O KAE? - AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC DRAMATURGY THROUGH A ‘DELIBERATE INCOMMENSURABILITY’

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation, from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Supervisor: Professor Mark Fleishman
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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the erasure of the black woman from the mainstream theatre space of South Africa as a provocation towards the creation of a dramaturgical process that pivots around the notion of ‘deliberate incommensurability’ as a catalyst for exploration. ‘Deliberate incommensurability’ is a term I have coined myself as it suggests an agency in the black woman as subject and object of study. I suggest the requirement for an autoethnographic inquest in carrying out the research, as the methodology used in the creation of the processes and products of the study was Practice as Research (PaR). The methodology uses the modes of translation and literary studies in order to unpack the myriad ways in which the representation of the black female has effectively been an erasure of her presence. I detail four points of origin for the study drawn primarily from Gayatri C. Spivak and Toni Morrison. In addition, the study interrogates the processes towards creating O Kae? - a performance installation that evaluates the importance of opacity towards the self-representation of the Other in an attempt to discover an alternative aesthetic and creative praxis for myself.
INTRODUCTION

We are the ones from communities that make art professional
We are the ones whose stories are only heard when spoken through Anglo-Boer languages, the protagonists of those stories, lending Anglo-Boer hatred machinery to perform its liberalism,
No longer.
We are not anonymous.

The majority of state funded theatre institutions in the country have black CEOs, female or male. I use the term, black here in the Black Consciousness vein, which includes all people previously classified in South Africa as “non-white”. The CEOs are from the era of the Black Consciousness Movement\(^1\) and irrespective of their involvement in the struggle towards South Africa’s democratisation, it is under their watch that the sector seems to be regressing back to the apartheid mentality of divide and conquer, blacklisting and plain gate-keeping for emerging and established talent that does not ‘toe-the-line’. When I first became an administrator of a municipal owned theatre, another colleague was based at a state-run theatre. We attempted to organise a collective of the Artistic Directors at various state-funded institutions in an effort to create a touring circuit between the theatres that could extend the life of theatre productions and increase cooperation between theatre spaces. It was our thinking that the theatres were working in silos and this was not effective for the advancement and innovation of theatre in such a small, yet highly saturated market. The collective ended up consisting of, only, the two of us and we toured three productions between both our spaces before we both left our respective institutions. Currently, the

\(^1\) The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, arose in the 1960’s spurned on by the banning of the 2 dominant political parties of the time, the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). One of the key aims of the movement was the restoration of confidence, in those groups of people considered non-white by the Apartheid state, through practical and intellectual engagement with the agency the oppressed possessed to either change their paradigm positively or to continue consenting to their subjugation.
Artistic Directors seem to only be trading, between them, shows directed by themselves and not spreading the net to include productions by other directors in their respective regions.

The number of independent spaces has increased in the past five years, however, most are struggling for funding unless they belong to individuals with access to capital and in South Africa this division is along racial lines. However, the spaces blossoming, because of the cultural hegemony, inherited capital and assumption of ‘white is right’ are given support by the mainstream theatres and their owners acknowledged by the ‘captains of industry’ while the venues in the townships retain the development/charity status that helps South Africa embrace its cognitive dissonance around privilege.

In a recent article inspired by a post on social media by Faniswa Yisa in which she posed the question: “How many theatre institutions in Cape Town have had a black female director without the umbrella of ‘emerging’ or ‘development’?” (Faniswa Yisa, 2018), Mike Van Graan (2018) provides an analysis of the South African Theatre sector. In What The Naledi Theatre Awards Say About The Theatre Sector, published on his website, Van Graan focusses his analysis on the Naledi Theatre Awards, an annual award ceremony for productions showcased in Johannesburg and utilising data gathered from the past fifteen-years (2003-2018). He analyses awards in the following categories: Best Director; Best Script and Best Production, and attempts to clarify the importance of resources and access in the growth of the discipline within South Africa, the need for an established touring circuit among the state-funded theatre houses in the country, and the dearth of black female representation in the mainstream.

From 2003-2017, a period of 15 years, there have been a total of 90 nominees in the Best Director of a Play or Musical category. Of these, 27 (30%) have been black (in the Biko sense), while there have been 63 white nominees. There were two
male/woman director combinations, with 33 woman (37%) and 55 male nominees respectively. Of the total of 90 nominations, there have been five black woman nominees, all of them since 2013 (Warona Seane 2013, Princess Zinzi Mhlongo and Khutjo Green 2014, Jade Bowers 2016 and Lesedi Job 2017). 28 of the 33 women nominees were white. (Van Graan, 2018)

It is not surprising that the visibility and audibility of the black woman in the world has been compromised as a result of whiteness. The need to own, shape and model the experiences of the black woman has been dominated by an assumed cognitive dissonance that allows for the gazer to relegate this body to the lowest rung on the ladder in order to advance the project of subjugation, trauma and economic disparity which enabled the colonial state, and now the globalised state, to flourish and maintain dominance over her. The gazer is not merely the white male but one that is informed by the dominant hegemony. It is, therefore, possible to experience this type of dismissive gaze from the black and white females running institutions, as well. In addressing the notion of the audience or receiver of information belonging to the dominant culture, that which is seen as economically viable to the survival of either literary texts or performed texts, Toni Morrison points to an assumed and imposed non-racialism and poses questions around the effectiveness or failure of this assumed universalism, that sometimes functions as an erasure of those cultures considered below the scale of what is often assumed to be the standard. For non-racialism is in fact an erasure of or discomfort with expressions that do not necessarily have proximity in their performance, to those of the cultures that set the bar.

What happens to the writerly imagination of a black author who is at some level always conscious of representing one’s own race to, or in spite of a race of readers that understands itself to be “universal” or race free? In other words how is “literary whiteness” and what is the consequence of that construction? How do embedded assumptions of racial (not racist) language work in the literary enterprise that hopes and sometimes claims to be “humanistic”? (Morrison, 1993: xii-xiii)
My enquiry stems from a desire not to be translated nor contextualised. To exist in the way that I exist in the world which is removed from how the dominant hegemony seems to erase my presence. From the knowledge that within my world and within the world of many black theatre-makers, I do exist and the work I have done has impacted on how other theatre-makers approach their processes and influenced the choices of the narratives they have told. I want to remove a contextual setup as it is often the works of black theatre-makers that seem to need contextualisation.

A few years ago, I co-wrote a piece called *Mosetlha* with Mmabatho Mogomotsi and when it came time to present it to an esteemed theatre house that had commissioned the writing through its development wing, we were told by the two white males - artistic director and literary manager - whose job it was to programme for the space that they did not understand the piece and that maybe this lack of understanding was because they were white. This was a piece that explored the Setswana mourning process of a woman after losing her husband. At the time, one of the males had just recently lost his wife. The notion that mourning and grief are somehow racially located was something we honestly could not grasp nor did we even want to understand. I refer to this incident as a way of explaining the reason behind the choice of what I am describing as deliberate incommensurability.

I do believe that this mode of translation, the mode of deliberate incommensurability, is both owned and used in South Africa as a lock at the gates of creativity. The supposed incommensurability of the character’s experience in mourning is located within a mindset that posits language understanding above experience. That understanding, in turn, needs to be framed around existing Western rites of mourning for the grief to then be translatable. In this instance a deliberate assumption was that of positioning the grief felt and expressed by a black woman as incommensurable to a white
male. Such grief would require some form of transposition or even an assimilatory aspect in order to draw the artistic director and literary manager in, and those they viewed as primary audience in their performance venue. Mosetilha\(^2\) is a tree that blooms yellow flowers that are used by Batswana to wash, sterilise and preserve bodies before burial. The play, having decided that our commissioner was the target market, was written predominantly in English with Setswana accenting moments of ritual which were supposed to be interpreted by movement sequences written into the text. Even that consideration for audience members who did not speak Setswana was not enough to lend *Mosetilha* the translatability we had desired, as the writers of the play. We were certain of Kwame Anthony Appiah’s resolve that:

> What interests us in the translations that interest us most is not meaning, in the sense that philosophy of language uses the term; in many cases, as the proverbs surely show and for reasons they exemplify, getting the meaning, in this sense, right is hardly even a first step towards understanding. (Appiah, 1993:808-9)

However, our attempt at a performative thick translation did not create the level of transparency which we had hoped it would. Appiah makes the distinction between assertoric speech acts (those that function within the Gricean mechanism), and performative speech acts, that create and/or announce roles and/or situations. The Gricean mechanism, according to Appiah, consists of conversational maxims that suggest the speaker is attempting to share information through their utterances, whereas performative speech acts are reliant on multiple factors, such as shared contracts of understanding and the knowledge or awareness that “utterances are products of actions, which like all actions, are undertaken for a reason” (1993:809).

Play texts consist of utterances, performatives and assertoric speech and as such require the reader and/or audience to exercise a wide range of their translating abilities in

\(^2\) *Peltophorum africanum*
order to be able to access whatever meaning or affect is intended by the text. The experience with Mosetlha merely serves to highlight how I came to the realisation that I could possibly ‘ab-use’ (Spivak, 2012:3) incommensurability and make it deliberate in order to resist the sort of translatability that requires a diminished self-representation in order to be understood from the perspective of the dominant discourse. As much as the idiomatic expression carries symbolic meaning, when uttered, the meaning itself is transformed or coloured by the intention of the utterer and the circumstances within which it is evoked. This, in turn, offers the expression a multitude of possible interpretations which allow for the obfuscation which deliberate incommensurability requires.

The importance of understanding the different subtextual possibilities of an utterance is one of the reasons I am drawn to translation as a mode of investigation for the creation of a performative dramaturgy. Appiah highlights the importance of engaging with difference and the importance of difference in understanding how much is demanded of us if we wish to engage in relationships of acceptance. Here, he is in agreement with Spivak that “as long as we take the literary as substantive source of good thinking alone, we will fail in the task of the aesthetic education we are proposing: at all costs to enter another’s text” (Spivak, 2012:6). The act of “entering another’s text” and “at all costs” requires a multitude of transformations for the One. It is a practice of recognising that the binary, between the One and the Other, is collapsible while still appreciating the differences, a practice of requiring no expectations of transparency from the Other and inhabiting the discomfort of difference – a surrender to the mystery of relating. The positionality of the translator is as important as the material being translated and the positionality of the target receiver. Translators cannot claim objectivity in translation, particularly in theatre and performance. The nature of theatre and performance is such that it reflects the creator’s
subjective commentary on the human condition and any interpretation that follows from there is influenced and coloured by the subjective perspective of the receiver. Theatre and performance are a series of modes of translation that intertwine, intersect and, perhaps, contrast in multiple ways towards the creation of textured meaning-making and knowledge formation.

Due to this fact, in considering exploring incommensurability it became important to add “deliberate”, as what is generally assumed to be untranslatable possesses many modes by which it can be translated. Appiah talks about the need to engage a thick translation when working with poetic or idiomatic texts. In his essay, *Thick Translation* (1993), he is, essentially, exploring utterances and the multiple meanings and intentions that can exist within a text. A thick translation means that a Sesotho proverb such as “Ngoana a sa lleng o shoela tharing” cannot simply be translated literally into the English word-for-word: “A child who doesn’t cry dies in the cradle”. As much as this translation is intelligible in the English language it does not possess the full scope and poietic space inhabited by the original Sesotho idiom and merely serves to render Sesotho translatable to the English language. In essence, English then consumes Sesotho. Through rendering the literal translation offered above insufficient, Sesotho then performs the right to difference by requiring, of English, a transposition towards the idiom’s intended multiple meanings.

As a theatre-maker I have always gravitated towards stories of black women, and either devised or directed playtexts written primarily by African-American female playwrights, namely Ntozakhe Shange, Katori Hall and Zimbabwean-born, Danai Gurira. The decision behind working on these texts, apart from their artistic prowess and themes, was because I wanted to work with scripted texts and found the South African landscape very dry when it came to accessible, published work by black South African women. Fatima
Dike’s *Sacrifice of Kreli*, the first play to ever be published by a black female playwright in South Africa, is no longer in print and is not easily accessible. The reason for the dearth of written texts by black South African women is that most of the work created in South Africa is devised work and there are no extant texts of the productions. Publishing plays in South Africa has previously been the domain of the white English and Afrikaans language playwrights, with black artists only recently beginning to either self-publish or to rely on smaller, independent publishers like Junkets Publishing and DiArts Konageng for publication.

