that is South Africa. For me it is not only about politics and the arrogant assumption that what I make can effectively make a difference. But in my work…if I can gather like-minded people around me through a collective guffaw or snigger…then shifts in people’s perceptions can be affected and the target of my satire belittled and undermined. I often try to gently tug the rug of complacent attitudes and preconceptions from under the feet of my audience…and often, but not exclusively, this is done through humour.

MH: In what ways, if any, does the idea of censorship become a consideration when producing a work?

BM: I consider self-censorship to be more crucial in unbundling than censorship. Freedom of expression is enshrined in the constitution… Salman Rushdie has said that this includes the freedom to insult… so I will take my chances. Within this are various levels of editing and refining that all artist, poets, stand-up comics etc will do…It is up to these artists to decide what is or isn’t appropriate. Each will be guided by their own conscience. For the state, or anybody for that matter, to attempt to ban or decide what can or cannot be said is censorship. These attempts at censorship that were made so soon after the collapse of the Apartheid regime… are chilling, frightening and eye opening.

Within this context …I will fight the obstructive veil of self-censorship going forward.

MH: You have spoken about your use of satire in your work and how this approach acts as a means of communicating ideas. Do you feel this approach or any other allows for artists to be free to portray anything they feel appropriate?

BM: Yes.
MH: Could you expand upon your use of personal narrative in your art making practice and artworks?

BM: I embed myself within the unfolding narratives of my work. I am often both the perpetrator and the victim of my satire. I am well aware of my privileged position in the South African context…race …class…and economic…and I will continue to reflect on these privileges ion myself and in others…satirically. Also…I find the processes of sculpture making therapeutic. The act of making…sanding…filing …is also meditative and deeply personal. Hopefully this abstract sense of making will be imbedded in the resulting sculptures and begin to communicate who I am and how I view the world…if that makes sense. Personal and hopefully idiosyncratic.

MH: The work Call and Response (2016) seems a to have been made in an attempt to form interaction between the public and yourself, potentially answering some of the questions with regard to your continued socio-political commentary. Could you respond to this statement?

BM: All my works are attempts to form an interaction between the public and myself.

This work addresses straight on my resentment, disgust and anger at the state in their attempts to shut me up. Like a naughty boy…they expected me to diligently write my lines as punishment…That was their call.

My response was to spell out unequivocally: You are a corrupt fuck.