There are fewer opportunities for writers, and it is quite instructive that in 15 editions, only one black African woman has had a play nominated for a Naledi award. It is not so much for the Naledi judges to go out in search of such writers in future, but rather for the theatre industry to increase this pool of writers; this can be done with relative ease as each subsidised theatre could commission a writer, or contract a woman resident writer for an extended period of time as has been, and is the case with male writers and male writer/directors. (Van Graan, 2018)

Texts by playwrights from other parts of Africa such as Ama Ata Aidoo, Fatima Dike’s later work and Gcina Mhlophe did not elicit the sort of urgency and inspiration in my young director imagination that texts such as *Eclipsed; For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/When the Rainbow Is Enuf* and *The Mountaintop* did, in terms of aesthetic treatment, content and use of language. They had also been interpreted multiple times by various directors and, in the quest to be visible as a director, my need was to make work that had not yet been mounted on the professional stages of the country. As Van Graan has observed of female playwrights, as reflected by his analysis of the Naledi Theatre Awards:

The only black woman to have been nominated in this category over 15 years, and out of a total of 80 nominees, is Motshabi Tyelele, and that was in 2004. Of the 80 nominees, 37 are black (36 were men), 42 white and there was one collaboration between a white and a black writer. There are only 13 woman nominees (16% of the total), 12 of whom are white. Clearly, using Yisa’s question as a starting point, more opportunities need to be provided for black African women directors and playwrights. It is not necessarily that the talent does not exist and needs to be “developed”; it is about having time and support to hone one’s craft and opportunities to present one’s work with the highest possible production.
standards. The writers who have received the most nominations (Lara Foot, Craig Higginson, Aubrey Sekhabi, Mpumulelo Grootboom and I) have all benefitted from an extended period of time working in, or with a theatre. Foot and Sekhabi are the artistic directors of their respective theatres; Higginson was the resident dramaturge at the Market Theatre for a number of years, Grootboom is a resident director at the State Theatre and I enjoyed 3.5 years as Artscape’s Associate Playwright. (Van Graan, 2018)

As frustrating and in need of transformation as the mainstream paradigm is, my interest for this research is not an attempt to engage in a practice in order to modify it, but to use the situation as a springboard for a dramaturgical concept that converses artistically with the paradigm. How does this socio-political reality fuel artistic expression?

Deliberate Incommensurability

I think therefore I aim to make work that calls for multiple angles of analysis and critique and challenges the notions of authenticity, purity and aesthetic value. My theatre-making impulse is drawn largely from this desire to self-represent and deconstruct notions of otherness as they exist in liminal spaces between what are often mistakenly perceived as binary cultural poles. (Kabwe, 2007)

An investigation of incommensurability, whether deliberate or inherent to conflicting paradigms, needs to stem from an investigation of translation: its purpose, modes, techniques and tactics - its processes. Walter Benjamin in The Task of The Translator states that the mode of translation is reliant upon the original containing the element of ‘translatability’. This translatability, he states, is not reliant on whether a translator emerges from all those consuming the original but, rather, from the material lending itself to translation (Benjamin, 1999:71). He goes on to state further that “translation issues from the original-not so much from its life as from its afterlife...the concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely the setting for history, is credited with life” (Benjamin, 1999:72). Thus, the original is very important as it is a catalyst to the translation and that after having lived for a period of time and having created some
form of translatability around its existence, the original still needs to remain itself even, or especially within, the translation. However, Benjamin then goes on to speak about “fidelity and licence” or freedom that are the elements of conflict within translation (Benjamin, 1999:78). How faithful is the translation to the original and how much freedom can be afforded the translation?

A perspective I hold is that everything is translatable and that the modes of translation are the ones that hold the efforts of translation ransom. Ransom to the translator’s background, ethical, political and social leanings. Why, then, the need for a deliberate incommensurability? Deliberate incommensurability is a term I have coined myself. The use of the word deliberate, affords the subject agency over her representation and translatability and caters to the need to “self-represent and deconstruct notions of otherness” (Kabwe, 2007:6). Translation, as a mode, is usually concerned with transparency - an urge towards a universality of understanding that a deliberate incommensurability attempts to obfuscate. This is what Edouard Glissant calls the “right to difference without the need for transparency” (Glissant, 1997:189).

The impulse for deliberate incommensurability comes from the subaltern- the underrepresented black woman theatre-maker - primarily. The subaltern has either had to translate herself, endure bad translations by some Other (or the One) on her behalf or offer contexts to her experiences in the aim of assisting some Other to “enter her text” and experience what is being offered as a translation, representing the full scope of the subaltern’s familiarities and understanding of said familiarities. What happens when the subaltern wilfully resists translation and contextualisation? How does this resistant mode function within the obvious paradox of using translation to betray translation? What modes and/or methods can assist with placing this exercise on stage?
I would like to suggest that a deliberate incommensurability has very little to do with a refusal of translatability but that it is, rather, an embracing of the mysterious within the translational lacunae thus offering an interesting scope for artistic exploration. In its resistance to a translatable context what becomes important is the dwelling within the discomfort of the unknown, the move towards re-membering even while one is encountering a dismantling, a refusal of absolutes. This is the paradigm of the ‘double-bind’ which Gayatri C. Spivak speaks of, that cannot be played to some resolution, and this is what I investigated in the studio (Spivak, 2012). Deliberate incommensurability is a refusal to be ‘created afresh’ by the dominant hegemony and an agreement “not merely to the right of difference but, carrying this further, [an agreement] also to the right to opacity that is not an enclosure within an impenetrable autarchy but subsistence within an irreducible singularity” (Glissant, 1997:190). It is a self-representation that denies an othered contextualisation and embraces liminality. It is a self-representation that does not fear relational voids in understanding the porosity of identity and the reception of said identity. An “irreducible singularity” informed by multiple sources and stimuli striving for freedom through difference.

Vasso Kindi explains how Thomas Kuhn and Paul Feyerabend, separately yet simultaneously, coined the term and concept of incommensurability with a focus on scientific texts (1999: 1). Before the introduction of said term, it was believed, that the translation of scientific texts was easier than the translation of literary texts. The reason for this was the belief that scientific concepts were fixed denotations not dependent on changing contexts whereas literary language, with its utterings, metaphors and contexts proved to be so unpredictable as to open itself to the notion of untranslatability. According to Kindi, Kuhn argued that paradigms with differing formulaic results were
incommensurable to each other and thus could not be compared to each other without fallibility. In essence, “what made things more difficult was that incommensurability implied different ontologies, different description of problems, different evaluative criteria” (p.6).

Of course, Kuhn’s theory was not popular with scientists due to its proclamation that empirical evidence is also reliant on variants determined by context and that, perhaps, there is no absolute truth. For Kuhn, in fact, there exists merely a reality of paradigms existing at parallels to each other, never to be able to communicate with each other because the full scope of their formulation is dependent upon differing regimes of data collection. However, according to Kindi, Kuhn was certain that incommensurability has no resolution and to use the term untranslatability affords paradigms their constituting processes and demonstrates that “it is quite possible that no translation is found for particular linguistic terms no matter how hard we try and how meandering the moves” (p.11).

Lacunae, here, seem to exist as expressions of freedom and whatever is expressed reserves the right to become its own expression devoid of translation. Generally, in situations such as these, when a thick translation also proves itself irrelevant to the task at hand, calques are borrowed from the source language in order to create the possibility of understanding. A calque, is a loaned expression or word for word transposition from one language to another. In Sesotho, the words for cup are “lebekere” and “kopi” which are calques borrowed from Afrikaans words “beker” and “koppie”. It is not an exact translation and serves to demonstrate the inability of a concept to be translated into a target language. This poses an interesting challenge for gestural work, olfactory performance and/or invocations through images, that may serve one purpose for the maker of a work yet be interpreted or translated differently by the observer or audience member.
Readers and writers both struggle to interpret and perform within a common language shareable imaginative worlds. And although within that struggle the positioning of the reader has justifiable claim, the author's presence—her or his intention, blindness or sight—is part of the imaginative activity. (Morrison, 1993: xii)

My interest is in a deliberate incommensurability and its implications for performance and the social representation of the black woman. How can this social representation bear on a performative representation working towards visibility and audibility? If the intention is to resist the notion of a commonality between the one creating and performing and the viewer, what sort of offering can be borne out of such an experiment? Could the choice for deliberate incommensurability further obscure the black woman and, if so, what is to be gained in the attempt to shine a spotlight on her experiences and locate the black woman as an agent towards the fashioning of her own representation?

Homi Bhabha suggests that “what is important in the engagement with stereotypical colonial discourse is to observe and understand how the processes of subjectification function, rather than on the identification of positive or negative images” (Newton, 1997: 294; italics in original). In a globalised world the assumption is that of a standardised existence and experience. Standards are obviously set by the dominant group which, in our current reality are those who control data and capital; those in charge of the mainstream. The project here is to unify the world through a conformity and assimilation to commodified representations and ideologies of unification. These standards have also borne an expectation of an authentic African art/culture as framed in a particularly essentialised form that can draw capital and what is considered a vast audience. In South Africa this becomes framed according to that which is both tourist-friendly and retaining a certain proximity to both whiteness and a homogenous African experience attempting to reclaim the precolonial subject and experience. What is important to note is that the theatre-maker of 2018 South
Africa is influenced by many cultural artforms and as such a lot of her work is influenced by a hybridity that is not uniform across the discipline. The notion of the authentic African theatre experience is as repressive as it is a fallacy.

Black female artists are not a homogenous single-cell entity that vibrates and resonates within a monotonous frequency. This is very clear when observing the works of artists such as Mwenya Kabwe, Nora Chipaumire, Meshell Ndegeocello, Nelisiwe Xaba and Mamela Nyamza. Although the common thread seems to be the desire for a continuously transforming self-representation, the modes, forms and aesthetics engaged differ as much as they intertwine, lending weight to Glissant’s assertion that “opacities can coexist and converge, weaving fabrics”. Glissant goes on to suggest that to “understand these truly one must focus on the texture of the weave and not on the nature of its components” (Glissant, 1997:190). It is my attempt with this dissertation to detail the textures explored and revealed through the search for a performance of deliberate incommensurability while searching for the missing black woman. The aforementioned artists use poetry, music, physicality to explore their position in the world. They engage with personal and communal histories and experiment with creativity in a way that often highlights the hybridity of their aesthetic and thematic choices. They create work that challenges any cultural hegemony and repressive moeurs designed to standardise their existence within the commodified global experience.

Bhabha’s suggestion of assessing the functionality of stereotypical processes of representation without dwelling on the quality and lens of the represented images is, therefore, intriguing and a mode that requires that I, as researcher, also change my habits in the way I relate to this discourse. It proposes a shift in perspective that will, hopefully, detail and produce creative possibilities for my practice. And, because the possibility for such an
encounter seems incommensurable to myself, the lens of deliberate incommensurability, approached through an autoethnographic praxis (explored in the next section) becomes integral to the research. What are the implications of such a venture? How does this focus on deliberate incommensurability translate to an audience? Who is the audience the work is being created for? Is there an audience for such work?

Interestingly, it is not merely through being a black woman that I am supposed to be obscured, it is also through the practice of dramaturgy. The traditional notion of the dramaturge is that of an outsider who assists the director with a concept and is, seemingly, muted within the process of creating a play. However, in my opinion, dramaturgy is the all-straddler of the performance world with many varied definitions, some very prescriptive and restrictive, such as the assertion that there exists a Dramaturg's Protocol which the dramaturge must honour before beginning rehearsals and which is based on a five-step systematic guideline of the materials, resources and research required of said dramaturge (Cardullo, 2005:14). Along with the many observations she makes about the inclusivity of the discipline of dramaturgy, point two on Marianne Van Kerkhoven’s list reads as such:

In artistic practice there are no fixed laws of behaviour, or task that can be wholly defined in advance, not even for the dramaturge. Every production forms its own method of work. It is precisely through the quality of the method used that the work of important artists gains its clarity, by their intuitively knowing – at every stage in the process – what the next step is. One of the abilities a dramaturge must develop is the flexibility to handle the methods used by artists while at the same time shaping his/her own way of working. (Van Kerkhoven, 1994: n.p.)

Although, as Van Kerkhoven states, “every production forms its own method,” the dramaturge’s protocol laid out by Cardullo (even though it may seem restrictive at times) might be used to create a foundation upon which a creative process can be built. In the course of my studies I have had two occasions to perform the role of a dramaturge for
productions. These experiences differed immensely in construction and in the roles I was expected to carry out as dramaturge. The first instance was *Iyazika*, in 2017, directed by Mandla Mbothwe and choreographed by Owen Manamela-Mogane. This production was a student production for the third- and fourth-year bilingual (isiXhosa and English) students of the University of Cape Town’s Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies (CTDPS). *Iyazika*, which was a reprise and adaptation of Mbothwe’s professional production,*Ukutshona ka Mendi: Did We Dance,* required active participation as dramaturge because the first weeks of rehearsal the director was not available. As I had been part of the professional company that had devised the original production, the director knew that the initial stages of the protocol had already been covered: research on the events leading to the sinking of the SS Mendi in 1927 had already been done; I understood what his conceptual and artistic wishes for the piece would be; I was in possession of significant research material that would assist the scripting process, in his absence, as I had also written a paper on the process of devising the piece. The first weeks of the rehearsal were a collaborative exercise of developing material for the piece with the choreographer. For *Iyazika* I was required to assist in the text development of the piece, to teach and to also perform the duties of liaison between the students and the choreographer and director. Later in the process I was to be their creative sparring partner.

The second instance was working on Koleka Putuma and Nikki Van Callandt’s *Here To There*, in 2018. This process required a different role from me as dramaturge as the company is a company of professional performers and not students. Here I was required to be the outside critic, who is mediator between the disciplines of dance and poetry, in order to assist the creators to clarify their intentions and concept and to ensure that, within their abstraction of their treatment of the topic of the contentious histories between South Africa
and the Netherlands, their commentary remained clear. In this process my research and/or commentary served as discussion points in rehearsals and the company was free to do with the information as they chose. In an instance such as this, the dramaturge is required to then pay attention to the choreographer and director’s blind-spots in the creation process, to ask as many questions as possible towards the realisation of a concept in performance, while understanding the limitations of her engagement. This piece was also a site-specific piece, which we later re-termed site-responsive. Each chapter of the piece, of which there were four, was performed in its own location and the production itself performed at four different institutions in two countries. Each iteration required an active and creative response to the possible challenges for the chapters and decisions around which sites in the venues best suited the individual chapters, conceptually and politically. I mention these two processes to demonstrate that dramaturgy requires multiple roles of the dramaturge.

Dramaturgy is at once the midwife, nurse, strict parent and removed aunt still attempting to foster a close relationship with her estranged family but doing so from the shadows, unseen and/or unmentioned.

Dramaturgy is a vital idea. Its general definition encompasses almost the whole of theatrical activity, but in the context of what dramaturgs do, dramaturgy is a comprehensive exploration of the context in which the play resides...

There are different sorts of dramaturgs, with varying responsibilities, though few dramaturgs are of a pure type; most overlap categories. (McCabe. 2005: 64)

In this dissertation I attempt an exploration of how translation can be a dramaturgical tool towards the development of a piece of theatre and facilitation of a process of creating said piece of theatre or multiple interventions. I detail some of the thoughts around engaging with theorists whose work on post-colonial realities resonate strongly with my views of the world in an effort to carve or fashion a new process of theatre-making and an aesthetic
direction for myself. With the above assertions of the dramaturge wearing multiple hats it seems that the argument that the dramaturge cannot be the source is unfounded. This argument was raised by one of my colleagues and I found it problematic, particularly because of the processes I have been involved in to generate productions. Thus, if the dramaturge is truly only a fly-in-the-wall type entity then surely by placing her in a piece as performer, dramaturge and director, is in itself, deliberate incommensurability? It would be an attempt at blurring the lines in order to collapse the borders of assumed hierarchy in the creation process towards making a production.

A deliberate incommensurability imagines that the existing contact zones between cultures and narratives are, at times, somewhat impenetrable and that there is very little intersection between ideas and forms. That experiences exist in constant friction of subjective difference to each other and that the discomfort of this friction needs to be maintained, deliberately so. And so, I chose this terminology as a deliberate mis-take in order to examine how a desire to deliberately remain incommensurable would impact a rehearsal process and what sort of product would result in such a quest. What I did not bargain upon was being incommensurable to myself. Without deliberateness. The initial stages of my exploration were really very challenging, difficult, in fact. I came into the studio fully armed with exercises that had previously borne fruit when I had been working as a director with performers who were not myself. I had wanted to start from a place where there is no language. Where meaning creates itself. I hadn’t yet discovered what a deliberate incommensurability would speak like and had thought to offer myself a space without verbal language within which I would explore and hopefully reveal some really interesting and challenging modes of representation of the black woman. As Kabwe states,
“the daily task of the Afropolitan is to forge a sense of self from disparate sources and either overcome, mask or ‘play with’ the self-consciousness of being in-between” (Kabwe, 2007:6).

The tools available to both the dramaturge and the director seemed inaccessible and obscured. For any process to begin and flourish, the modes of engagement with a rehearsal process needed to change and accommodate this incommensurability deliberately. The disparate sources of which Kabwe speaks are internal and external. What could my own personal history reveal about deliberate incommensurability? How do I represent as a subject that is enabler and surrogate for another’s existence? How do I recognise and define experiences through an ab-use of that which is my primary discipline?

Autoethnography

We are cinnamon honeysuckle
Slid out beyond sleep.
We taste the night with turmeric wishes.
We inhale promises of Goddesses unknown
As we gaze to the Sky awaiting Modjadji’s presence.
We are volcano soil dark, morula fruit glow, caramel sweet and kgalagadi\(^3\) sand textured.
We are ‘Brown Silk’\(^4\)
Singular in our multiplicity and multiple in our singularity
We are the base that refuses to uphold the façade
We are the ones from communities that make art professional
We are the ones whose stories are only heard when spoken through Anglo-Boer languages, the protagonists of those stories, lending Anglo-Boer hatred machinery to perform its liberalism,
No longer.
We are not anonymous.

We will not have our names continuously bastardised so you can plead ignorance midway through a speech of your superior intellect while gesturing at us as though we are the ones who misunderstood the inflections in our carefully chosen and deliberately coded representations of our purposes.
We are crafters of the finest art.
Downtrodden we are not.
We are daughters of the dust\(^5\)

Who stand in the Kgalagadi urging the sandstorm to cover the filthy ruins left by your need to conquer
We are Angry
We are Black

\(^3\) Setswana name for the Kalahari Desert
\(^4\) ‘Brown Silk’ is a term by Valerie Maynard, an African American visual artist of the Black Arts Movement (BAM). It refers to the skin of people of colour with the inclusivity and measurements of the American racial classifications for blackness. She argues that the brown skin is as delicate, carefully woven and precious as silk. Maynard shared this with me during an introductory conversation in July 2016, in Baltimore, USA.
\(^5\) Reference to Julie Dash’s film of the same name first released in 1991.
We are Women
We are not fooled by your fear
We are “Die Swart Gevaar”
We are coming for what is ours, ‘for health’

We cannot begin to explain your wounding when we are busy
Tending the scars of your hatred.
We are the children of revolutionaries whose fire Time doused
Yet Spirit ignites.

We audaciously will off our faces the mask of Anastasia, bit still trapped between our teeth. We spit the metal out from our lips and utter screams that disturb the wind and send birds afrolick through the space delivering revolution to our doors; alleyways and stages.

Channelling the Goddess Ancestors towards a restitution of self. Our expression is formless in its exactitude and defined in its fluidity.

We are poets and storytellers called to action from the pit of nothingness towards a visibility and audibility undeniable.

We are cinnamon honeysuckle
Slid out beyond sleep
We taste the night with turmeric wishes
We inhale promises of Goddesses unknown
As we gaze to the Sky awaiting Modjadji’s presence.

We are coming for what we want ‘for health’.

The above epigraph is a manifesto I penned in order to create a possible creative thrust to, once more, be able to envision a future for myself within the discipline and industry of theatre in South Africa. When one glances at my CV and assesses the trajectory of my theatrical career, it is very obvious that I have had a successful path and have been able to engage in a lot of work that has been successfully attended. I have received nominations for performances and directorial work in the country’s awards frameworks and continue to make work regardless of the venue. This places me in a very advantageous and seemingly privileged position, when one gazes from the outside. I have also been an Artistic Manager

6 The Black Fear: A term used during the apartheid era to promote and validate fear of Black people by white South Africans
7 “a black feminist or feminist of color usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous and wilful behavior... a woman who loves other women sexually and or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility...and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health... (Walker, 1983: xi-xii). Walker seems to suggest the need for a courageous and brazen attitude of self-representation and inclusion, for the black feminist, only if she feels the endeavour of inclusion healthy for her continued survival. An inclusion on her own terms.
of a municipal owned theatre, the Soweto Theatre, and was able, through that role, to produce new South African work and garner award nominations and wins for the institution in my short time as administrator for the theatre. A few of the productions and new writings that were produced in the space have been published. I have sat on the Artistic Committee of the National Arts Festival and even curated the main program for the festival in 2017.

However, CVs very rarely detail the processes involved in attaining the credits that populate them. As much as I seem to be visible within the discipline I am also missing. As much as I seem to be audible within the field I am also silenced. This is both a feeling I have and an interpretation of how difficult it has been to have my work produced in and by mainstream spaces, and the difficulty of convincing arts reporters to review my work. At times the disappearing and silencing is an active choice on my side in order to replenish for the next race. I began directing theatre in 2000, always thrusting myself within the ‘professional’ mould as I was aware of and resistant to the historic classifications that would seek to relegate my work to ‘community theatre’ in order to disregard its presence in the sector. In the 18 years I have been engaging with this discipline I have only had three productions produced by state-funded theatres, the rest of the work has largely been self-produced or co-produced with independent producers. At the start of my research I was wondering what the future held for me as a theatre-maker and I was both frustrated and angered by what I viewed as a regression to oppressive modes of representation and the silencing of many new dynamic voices in South African theatre. And one of the first steps was penning *Cinnamon Honeysuckle*.

It is often stated that a manifesto requires critical mass for it to be considered a proper manifesto. That it requires cosignatories and co-authorship, a sense of a communal dissemination and distribution in order to be regarded as an actionable manifesto.
Its morphology includes such features as numbered theses; denunciations of the past; an aggressive attitude towards the audience; a collective authorship; exaggerated, shrill declarations; varied, often bold, letters; and a mass distribution in newspapers, on billboards and flyers. (Puchner, 2002: 451)

However, I wanted to create an affirmation for myself as I felt that I was drowning within what was fast becoming depression at having dedicated my life to what I now viewed as a very oppressive and abusive relationship that I would not leave - my relationship with theatre. Martin Puchner speaks of the impatience of the manifesto and how it tends to be penned in punchy and short statements because what is important in it is not the text but the call to action. He also speaks of how theatre and the manifesto are both concerned with visibility - the manifesto is concerned with manifesting ideas into being and, theatre with providing a location for seeing (Puchner, 2002: 451). *Cinnamon Honeysuckle*, a poetic manifesto, is as personal as it is a communal call towards a reclamation of space, for healing. An attempt at representing what Mwenya Kabwe calls the ‘Afroliminal’, which she describes as:

...the space between breaths, the space in the blink, the space between making a mistake and realizing that it’s a mistake, the space between the jump and the landing; between the impulse to sneeze and the sneeze itself. The space between what you see and what you get. The space between shall I stay or shall I go. It’s that space that vibrates when all else is still. (Kabwe, 2007: 21)

This space generously embraces the seemingly unknown and the discomfort that accompanies the unknown, creating a platform from which one can action the manifesto.

I have recently come across a manifesto by Nora Chipaumire which carries many of the features Puchner ascribes to the genre: “denunciations of the past; aggressive attitudes towards the audience ... shrill declarations” (Puchner, 2002: 451). Chipaumire’s *Manifesto|2018:*

*Think*
Although these two manifestos, hers and mine, use differing styles in their proclamations, the underlying need for reparations and engagement through self-representation in both, the common call towards a presence undeniable, cannot be overlooked. Both signal an impatience and dissatisfaction with the present and seek an immediate performative future (Puchner, 2002).
The above narrative is merely a demonstration of how autoethnography can assist in developing a methodology towards discovering the missing black woman through deliberate incommensurability. Autoethnography positions the researcher as the object of study and uses personal narratives and experiences in research for data collection and reflection. Keith Barry and Chris J. Patti in their 2015 paper 'Lost in Narration: applying Autoethnography' quote A.W. Frank:

"Storytelling is for an other just as much as it is for oneself. In the reciprocity that is storytelling, the teller offers herself as guide to the other's self-formation. The other's receipt of that guidance not only recognises but values the teller. The moral genius of storytelling is that each, teller and listener, enters the space of the story for the other. (Frank, 1995: 17-18, original emphasis quoted in Barry & Patti, 2015:263)"

As stated earlier, Morrison also talks of the struggle to communicate between the reader and the author. The struggle for the reader, based on their positioning, to enter the imaginative world of the author, based on the author’s positioning. And so, the process of sharing art becomes a relay activity between the two, audience and performer. The performer, in attempting to reach the audience, paints pictures located within the intentions of the story and is often confronted with an audience wanting to understand her intentions, or battling to access the world and creating imagery from their perspective to fill in the lacunae created by the writer’s imagination.

My use of poetry in the manifesto denies an immediate transparency of understanding and/or engagement and forces the audience to decipher for themselves what the imagery and metaphors could possibly mean as these are also supported by the literal shrill declarations of which Puchner speaks. It is an embracing of the struggle. *Cinnamon Honeysuckle* became the first seed planted towards this research and I will speak more of it when I detail the dramaturgical process in the studio, later on in the dissertation.
The manifesto was penned, as stated earlier, out of a desire to articulate frustrations I felt regarding the representation of the black woman on South African mainstream stages. It was a call to affirm the urgency for action in order to render the black woman visible and audible in a creative space that seems to wilfully obscure her voice. *Cinnamon Honeysuckle* became a manifesto of reference for the aesthetics, poetics and symbolism explored in the creation of *O Kae?* The manifesto adding up to theatre, so to speak.

These manifestos speak out for a return, and their writers are struck by a sense of historical belatedness that makes these manifestos intensely self-aware, critical of the form they are using, and thus incapable of proceeding without scruples or doubts in the classical manifesto manner. The manifesto, a form that shuns reflection and privileges action, is thus turned back on itself; a genre of action becomes a genre of reflection. (Puchner, 2002: 453)

I chose autoethnography as a methodology for a number of reasons. The first being that there is very limited presence of a perspective like mine represented in the world. A black South African, Motswana, who grew up in Lesotho and is a theatre-maker, this woman is still under-represented in the academic sphere and as such it was important that I, “[write myself] into [my] own work as [a] major character to...[challenge] accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher’s voice is not included in the presentation of findings” (Holt, 2003:2 quoted in Denshire, 2014:832). This methodology allows me to speak back to the socio-political positioning of the missing black woman from a personal narrative that could possibly translate to the communal.

Secondly, deliberate incommensurability deems that I begin with the self in order to deny contextualisation. Autoethnography allows for a self-reflexive process within which I can dialogue and relate both with the self and the world within which I am attempting to locate and render the black woman visible and audible. How did I consent to being disappeared and how does this disappearance perform? Earlier in the dissertation I spoke of
how the record of the Naledi Theatre Awards showed a lack of representation of the black female director in Johannesburg. The article by Van Graan created further dialogue on social media with the artistic director of a prominent theatre in Cape Town stating that only one black female director has been commissioned by the Baxter since 2003 (Van Graan, 2018). It is then not surprising that the Cape Town theatre awards have also not gazed towards black female theatre-makers/directors for their nomination slates as the theatre houses have performed our invisibility and silence. Below is an example of how autoethnography was used by a company of performers to address this oversight.

After the Cape Town theatre awards - the Fleur du Cap Awards - announced their nominations for 2016, three prominent artists: Mamela Nyamza, Chuma Sopotela and Buhlebezwe Siwani, with the inclusion of a newcomer Zikhona Jacobs, staged a protest on the evening of the awards, at Artscape Theatre Centre. Their protest was about the lack of representation of black theatre-makers in the slate of nominees. Dressed in underwear that had the old South African flag on it, legs in fishnet stockings and bras, their protest was about the commodification of the black female body in the telling of stories on the mainstream stages of Cape Town. It was also a protest about how these bodies and their narratives were seen to be worthwhile when directed by a white person, yet, they were still ‘incapable’ of expression on their own, of being on the level of merit that warrants peer recognition. On the night, as they walked up the red carpet with tins as their heels, a young white woman working at the awards approached them and asked if they were invited. One of the artists being asked this question, starred in a production that had garnered the director an award nomination which the director won at the end of the night. This incident demonstrates the level of self-imposed ignorance rampant within the decision-making circles of theatre in South Africa with respect to the presence of the black female voice.
Although it may be argued that the young woman on the red carpet is not required to know everyone in the industry, the theatre and performance industry in Cape Town is very small and even smaller for black women. Three of the performers staging this protest are the few prominent black faces on the Cape Town stages and perform and/or exhibit their work, mostly, overseas. This protest’s third iteration\(^8\) was performed at the Baxter Theatre as a performance piece entitled *Rock To The Core*, a non-linear exploration of the battle for scant resources symbolised by the one trophy that is put upon a pedestal at the end of the performance.

*Rock To The Core’s* pre-set music is Nina Simone’s *Young Gifted and Black* with a large frame dominating the stage: it is both picture frame and dressing room mirror. It is also the metaphoric gate that has locked the women outside, and entrance into the frame is extensively negotiated among the cast members. For this iteration, Nyamza stepped out during the rehearsal process to direct and two additional performers, Indalo Stofile and Vatiswa Nodlayiya, were included for the showcase. Simone is on an incessant loop as the audience walks in and by the time the show eventually begins there is no doubt regarding the focus of the piece. The affirmation in Simone’s song is “young gifted and black/oh, what a lovely precious dream/to be young gifted and black/open your heart to what I mean” (Simone, 1970). The song is an affirmation that becomes ironic as the production continues because the performers internalise their own exclusion to the detriment of the community they had formed with each other.

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\(^8\) The first iteration of *Rock To the Core* was this walk on the red carpet at the Fleur Du Cap Theatre Awards ceremony of 19\(^{th}\) March 2017. The second iteration was a fundraiser-rehearsal-in-process showcase at Hiddingh Hall on the University of Cape Town’s Hiddingh Campus. The night was a showcase for all those who had contributed financially towards the furtherance of their impending run at the Baxter Theatre, in October 2017.
The performers shuffle into the auditorium and onto the stage dressed for an important event and shoulders covered with sheepskins. The sheepskins serve the dual function of anointing them to the elite (as they could easily be interpreted as fur coats) and of suggesting the impending revelation of the wolves that are about to attack each other for the benefit of recognition within the world that currently excludes them. Throughout the performance the women, through their incessant competition with each other to gain the position of being the trophy, the one that is seen and acknowledged -the token - end up broken down, undressed except for their underwear with aprons and oven mittens used to web their feet together, crawling along the floor to build the pedestal on which the trophy will be mounted. Many people walked out of the show including avid followers of Nyamza, Sopotela and Siwani. People felt that, artistically, it fell short of defending the protest for inclusion onto the mainstream spaces. But in my opinion, it was a strong live art offering and a protest that sought to break the conventions of the very same discipline within which the artists worked, and it spoke back to the following quote from Nora Chipaumire (2018):

I use my work to question how status and power are experienced and presented with the body. [...] For me and others born without property, name, or class, the human body poses a possible salvation.

The performance resonated a lot with me as I was already engaging questions around my research and beginning to see that there is a collective consciousness around representation of black women on our stages. That artists were being vocal and protesting creatively was even more encouraging and a clear indication that the notion of the missing black woman is not a myth. However, what also became apparent to me after watching the performance was that I wanted my protest to sit in that “space between breaths” (Kabwe, 2007), to be an afrodizzy cinnamon honeysuckle, something between fantasy and nightmare. A celebration
of an obscured presence. I wanted a way out of my own darkness in an attempt to imagine an optimistic future.

The final reason for choosing this methodology is that I was approaching this research from a position of unknowing and needed an entry point that would allow for the slow and deliberate revelation of how a dramaturge, as source, could interact with deliberate incommensurability in the search for the missing black woman. It appeared to me that autoethnography would allow for a personal historic overview regarding influences and stimuli, which would be beneficial towards the interrogation. I did not want to begin with a narrative, assuming that everything I wanted to say had already been said and what I was seeking was as obscured to me as I wanted to obscure it from the audience, a process of “positioning the researcher as an object of inquiry who depicts a site of interest in terms of personal awareness and experience” and/or “[an orchestration of] fragments of awareness-apprehended/projected and recalled/constructed-into narratives and alternative text forms which represent events and other social actors as they are evoked from a changeable and contestable self” (Crawford, 1996:167).

Having decided to begin the rehearsal process without a clearly defined narrative, I needed stimuli in order to begin my interrogation. The next section details the four provocations that were intended to assist in the rehearsal process in the initial stages.

Dramaturgy

In my attempt to explore the textures of self-representation through the search for a performance of deliberate incommensurability, I needed to answer the following questions: How can the socio-political restrictions experienced by the black female inform a performative representation working towards visibility and audibility? If the intention is to
resist contextualisation, what sort of offering can be borne out of such an experiment? And, could deliberate incommensurability further obscure the black woman? The implications of the final question made me very uncomfortable because it meant that I could possibly be perpetuating the gaze and conditions that commodify and, then, cannibalise the black woman, and for a long time in the rehearsal process this possibility haunted the work and retarded my progress and productivity.

To address the questions above I focussed on concepts taken from both Gayatri Spivak and Toni Morrison - an attempt at the performativity of ‘ab-use’ by the Africanist trope. Ab-use, is a neograph coined by Spivak in her introduction to An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalisation (2012). The term suggests a usage of the “European Enlightenment from below”, to look at it without excuse or accusation but as something equally instrumental to the reimagining of a new epistemology, a new way of looking at the world within the paradox and a way of claiming agency and a point of origin that defies history (Spivak, 2012). This speaks to an understanding that cultural dominance affects both the dominated and the dominator. It would suggest an appropriation of the One’s idioms for the benefit of the historic Other. “Within the context of self-representation, this process of writing [would become] an exercise in re-centering a dislocated African subject position through a process of re-scribing the colonial text” (Kabwe, 2007: 22). The Other, has either had to translate herself, endure translations done on her behalf about her or offer contexts in order to assist in translating herself to the dominant One.

This process of representation also begins with naming. I have three names: a Setswana one, a ‘catholic’ one (inspired by the religion within which I was raised), and a ‘Muslim’ one (as I was born after my father converted to Islam). This consideration of the weight that naming holds in the world - “names are not only forms of producing knowledge
about the world but they are relational and...symbolic forms defining the iniquitous and volatile relations between people” (Makhubu, 2018: 23) - affirmed the decision to name the practical research offering O Kae? “O kae?” - a greeting in Sesotho and Setswana-not only asks about the health of the one being encountered but also about the location of the one being encountered. It is gender non-specific and not specific to the one encountered as it can also be a question about someone who is not present within the relation/encounter. The choice to use this pleasantry, apart from the obvious connection to the missing black woman, was also that it provided for a variety of subject positions and a possibility for parallel realities to exist at the same time in varied mediums.

This investigation originated from the following terms and ideas drawn, primarily, from Spivak and Morrison, with the overarching trope being Morrison’s assertion of the Africanist character as “surrogate and enabler” (1993: 53) navigating the world of Spivak’s double-bind:

**Catachresis**, being the seeming misuse of a word or the misappropriation of an idiom, offers the opportunity to rescript existing metaphors and allows for obfuscation. In *Cinnamon Honeysuckle* the phrase “we are afrodizy quivering at the sight of trees” was inspired by the quiver tree, a succulent native to arid Southern African regions and located, in South Africa, in the Northern Cape which is my ancestral home. It also alludes to the danger this beautiful, resilient afro poses as it is used to create arrows for the San. This play with “catachrestic concept-metaphors for which there is no literal referent” (Spivak, 2012: 4) offers a multitude of possibilities for a deliberately incommensurable representation of the missing black woman. It allows for a concentration on the creation of either rhetorical effect - affective devices to elicit responses from audience - exaggeration of comparisons between ideas or objects, or the creation of references that did not exist before the
formulation of the idiom. It allows for the use of mixed metaphors and *mise-en-abyme*, “an indefinite series of [...] reflections” (Spivak, 2012: 4). The attempt was to link this investigation with Morrison’s fourth “topic of critique” which is an investigation of how the narrative of the “Africanist character...[is] a means of meditation—both safe and risky—on one’s own humanity” (Morrison, 1993:53).

Using the term “missing black woman” is itself an intended mistake/mis-take. I use it to highlight the phenomenon of exclusion that is the fabric of the theatre industry in the country, particularly that of state-funded institutions and those institutions that receive recognition for outstanding work. The reality is that black women are not missing in the theatre discipline, it is merely that they are excluded from mainstream spaces and as such function perpetually on the periphery and are classified as requiring development at all times. What then becomes important for the investigation is to explore how the black woman is missing.

For this interrogation I reverted to mythology, particularly the two heroines that I knew would inspire a lot of aesthetic and content production from me. I have always been fascinated with both Amma - the Dogon creation goddess, and Osun - the Yoruba orisha who is considered to be the:

[...] goddess of love, pleasure, beauty, and diplomacy and of the Oshun River. Oshun was considered to be generous and benign. She was one of the wives of Shango, the god of thunder and lightning. (Lynch, 2010:103)

The unification of various qualities of these two seemingly disparate goddesses would allow for them to be surrogates for my exploration of the obscurity of my presence. They would form a platform upon which I could draw out and survive the investigation. As goddesses they hold the position of supernatural strength and magical powers that has allowed for
their existence over millennia. The woman formed from this *metissage* can control nature, speak and appear without restrictions.

**Productive Undoing,** “…is a difficult task. It must look carefully at the faultlines of the doing” (Spivak, 2012:1). This is a reassessment of the representation of the Black woman in conjunction with Morrison’s third topic of engaging in studies that investigate how black characters are used to enhance the white characters and their situations (Morrison, 1993:52). Looking at the textures that are woven together to create the tapestry that produces representation and tropes, requires not only an external dismantling but an internal one as well. This process is like a chiasmus of emotional and psychic relays between the external and the internal. A constant reassessment of self in relation to the world and the world in relation to the self.

As a writer reading, I came to recognise the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer... the fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the writerly conscious. It is an extraordinary revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity of shame, of magnanimity. It requires hard work not to see this. (Morrison, 1993:17)

Although this statement from Morrison relates to reading writings by white males, the undoing for me was the realisation that the obstacles towards visibility and audibility I was encountering, were embedded within my own experience as much as they were within the experiences of a hypothetical missing black woman surrogate. I found myself moving between wanting to protect myself from truths and wanting to only showcase the strong, defiant rock that is supposed to be the domain of black women across the globe. And this need created blockages that I will address in detail in the next section.
Shifting desires. Here, I linked this exploration with Morrison’s second topic which looks at investigating the idiom, language and other modes to Other the Africanist in speech and text (Morrison, 1993:52). How does the hybrid appropriated character of Amma-Osun navigate a world that has forgotten her existence? A world that has placed her on the periphery as an entity of occult worship? Does this mean that she has lost all her mythical powers or merely that she continues to function on the periphery, shedding light only to those that know of her, creating and recreating herself anew to maintain her place within the cosmic space that she fashioned. What happens when she is cast down to earth and is no longer located within the mythology that gives her strength? Is she still as strong as she is when she exists in the cosmos or within the frame of the orishas?

The ideas listed above were used to frame the world of the piece in that, through considering the concept for the performance, they aided in providing texture and nuance to the otherwise simple offering that was O Kae? The performance installation was an offering of questions around memory, the private and the public, and the future for the missing black woman in mainstream South African theatre. Removing the offering from the typical theatre space and placing it in an art gallery and a classroom was a result of the interrogations inspired by the ideas above.

Nuance is the subtlety of meaning, a complex of feeling, or a delicacy of perception for which the mind still has no words or mental categories. In the presence of nuance, the creator suffers what may be called, in physics, an acute non-linear reaction: a connection similar to the “butterfly effect” when we move the microphone near a speaker and a critical jump in the system occurs, submerging it into chaos - into an order suddenly complex and iterative. (Sprengelburd, 2007: 373)

In the creation of nuance for O Kae? Sprengelburd’s statement on non-linear correlations became important. The treatment of it resulted in fire on a wall releasing breath in the performer, which then creates water and the stars which then elicit movement from the
performer, this movement then gives rise to the cosmos which releases the voice of the performer and so on. A sequence of seemingly unrelated occurrences providing reactions that bounce around the room or performance space.

Before addressing the ideas above, I would like to use the notorious case of Saartjie Baartman and Nelisiwe Xaba’s exploration of the narrative, in performance, as a way to introduce another black female artist working within the realm of deliberate incommensurability and missing on South African stages. In the performances I will detail, she uses her body as surrogate for a body that was surrogate for the colonial project and so Xaba’s body then becomes an exoticised hybrid incubator of desire.

In Nelisiwe Xaba’s performance of They Look At Me and That’s All They Think (2006) we witness a young carefree Baartman walking and swaying with a ladder and a large roll of bubble wrap balanced on her head. Xaba is dressed in all white and the skirt resembles the whalebone skirts of the era. The skirt sways and creates a silhouette representing Baartman’s physique. Later in the piece the skirt turns into the ocean that carried Baartman away as Xaba simulates the journey that took Baartman to France where the skirt and ladder transform into a tent and cage representing the human zoos that imprisoned Baartman and denied her freedom. In this moment she is a shadow behind the tent, grotesque images and gestures used to represent the gaze of the time and Baartman’s seemingly unusual beauty.

The score of the piece consists of multiple styles of music with the African and jazz music playing an affirming role for the character while the European classical sounds usher in violence, dispossession and oppression. Xaba’s work is creative protest that is as humorous as it is angry, peppered with moments of cheekiness and a reclamation of the personal power of the one who was oppressed. Her androgynous appearance offers her
scope to explore the tensions between heels and legs sculpted from years of dance training. In addition, her collaboration with fashion designers offers very structured and well-designed silhouettes that also struggle, in performance, with the performer’s choreography, for their image integrity. The artist and her creations are in constant communication and conflict with each other, even before the audience enters the space. In an interview in 2011 she stated that: “I have accepted that I am seen as the [queen] of exoticism and the exotic. [My body] is political. But what I’m interested in is the gaze and its angle. The angle that you view or gaze from is the point that it becomes political” (Xaba, 2015).

Xaba has always been working within deliberate incommensurability. Her work, since *Fragments of an Orgy*[^9], has been about appropriating recognised images, symbols and representations of the Black woman dancer, and subverting them to create a self-representation that uses her androgynous appearance, deconstructed ballet and expectations of audiences of a dancer, to refuse to dance obviously choreographed sequences because all movement is dance. In *The Last Attitude* (2015), a dance piece in collaboration with Mamela Nyamza, both dancers/choreographers take a hard look at ballet and its restrictions on the black female ballet dancers by assuming the roles of male dancers. Historically principal male ballet dancers were merely cranes that were there to lift the ballerina in performance. This has shifted and the principal male dancer is seen to have a lot more solos and yet is still required for the lifts. Nyamza and Xaba, speak of how, although there has been progress in this regard, the black primadonna is a rare find. At the beginning of *The Last Attitude*, Xaba is heard stating to Nyamza that she now has dance injuries because Nyamza wants to dance and she can’t remember when, last, she actually

[^9]: Co-produced by Xaba and the Dance Factory in 2006. The performance was hosted at the Dance Factory in Newtown Arts Precinct, Johannesburg. Xaba then went on to perform fragments of the fragments at various festivals around the world.
danced. Multiple white mannequins dressed in tutus and suspended from the ceiling form the backdrop of the piece. The mannequins have also been sliced in half, which alludes to issues of weight control so prevalent in ballet. The mannequins have breasts but no buttocks, no legs nor arms, and the tutus flow down their amputated shapes. Nyamza and Xaba become the legs of these amputated ballerinas as male ballet dancers. Here too, the dancers play with their androgyny, which is exoticised through casting themselves as surrogates for the male ballet dancers. When asked to comment on the changing role of male principal dancers in ballet, Nyamza said the following:

It is not only about why the role of male dancers has changed, but it must also be how the traditional logic of traditional ballet has also evolved dramatically since the times of the classics. You can’t separate these two aspects. [...] Despite all these demystifying shifts in classical ballet, one phenomenon is stubbornly insistent in ballet: the lack of black women ballet dancers. Darker skins have always felt unwelcome due to the scarce statistics. And if they are black ballet dancers, they are either miscast or simply degenerated to inferior/lesser roles. There is still a myth that casting a black ballet dancer in a lead will alter the harmony of the ballet piece. (Nyamza, 2016)

The Last Attitude read as their final engagement with the trials and tribulations of their ballet training and engagement with the artform. The dancers’ journey in the piece moved between irreverence and reverence for this dance form that is the foundation for the work they are renowned for today. Both performers began dancing as young girls in ballet schools and later studied at Alvin Ailey’s School of Dance which, itself, was formed in response to the restrictive nature the discipline has regarding the casting of black bodies. Their work often explores how stereotypical images function towards the maintenance of an oppressive objectification of the black female body, by exploring race and classist elitisms. Xaba and Nyamza are constantly subverting, shifting and internalizing the gaze in their work in order to claim agency over their representation and to artistically engage with the socio-political conditions they have to endure as black women.
In attempting to engage with the missing black woman on mainstream South African theatre stages artistically, through a deliberate incommensurability, the dramaturgical concept, therefore, would incorporate catachresis, intended mis-takes, productive undoing and a shifting of desires for the creolised goddess that represents both the personal and private that informs my personality, responses to the world and situations, and through all this, an attempt to create nuance of experience. An attempt to embody the images created by *Cinnamon Honeysuckle* and a dwelling in the in-between, within the discomfort, destabilised mythologised reality of the missing black woman. Through all this exploration the dramaturge would also be the surrogate for the performer and the performer the surrogate for the dramaturge.

Deliberate Incommensurability In The Studio

Working in the dark is a multilayered concept: we worked in the dark because we used our intuition to guide us, we worked in the dark pits of our own anger, we worked in the dark as a way to confront what we know, what we have experienced, and what we feel. This is similar to having one’s eyes closed in an unfamiliar space, and having to navigate this space with the remaining senses — which are heightened because one sense has been temporarily disabled. (Lejowa, 2010:30)

As stated earlier, this research stemmed from a desire to use the socio-political landscape of theatre performance in South Africa to arrive at a dramaturgical concept centred around deliberate incommensurability. How can the mythology of the missing black woman be used as inspiration for the creation of a new project? Another desire was to respond to the notion of the “dramaturge is never a source” which for me is preposterous given the various modes of creating performance that I have engaged with. What is, therefore, the role of the dramaturge where she is both creator and performer? As research around a South African subject who is both dramaturge and theatre-maker does not yet exist, I embarked on an
Autoethnographic study of the particular phenomenon. The object as subject, the subject as object. Much that is both in support of and against this mode of research will be detailed later in the chapter. Drawing from self was also another form of discovery of a possible new aesthetic and language of expression for myself in order to self-locate within the theatre experience. A re-membering of the seed and/or compulsion to tell stories in this particular medium. This section will detail some of the "pathways of reflexivity" spoken of by Lynne Norton. For Norton, "the journey follows six phases: initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination in a creative synthesis" (2017:7).

Denshire, in her paper Autoethnography states that:

"Autoethnography goes beyond the writing of selves... Contemporary autoethnography is informed by a range of disciplines. Writers of these accounts address social questions of difference and becoming that may enable voices previously silenced to speak back. (2013:1)"

In this section I will be detailing the process embarked upon to create O Kae? – an audio-visual performance installation. Quoting Lionnet, Denshire states: autoethnography "opens up a space of resistance between the individual (auto-) and the collective (-ethno-) where the writing (-graphy) of singularity cannot be foreclosed" (Lionnet, 1990:391, quoted in Denshire, 2013:3).

"By writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings. (Denshire, 2013:1)"

Through a step-by-step breakdown of the process, using Norton’s autoethnography phases, I will be writing myself into this research in an attempt to create performance methodology around deliberate incommensurability and the myth of the missing black woman.
Initial engagement

In the beginning it was important not to have a narrative already mapped out but to discover how and what the body in space was wanting to translate. And so, I used my manifesto, *Cinnamon Honeysuckle* drawn up in response to the state of the black female on the mainstream stages of South African theatre- as a starting point for the inquiry. It was important to identify the seat of the discomfort in order to engage with it. What I was aware of was the need to artistically respond to the manifesto and thus create a performance piece that spoke back to the manifesto and is the manifesto itself.

Autoethnographic research is a process of patriation and reparation, a process of continued self-plagiarism and referencing that can sometimes feel claustrophobic and even, at times, like artistic masturbation. However, I drew comfort in the work of those like Chipaumire, Nyamza and Xaba who have been self-representing for decades in the realm of deconstructing dance, particularly ballet, which was their original dance home and which they continue to critique and exploit for their own narratives. Using the techniques they were taught-techniques they both value and detest- to write themselves into existence. Abuse of dance, so to speak.

I began by gathering stories of trips on our public transport system, recording altercations, conversations and images seen on the side of the road while the taxi driver played loud music and the *gaatjie*\(^{10}\) entertained the passengers, stories of migrant taxify\(^{11}\) drivers and anything I felt would remotely assist in the writing of the play. Even within these stories there always seemed to be a presence that lurked, a larger than life woman wanting

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\(^{10}\) South Africa uses minibus taxis as one of the modes for public transportation. A taxi is formally supposed to seat 16 passengers including the driver, however, in Cape Town there is usually a 17\(^{th}\) passenger who has the role of collecting the money from the passengers. He works closely with the driver.

\(^{11}\) Taxify is a South African transport app that functions like Uber.
to be heard and seen. In some cases, she was narrator and in others, a character in the
story. This process was easy and enjoyable and was simpler because the stories were
sparked by anything seen and were easy to record. I began wondering how these stories
could intersect and connect with the manifesto and assist in the creation process.

At this stage, a colleague and I decided to assist each other in our rehearsal
processes. He would provide the physical movement catalysts and I, the narrative ones, in
order for us to begin exploring our different topics as an attempt to arrive at our main
questions. Our rehearsals were scheduled for three-hour periods. The first forty-five
minutes were meant for physical and vocal warm-ups and then each of us would take forty-
five minutes on our individual processes with the other as facilitator. The remaining time
was spent in discussion of whatever discoveries were made that day and associations to any
material we had been reading. We engaged in this process for several weeks, making video
and audio recordings of discussions we had after a practice session. A lot of what we
explored assisted in deriving the beginnings of the title of this minor dissertation and clarity
around my focus.

Through this initial engagement, ideas of how deliberate incommensurability could
be explored in performance were derived from readings and particularly from Spivak and
Morrison. In this way, I began to locate the black woman somewhere within their theories in
a performative way. This process was the birth of the four-movement structure that began
to haunt the process until the final iteration in June 2018. The movements were, initially,
determined by the natural elements: Earth, Air, Water and Fire, and each required a
performative element to be missing. This missing element could be sonic, physical, light or a
discordance that confused the focus in a way that obscured the intended focus of a
movement. How I broke the initial structure up was:
Air: Speak truth in Mute

Water: Introduce Sounds

Earth: Sounds Become Words

Fire: Words become phrases

Fire: Phrases become *Cinnamon Honeysuckle*

I had very little idea of the truth of which I was wanting to speak except the interrogation through deliberate incommensurability of a missing black woman. However, I kept returning to the manifesto as a form of inspiration towards discovery and writing the text for the play.

It had, now, become clearer that what I desired to research was: the Africanist character as surrogate and enabler; the way an Africanist idiom is used to establish difference or, in a later period, to signal modernity; to investigate the manipulation of the Africanist narrative (that is, the story of the black person, the experience of being bound and/or rejected) as a means of meditation - both safe and risky- on one's own humanity in order to study the “technical ways in which the Africanist character is used to limn out and enforce the invention and implications of whiteness” (Morrison, 1993:52-3).

I found that Morrison and Spivak resonated with each other and provided possibilities for the rehearsal room once I imagined their theories existing in parallel and intersecting within performance. This then led to the formulation meant as the starting point for exploring the second phase, immersion. Engaging the black woman in a series of meditations, a series of exaggerated situations, invocations, mixed metaphors and creating new meaning in an effort to render her visible and audible. This black woman, how does she claim back her space while negating or refusing the spaces within which she has historically been situated and fashion herself anew without compromise? The urgency to claim her liminality and peripheral existence and frame it as her standard and by so doing, create a
metric system for herself. There is a need to speak in manners that have previously been bastardised or rejected in the world within which she operates.

**Immersion**

Autoethnography is slippery and dangerous. Self-recognising and disavowing. Dreadful and enjoyable. A study in discomfort. The nebulous place of the public and personal constantly in flux and conflict or conversation with each other.

The immersion phase involved entering the rehearsal room and attempting a process of devising as performer and writer. What I needed to do now was to place all the balls, that I had been juggling, in the air and systematically work through them in order to arrive at something resembling a theatrical performance. This process should have been simple enough. I have a toolkit packed with exercises I have used before, as a director, and those I have participated in as a performer and these should have made this phase of work straightforward. I had set myself a month and a half before my first showing for my supervisor and I was excited to finally be entering the rehearsal studio and placing the theorising into practice. During the vacation I had asked my mother to recount stories of my birth, recorded one of my brothers reading leboko lakwa Seane¹² (our family praise poem) and had collected stories from Soweto to filter into this process. Soweto is the township where I grew up and within which I worked and, as such, I had access to black women across generations and was using my access to harvest stories. I was now ready to search and find, with the aid of deliberate incommensurability, the missing black woman.

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¹² As the only female off-spring of my parents I have a role to play in the lives of my nieces and nephew. I am the one required to articulate the pride of the family at any of their coming of age ceremonies. Leboko la kwa Seane is how this pride is expressed. However, this poem is also expressed at family reunions of any kind, whether joyous or painful.
I had, at this time, attended a studio on the creation of new work using the system of six ‘Viewpoints’ - Space, Shape, Time, Emotion, Movement and Story - as developed by choreographer, Mary Overlie, and then expanded and developed by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau (2005). The rediscovery of this methodology was what I relied on to prepare myself to create.

- Viewpoints is a philosophy translated into a technique for (1) training performers; (2) building ensemble; and (3) creating movement for the stage.
- Viewpoints is a set of names given to certain principles of movement through time and space; these names constitute a language for talking about what happens onstage.
- Viewpoints is points of awareness that a performer or creator makes use of while working. (Bogart and Landau, 2005:8-9)

What drew me to this methodology was, mainly, the expression of “kinesthetic response” which is “a spontaneous reaction to motion which occurs outside you; the timing in which you respond to the external events of movement or sound; the impulsive movement that occurs from a stimulation of the senses” (Bogart and Landau, 2005:9). Beginning from a place of unknowing and embarking on an autoethnographic enquiry meant that I needed to buy myself time in the rehearsal room, to listen to what is within as much as what is without and respond accordingly. I could not have a predestined point of arrival as I was unsure of my starting point. What viewpoints allowed was space and time to engage with the rehearsal room, it’s architecture, found objects and to also pay attention to what was happening within me, to my body and what my habitual responses are, gesturally and/or vocally, to any stimuli in my body and space. I found that the body has its own tremors and reflex responses of which I was previously unaware.

I was still operating from the unknown and undetermined, just with guidelines gained from Morrison and Spivak. The structure of rehearsals was quite simple for the first three weeks. I offered myself four-hour long rehearsals with a thirty-minute break in the
schedule. I would begin with physical and vocal exercises; use breath to either make myself heavy or light; play music-usually either The Harp Solo by Alice Coltrane or Nirbhaya by Kefaya, and wait for either my body or my voice to respond. These songs were chosen because the former is instrumental and the latter in a language I do not understand. I could play them in a loop without boredom settling in and this allowed for extended periods of improvisation, alone.

At this point my research branched out towards phenomenology as a possible joint methodology to incorporate into the creation process. The desire here was to find ways of intensifying the rehearsal process and providing the type of stimuli that were not predicated upon content but that relied solely on moment to moment exploration and whatever resulted from said exploration. The enticement of working from the unknown and needing by all means to merely explore during this phase and not to predetermine much of what would be desired outcomes led me to this methodology. Susan Kozel, drawing on the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty in her examination of phenomenology as a methodology, in the preface to her book Closer: Performance, Technologies, Phenomenology (2007), opines that:

As a method, phenomenology involves a return to lived experience, a listening to the senses and insights that arrive obliquely, unbidden, in the midst of movement experiments or quite simply in the midst of life. Phenomenology, in short, allows me to respect these sensations and inner voices, these unformed ideas, thoughts, or images that emerge directly from ... experience. (Kozel, 2007: xvi)

On reflection, I understand that viewpoints allowed this space of inquiry in the studio. A surrender to what the body experiences and how the internal and the external are in some form of a feedback loop with each other. This is a realisation I wish I had been able to exploit more in the rehearsal, during my experimentation, because perhaps then, I would not have felt as blocked as I felt at the time. In my opinion, I was moving nowhere slowly.
After the embodied exploration I would then do some free-writing. Not to suggest that the writing process is disembodied. However, within the space I inhabited during the immersion phase of my research, I did not see the connections. I had assumed the binary that I was seeking to refute. I had also decided not to listen, read nor reflect on the free writing daily but weekly. The first week went very well, with very little expectation of anything but merely to build material towards the eventual scripting of a performance. However, by the end of the second week I was convinced that I was working in opposing directions. I began placing judgements upon my explorations and when I listened to the free associations that happened during the music section of the rehearsal, I would cringe and wonder what it was that I was really working towards. I began to view most things I produced in the studio as inferior. I began to resist any other modes I used to enter improvisation until by the end of the third week, I began to doubt whether it was even necessary for me to embark on the process of conceiving this production. To what end? The following is one of pieces of writing that sprung out of the rehearsal process at this stage:

I try and find her within
But she is depleted
Unwilling to collaborate
I rush to the shoreline
Eager to meet her in the violence of unsettled waves
But the ocean is deceptively calm
And she is silent
I find an egg and caress it for mysteries to be revealed
I imagine them landing in the ocean and sliding her onto the land
I imagine her North/East/West/South collarbones
Joining to release Air, Fire, Water and Earth
I stroke her so she may reveal herself yet she is still unwilling to play

She is depleted, she says, what is so special today that will make them see or listen?

I bite my tongue multiple times trying to find an answer she will believe

I taste iron in my mouth and realise that my teeth are still clinging to my tongue as one clings to a walking cane

I say to her, “but from you the multiverse was/is/will be created”

“from your presence I mined gold millenia ago”

“you created the surface/core/seen/unseen”

She says that is the problem and asks, “When am I giving to this void?”

“I am depleted/empty and very surely become invisible”

“I don’t understand why you are forcing me to play! Play with yourself, dammit!!!”

She is not the kind to use exclamation marks in her speech and so this takes me aback

I think of how I can replace exclamation marks with a full stop or, at least, cut them back to one.

I remember to caress

I lift her into my hands and caress her the way chickens do their eggs to help them hatch. My hands envelop and caress.

I tell her she can never be depleted for there is still so much within the shell/outside the shell.

She sucks her teeth at me

I remind her of her story/ “When the Star People arrived from the star planet they set you down on this land/you were surrounded by ten stones/which they placed in a circle to help you stay/you were healthy/well put together and the excitement at your hatching created waves in the ocean/the sound was hypnotic and the sight frightening/the waves towered over the Star People...they were unphased/standing in ceremony around you/you split open/Yes/you split/you didn’t crack...”

“I don’t want to hear anymore!!!”/she shouted

“Let me show you”/I said

(Draw)
“You see/this is how it happened You split open and there was such chaos/water/wind/air/earth/such chaos/spinning out of control”

“See”/she says/ “I told you they don’t want to listen”.

I began to reflect upon my general dissatisfaction with what is considered the theatre industry and went on a two-week rollercoaster ride of revisiting emotions I thought I had already processed and forgiven myself and the discipline for. I began to feel a lot of self-doubt and began wondering if the fact that it is so difficult to get produced is really because my skills lack merit and that it really is not a matter of a dominant culture holding on to the seat of power unrelentingly. I began othering myself and distancing myself from those around me in order to recuperate, even, a semblance of the person I had always assumed myself to be. I would walk into the studio and do the requisite first hour of warm-up and when it came to the generation process I would either burst into tears and lie on the floor in a foetal position, move whatever furniture in the space around then weep, look at myself in the mirror someone had left in the room during a previous process and then weep. After each rehearsal I would go home or to the postgraduate computer labs and binge watch a television series, feeling defeated from watching other people work.

The core of phenomenology ... calls for a return, again and again, to lived experience; that it takes as its starting point a position prior to, or beyond, the subject-object divide; that it shapes a reflective process that opens itself onto the richness of pre-reflective experience; that it is inclusive of a variety of experiences and not bound to a narrow and abstracted notion of truth; that it provides scope for the many dimensions of what we are as human beings to contribute to the expansion of knowledge and creation of cultural artifacts. Bodies, thought, imagination, memories, material conditions of life, and affect find a voice through phenomenology. (Kozel, 2007:5)

A running theme throughout my writing and throughout my body was that of fatigue and fog. I had an ever-present rock in my solar-plexus that just wouldn’t dissolve. It seemed to
get tighter and tighter and in one of the free writing sessions I decided to ‘let my heart
write’ and the following came out:

PELO: (Sob! Sob! Sob!) (emotion hiccup!) (sigh!) (fast beating) (slow pacing)
(emotion hiccup!) (sigh!) (sigh!) (ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo)
(ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo) (ho sisa pelo) (fast beating) (silence)
(silence) STOP! (silence) (sigh!)

The assumption was that by naming the rock, it would dissolve and restore some energy and
clarity to the process. I was thoroughly frustrated at this point. However, what is important
to note is that both these pieces of writing from the immersion phase were incorporated in
the final offering in multiple ways. I will speak of that later. The deadline arrived as
deadlines tend to do and I had nothing to show, according to my estimation. I extended the
deadline to attempt another mode of entry. I spent days panicked about my lack of
productivity and conferenced with a friend in Botswana who responded with the following
words:

I think in a sense you’ve been grappling with that concept in your own personal and
professional life. That you are missing in the industry, missing out on work. That
you are a missing parent, that you are missing as a lover. I can’t imagine how
debilitating it must feel for your lived experience to be mirrored in your current
study. That said, it can be a regenerative position of power. The fruits of that
absence are yours to define. The nature of that absence is yours to determine. (J.L.
Personal Communication. 11 Feb 2018)

I heard and agreed with her. If only I could determine the nature of the absence in time for
the next deadline. Norton states that this phase in the autoethnographic inquiry requires
the researcher to be immersed within the topic.

\[13\] Possible literal translations can range from “calming the heart”, “the heart gasps for air” and “heart stricken”.
I think it can only be fully understood through the description of what physically happens to the body when
this happens. It is the feeling, after a release of emotion or while attempting to contain the release of emotion,
when the heart skips a few beats, the person somehow forgets for a moment to breathe and then when the
heart begins to beat regularly again, the lungs begin to function and gasp a series of breaths before the body
restabilises.
In self-dialogue, the researcher converses with the phenomenon, "allowing the phenomenon to speak directly to one's own experience, to be questioned by it," so that multiple meanings can then be uncovered (p.16). The process involves not only the intellect but also emotion, with the researcher attempting to understand the phenomenon in its wholeness and unique patterns of experience. (MOUSTAKAS, 1990 quoted in Norton, 2017:n.p. (capitals in original text)

I eventually understood this phase as a phase of my own “productive undoing” within the deliberate incommensurability I had set up for myself in the studio. A lot of what I had taken for granted, the toolkit I assumed was in my possession, were all proving to be tired modes of engagement and I needed a new tool set. I was also encountering the consciousness within that was raw, bleeding and feeling depleted and needed private reparations in order to perform a public offering of protest towards healing. What also made this phase so difficult was my resistance to engage others in what was happening to me in the studio. I literally, disappeared myself and only appeared when I had responsibilities that included other people. Outside of those, structured and impersonal, on my part, interactions, I was unravelling in the studio and my self-confidence was being pummelled by what I was perceiving as a failing process of investigation.

It seems to me that a productive undoing, in itself, gives rise to shifting desires. When all the tools that one is accustomed to utilising lose their sharpness there is a need for a search and discovery of alternative methods. The dramaturge in this case is constantly seeking ways to free the process in order to arrive at a product. The immersion phase relied on multiple sources of stimulus, triggers or provocations. Perhaps, had I not panicked about the seeming unproductive nature of the phase and had also allowed others into the studio as observers and advisors, I may have drawn a lot more out of the process than what I did. I do not think, in retrospect, that working completely solo is sufficiently productive and advisable, particularly for my practice.
Incubation

Norton views the incubation phase as a phase in which the researcher establishes distance between herself and the topic and allows for reflection that aims at a level of objectivity in order to progress in the reflective process of her research. (2017:10) In my opinion, this aligns with Kozel’s phenomenological method in which:

The basis is the desire for an expansion of perception, of consciousness, and of bodily experience, and a sense that what currently exists needs to be transformed. What needs to go along with these changing experiences are new ways of understanding or interpreting them. (Kozel, 2007: 7)

Kozel suggests breaks in the work that do not adhere to time limitations, “you can take a moment, a day, a week, a year,” while you deliberate on the process you have just experienced (2017:53). These breaks are a demonstration of the importance of time for reflection during a process of unknowing. A time to let ideas stew and reveal or translate themselves anew, transforming into fresh stimuli.

Suffice it to say that at this point I was demotivated, panicked and in need of a plan. I just could not bring myself to engage in self-dialogue in the studio. At this point I began collecting the writing, sounds and images that had been created during the immersion phase and those that seemed to resonate with the research. Various images emerged of cosmic eggs, the spectrum of the colour yellow and allowing space for daydreaming. I began writing a play whose script now taunts me for completion and further engagement and still I was not arriving at this unknown of which I was in search.

I also began sharing and talking about my frustrations with several friends and colleagues. One, who knows of a short-story I wrote years back that I kept asking him to direct, asked after this story and whether I could not find my research within that text.
Sweet Summer Juice is the story of a ten-year old Mosotho boy living in the Malotis\(^{14}\), who is the village griot, with spectacular prophetic dreams that then unravel through the journeys of the men in the village while they are working in the gold mines of South Africa. Koma’s mother is indeed a missing black woman, but the story and its content are about a different interrogation.

I thought, perhaps the problem was that I was too close to the investigation and, therefore, if I had someone else in the room to propose stimuli and then leave me to explore, I may be able to achieve something. I asked a dancer/choreographer colleague for help and forwarded her a detailed illustration representing the Earth personified by a woman with various natural wonders extending out of her body. She was initially excited about the prospect and then later discovered that she did not have time in her schedule to work with me in the studio. I then approached a theatre-maker/performance artist friend I had recently worked with and she laughed and said I was crazy to ask her to direct me, where would she start. She then declined and I was back where I had been before. The other three people I felt would provide a generative environment for this exploration were in Botswana and Johannesburg. I chose the five deliberately because of their previous work and their general focus in the field regarding narrative and aesthetics and I felt that they would challenge me well while also recognising that I was quietly going insane, and, perhaps, assist in incorporating the insanity into the performance.

During this period of navigating this process I began to watch a lot of videos on the internet. I began downloading archival footage of videos of previous interviews and shows I had been in with the intention of using them somehow as part of my autoethnographic enquiry. I had now become an obsessed collector of images, footage, soundbites, music and

\(^{14}\) Maloti Mountains are what the Drakensberg Mountain Range is called in Lesotho. Maloti is also the currency for the kingdom.
anything remotely related to the missing black woman; surrogacy and enabling, parallel universes and the cosmos. How this material was to be used, I was unsure. I was creating material chaos.

Then I decided that perhaps it would be best to remove myself from the process as a performer, find an actor to work with and direct them through the inquiry. It soon became clear that if I were to remove myself from the performance and cast someone else, then I would not be engaging with the dramaturge as source and therefore, my investigation would be transformed. After a short period of moving between my presence on the floor and my absence, in a conversation with a colleague, it became apparent that I required this type of presence, of myself, because our conversation became very emotional and in releasing, I could feel the knot in my chest loosening up.

These first three phases of exploration, in my opinion, can continue indefinitely if time allows. I also think that what was missing was the co-creator, an outside eye that could highlight moments of possibilities in the work occurring in the studio, moments that I was blind to. However, as stated earlier, I had created an island of creativity and the were no boats to shore. Even as a dingy arrived, and I rowed myself to shore, I returned without the black woman I hoped would help me reappear.

The dramaturge, in this phase, is surrogate for the theatre-maker/performer. The act of physically extracting the performer from the studio, requesting directorial assistance from other theatre-makers and reviewing video materials and interviews, was a process of attempting to find distance in order to be able to objectively return to the project with clarity. This distancing revealed the need to change the form of the production. That, perhaps, what I was struggling with was the form that would contain deliberate incommensurability. That conventional theatre itself was incommensurable to the task at
hand. And as such, my productive undoing shifted my desires towards exploring a form I had previously never used, that of an audio-visual installation.

Illumination

I chose this terminology, deliberate incommensurability, as an intended mis-take in order to examine how a desire to deliberately remain incommensurable would impact a rehearsal process and what sort of product would result in such a quest. What I did not bargain upon was being incommensurable to myself. Without deliberateness.

The researcher explores themes emerging into awareness that were not directly present as part of the researcher’s consciousness and which reveal new insights. (Norton, 2017:12)

This is what began happening to me. From the collection I had obsessively gathered I began to edit a film consisting of interviews I had done about theatre; thoughts around how theatre can innovate and progress; interviews around audience development and creating content that is accessible to youth. This footage became a film of about twenty minutes. I then collected the illustrations and pieces of my writing and edited them into a separate film that was going to be projected on a different screen, the soundtrack of which was an interview with Winnie Madikizela-Mandela downloaded off the internet. She epitomised, to me, the very subject I was researching. She had contributed so much to the South African struggle for freedom and yet after independence had been silenced and disappeared. The interview was very insightful and honest with her confronting questions around the reasons behind her exclusion from the modern-day political framework of the country. To accompany both these films I chose to play Alice Coltrane’s *Harp Solo*. The song had been

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15 “In Her Own Words-Winnie Madikizela-Mandela”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmN2ZKD1EgQ&t=443s
the soundtrack to the Initial Engagement and Immersion phases, and she too, was a black woman whose work had been eclipsed by her husband’s music. The showing was to be very low-tech: two laptops as the screens for the films; a Bluetooth speaker with a USB connected to play Alice Coltrane, and a colleague in the room to manage the devices. These media would be competing for attention in the space and the focus undetermined. The idea was that the audience member would choose a point of focus in the visual and audio installation and remain with the scene that had drawn their attention for the 30 minutes of the performance. I had, before now, resisted having my supervisor in the studio because I had felt that I had nothing to show. It was now time to include him in the process and so he was invited in for a showing. I did feel, now, that I was discovering content and I had something to show from which constructive feedback could arise. Towards the end of the showing I began chanting from outside the installation studio. With this iteration my professional archive was interwoven with the public archive of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who, in turn, was speaking back to my private and personal archive in the form of the text being displayed from the video containing her voice.

This iteration was meant to be immersive, however, it turned out to be over saturated with information and stimuli, the sound from the videos was not very clear, and because the room was not blacked out, the space contained too much light. My supervisor asked the question that I worried about throughout this process, that if I was not physically represented in the space, as a living body, was I not silencing and disappearing the black woman and thus working in opposition to the research? I think this iteration was also not well thought through in that much of the initial stimulus around the natural elements creating some form of structure for the piece were not included and the four movements not distinct. Textually, the video included many of the suggestions of the cosmic egg but
were out of context within the content chosen for the installation and I had not been playing with symbolism. The installation was a literal understanding of the topic with very little nuance, and the surrogacy and enabling character of the black woman was not physically present to negotiate time and space between the visuals and the sound. In choosing to step out of the presentation I had, indeed, relinquished my agency and left it in the hands of another, the colleague who was in the room operating the devices.

I then chose to include my physical presence in the final iteration in order to properly engage with the elements, to explore the butterfly effect that Spregelburd speaks of and to write my presence into the installation. I wanted to explore idioms previously unexplored, to create a non-linear interaction of the hybrid character of Amma-Osun enacting her reappearance into the world. It became clearer now, what it is I was working towards: a performance installation that was to be a ritual towards visibility and audibility, a rebirth.

Explication

Theatre’s relevant and irrelevant relationship with religious ritual enables it to exhibit two different kinds of ritual, namely, sacred or rite oriented and secular-oriented rituals. Rite-oriented ritual in theatre shows clearly in those performances linked with rites of passage and the festivals or ceremonies connected with them. Secular-oriented ritual defines performances the subject matter of which are social-oriented, including contemporary plays. There is no dichotomy implied in these ritual types as they are applied in theatre. On the contrary, there is an active integration of both types through the established practices of theatre as they operate in different cultures.

(Amankulor, 1989:49)

A creolised goddess representing personal and private responses to the world and situations, interaction with her required a container within which catachresis and intended mis-takes, could give rise to a productive undoing that could shift desires. This is how the ritual became the dramaturgical device for the offering. According to Norton the explication
The phase is about the details of the interrogation, assessment of intention, meaning and placing all the elements of one’s research together into some form of coherence (2017:14). This coherence would be a rite of passage towards visibility and audibility. Deliberate incommensurability locates itself well within the space of ritual. Much of what takes place in many rituals, relying on symbolism and intent, requires very little explication and yet is carefully selected for the purposes of said ritual. Here was an opportunity to design a performative system of actualisation through self-representation. The decision was, then, that the ritual I would perform would be both secular and sacred in that, it would be created for the purposes of theatrical effect and yet have elements based on how followers of Osun celebrate and commune with the Goddess, but also how I celebrate and commune with my ancestors. The ritual would determine timing and pacing of movements and also attempt to direct the gaze and focus at various times in the installation.

I knew that I wanted to work with onomatopoeia, breath, repetition and the creation of new metaphors, a poietic experience of sorts. As I had decided on catachresis, productive undoing, shifting desires and the Africanist character as surrogate and enabler, the structure was to have four movements. I also knew that I wanted each movement to have something ‘missing’, either sound, visibility or backgrounded thoughts. Something had to be unrepresented in each movement.

I found that this phase often intertwined with the creative synthesis phase that follows below. They were in fact interchangeable, as the process of installing the performance, selection of video material, rehearsing the performance (alone and with the technology required) and sequencing, involved both explication and creative synthesis practices.
Writing from lived experience often amounts to writing without a clear methodological mandate, or demands the courage to assert that the methods are fluid and subjective. Paradigms are scraped together (defiantly, guilefully, playfully, intuitively) ... This bricolage or hybridization is done in part to find a voice in the academy, but more important, to help the writer herself understand what it is that she is experiencing and to communicate these experiences... This sometimes precarious process is sustained by the realization that reflection is not only a secondary process or a commentary on experience, but also the process of thinking that transforms the doing. (Kozel, 2007:9)

Kozel suggests a world of chaos that is created through an amalgamation of stimuli and a surrendering to the chaos in order to arrive at creative possibilities never before imagined. This was the time to look back at the entire process in order to devise a performance that would reveal something of the process of this autoethnographic research of deliberate incommensurability. Time was spent reviewing the writing, sound and video clips made in the studio, clarifying the desire for a four-movement structure and deciding on the aesthetics for the piece based upon the content that was already generated.

At this stage, the decision had already been reached that the form I would be using for the offering would be a performance installation. This form would allow for the unstructured collection to reveal a narrative that could weave itself into a structure. Firstly, a performance installation can deliberately function within and without the restrictions of conventional theatre, a multi-disciplinary approach can be engaged without worrying about linear narrative plot structure and images on projections and sounds can function wholly as text that does not require contextualisation. It is a suitably alternative space within which an alternative ritual could land itself and deliberate incommensurability exercise its obfuscation. As it was now very obvious that I was resisting the traditional theatre form for this project, I also wanted to find a space that was not considered a traditional theatre space. The resulting two iterations took place in a gallery space and a classroom on Hiddingh campus.
Having decided not to present *O Kae?* in a box theatre I needed to access spaces on the campus that could house the performance installation. The room required intimacy and the architecture of the room was important. The buildings of Hiddingh campus have a beautiful structure that is reminiscent of the colony, wooden floors and wooden frames on windows with pristine white walls.

Creative Synthesis- *O Kae*?16

The final stage, if one can talk of such an organic process having a final stage, is an integration of the data and themes that have been discovered and are presented in a creative form like a narrative, poem, painting, or story. (Norton, 2017:18)

For the first iteration of *O Kae?* in May 2018, I used the Ritchie Gallery and for the second, in June 2018 (video footage attached as an addendum), the offering was situated in the Annex, both spaces on Hiddingh campus. Within these spaces was a wooden bench, stage right, with a suitcase at a right angle in front of the bench. Upstage was a wooden wheelbarrow containing sand that was slowly dripping onto the floor from a hole in its bed. In the sand were various yellow and orange fruit, offerings to the Goddesses. The back wall was a surface for projection and on a plinth, stage left, rested a television which also showed visuals, with a considered heartbeat as soundtrack.

The back-wall projection consisted of moving visuals of the natural elements: fire, earth, air, water and was an abstraction of the story/text found in the immersion section. The television showed still images of illustrations of the cosmic egg, stage directions originally written for what was to be a play of deliberate incommensurability, *leboko la kwa Seane*, and the manifesto broken up and interspersed with images of blackness slowly

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16 Found on DOI [10.6084/m9.figshare.7442417](https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.7442417)
moving to yellow with droplets of water. The soundtrack for these visuals was a studio
session recording of Me’shell Ndegeocello. These two movements represented the personal
and the public and the interchange between both these spaces.

Conventional performance electric lighting was not used. Instead the gallery and
classroom were lit with candles and as performer I wore a black dress. The lighting from the
television and the projector provided additional light to allow the audience to see my face at
specific moments in the performance. The performance was an exercise in healing, a rite of
passage from the invisible to the visible; from the audible to the inaudible; from the present
to the absent. The ritual was both rite and secular towards a performed deliberate
incommensurability and was communication with both Amma-Osun and my ancestors,
represented by the Greater Kudu bulls that held more space and time in the visual
installations than any other image. The classroom iteration had the added element of scent
as I placed droplets of citronella oil at the four corners of the room. Towards the end of the
offering the kudus are replaced by a video of 54 black women who are active in South
African theatre as performers, directors, writers, producers, arts managers, teachers and
drama therapists. The collected faces are taken from across the country. This video plays to
the soundtrack of Maleh’s Se Ke La Nts`ia, which is a song that is about travelling to greener
pastures and asking not to be left behind. At the end of the video, I release a bag/bucket of
shells that has been hanging from the ceiling and they scatter across the floor.

The performance itself is interjected and stopped, a rhythm of engagement assumed
and then broken, the sense of the process of creation itself, where inspiration came in
spurts or was sometimes difficult to come by. The ritual itself hovers between the mundane
and the sacred, the realised and unrealised, the performed and experienced and the
irreverent and prostrate. A chiasmus of interweaving textures, gestures, aromas and
memories. An existence in the past, present and future simultaneously, and in separated moments.

The intention for the performance installation was to be both immersive and alienating simultaneously. To wrestle with the relationship between the audience searching for meaning and the performer disavowing the unwritten contract of communication with her audience. Time rotated around the different media installed in the rooms, suspended, stretched and or contracted. The intimacy suggested by the candlelight and scent of citronella lured the audience into a sense of comfort that would then be sporadically betrayed. With more time I would wish to explore the choreography of the four movements with more depth, to have the movements ‘speak’ in their own languages. With the written text I would wish to explore different ways of scripting - codes, languages that do not conform to the Latin alphabet, a sonic scape of these languages that textures the performed choreography. My intention would be to intensify the obfuscation and agency of the black woman in the process of her self-representation. The video material would also be original material, and not sourced from stock footage but deliberate filming of the different visual encounters in order to establish an even more personal video art integration. A feast and offering for the goddesses and audience that resulted from an unlikely source, a socio-political frustration.

Conclusion
Frustrated with the slow transformation of mainstream South African theatre and the continued indifference to the work of black female theatre-makers, I wanted to engage this socio-political reality creatively. I was not intending to address the possibilities for changing the industry, because “Black messiah/no” (Chipaumire, 2018). I chose to use the socio-political situation as a catalyst to develop a dramaturgical concept for a production and explore a Practice as Research based methodology using autoethnography as a basis. As the exclusion of the work of black females is deliberate, in my opinion, and is often requiring translation and contextualisation to the dominant hegemony, guiding programming choices in the South African theatre mainstream, there was a need for me to resist translation, to refuse contextualisation. I coined a term, deliberate incommensurability, as a thematic pivot for the research. My enquiry became a search for the missing black woman, an autoethnographic dramaturgy through a deliberate incommensurability.

In deliberate incommensurability rests the black woman’s agency to self-represent and this affords her the freedom to be different and to choose the time and manner of her appearance, it allows for a shifting of the gaze.

Transparency no longer seems like the bottom of the mirror in which Western humanity reflected the world in its own image. There is opacity now at the bottom of the mirror, a whole alluvium deposited by populations, silt that is fertile but, in actual fact, indistinct and unexplored even today, denied or insulted more often than not, and with an insistent presence that we are incapable of not experiencing. (Glissant, 2010:111)

Deliberate incommensurability in an autoethnographic context allows for an ab-use of the surrogate and enabling black woman trope towards the contemplation of a futurity that is textured and nuanced. In performance, engaging with catachresis affords a non-linear narrative that responds to seemingly unrelated occurrences that impact on and inform each other in order to serve the opacity of which Glissant speaks. Entangled symbols, personal
archives and newly formed idioms lend texture and unpredictability to the work being produced, as this text is not merely written but embodied as well.

The first step in the research was the writing of the manifesto, *Cinnamon Honeysuckle*, which was the initial engagement with the topic. The manifesto, borne out of frustration at the lack of representation of the black woman, was a personal call to action and healing, a reparation of the imbalances in a creative and poetic manner. The call of *Cinnamon Honeysuckle* is that of spitting out the metal bit that keeps the black woman’s mouth shut, of convening with Goddesses to bring the rain that cleanses the spirit and strengthens the resolve to claim space, narratives and creativity, in whatever form she chooses, for her health.

Most important, however, is the temporality of the manifesto, its construction of a history of rupture. As a political genre, the manifesto had been geared toward a revolution, a cut in the historical process, an act that attempts to change suddenly the course of history. [...] It is in this history of rupture that we must locate the particular performativity of the manifesto. (Puchner, 2002:451)

The manifesto, a dramaturgical devise for deliberate incommensurability, led the initial stages of rehearsals and led to the creation of a four-part movement structure for the piece, that was also informed by the qualities of the natural elements: earth, water, fire and air.

My autoethnographic research led me to Norton’s “six phases of heuristic research” (2017:7). In the first phase, initial engagement, I was exploring my frustrations with the industry, collecting stories and discovering my research topic. The immersion phase, which I found to be the most challenging, was the rehearsal phase towards the creation of a solo theatrical piece. Referencing Moustakas, Norton states that,

The process involves not only the intellect but also emotion, with the researcher attempting to understand the phenomenon in its wholeness and unique patterns of experience (MOUSTAKAS, 1990). (Norton, 2017:9 (capitals in original text))
During this phase I explored ways of generating material for the performance through the Viewpoints system which permitted an exploration beginning from the unknown. Working with shape, emotion, movement, space and time I could immerse myself in the exploration. However, this immersion was very challenging and emotionally charged and resulted in a distancing of myself from the world, in efforts to be in conversation with the phenomenon I was studying.

This is also the phase when my methodology began expanding to include phenomenology as an extension of the Viewpoints to further interrogate the pre-reflexive phase and, possibly, draw myself closer to the topic and research, through an embodied, responsive manner. In hindsight, I came to regard this phase as my own ‘productive undoing’, in that the tools I had previously used in the making of a theatre piece seemed to have lost their efficacy and I was required to ‘shift desires’ and find new ways of content generation for the task at hand. I later discovered that the free writing that happened during this period became the narrative abstractions for the final piece, *O Kae?*

During the incubation phase, the period of distancing the researcher from their study to allow for some objectivity, reflection and new insight upon returning to the project, I sought out directors and choreographers to enter the studio with me, went on a treasure hunt for inspiration and discovered that the conventional theatre form was not the form that would work for this inquiry. I had to employ the use of a new form and this resulted in the choice for an audio-visual installation, located outside of conventional theatre spaces.

The following phase, illumination, resulted in the first iteration of *O Kae?* which, I feel, was a literal reflection and engagement with the topic and fell short of exploiting the trope I had decided to work with and was perpetuating the erasure of the black woman even in its obvious attempt to represent her. Thus, the explication phase became a revisit of
my original intentions in the inquiry, towards relocating the black woman within the space she deserves to rightfully inhabit.

I revisited the concept of the black woman as surrogate and enabler of the dominant discourse and chose a hybrid persona of Amma-Osun, as the black woman’s surrogate and enabler. This newly fashioned goddess can find a way to appear and disappear at will, turning the gaze on herself. She can control a world of seeming disparate interactions in a performed theatrical ritual of rebirth. The location of this offering was also very important and the gallery and classroom chosen for the final two iterations was centred around the colonial architecture of the spaces, wooden floors and elevated ceilings. The space needed to be intimate and still seem about to consume her.

The sixth and final phase, creative synthesis, was the performance of the offering, that included candlelight, fruit, eggs, sand, water, cowrie shells and scent. A purge of the past to give rise to a new order. Abstractions of both the immersion phase writing and the manifesto formed the seeming dislocated narrative and informed the audio-visual choices for the installation.

Through this process I discovered that deliberate incommensurability, as a dramaturgical concept, requires a paradigm shift in the mind of the maker. Exploring this term autoethnographically, poses a lot of challenges as the process needs to move between experience and reflection, at a distance, and as a maker working completely solo in the studio, the distancing was slow in achieving. I would be interested in exploring this with a group of performers, while maintaining distance, as a director. To be able to properly and, almost, objectively reflect on how each of the stages affects and impacts on the rehearsal process and what material is created when there is an outside eye to make decisions and choices around their selection and deselection. As much as I maintain that the dramaturge is
the all-straddler of the performance world, there is a need for a detached eye to engage with the process of creation in order to further it and perhaps lessen the intensity and anxieties that arise from isolation.

Aesthetically, deliberate incommensurability offers an extensive range of possibilities to the creative process through the freedom given by the agency implied in the term. Far from being a refusal of contextualisation and translatability, it offers the space for testing levels of transparency, which then creates possibilities for non-linear narrative structures, cyclical time experimentation, discovery of new ways of engaging with language for the purposes of obfuscating communication. For as Appiah states, “it is a feature, simply put, of the written text that we don’t have settled and definite ideas about what matters about it” (1993:7). Deliberate incommensurability offers the prospect of ab-using all the learnt and historical ways of engaging with a creative process forcing the maker to seek new modes of material development and meaning-making. A rehearsal process of deliberate incommensurability, with phenomenology as the underpinning methodology and philosophy, that has a director monitoring while leading a cast of performers through the journey, would be an exercise in freedom.

The impulse toward phenomenology as a method is based on the realization that we can loosen our rationalist structures of meaning sufficiently to permit qualities that are associated with the pre-rational, such as ambiguity of meaning, fluidity of existential and conceptual structures, scope for entirely new thought, perceptions, including contradictions, reversals of meaning, or paradoxes. (Kozel, 2007:19)

On healing, autoethnography, coupled with phenomenology, as a methodology not only places the researcher as the subject and object of her own study but demands of the researcher to interrogate the self and raises whatever monsters are lurking under the
surface of the well-crafted personas that the researcher has used to protect herself. For the
dramaturge, director and performer to be situated in one body over the period of inquiry
can result in unpredictable mood swings, reliance on self-medication that is not always
productive, slow down the process of discovery and hamper creativity. When moments of
self-doubt arise and all these possible allies are located in the one doubting themselves, the
intensity of the frustration is that of three entities battling it out for a solution, in one body.
Any creative requires a sparring partner. However, pulling through on the other side of the
stagnation can be a strengthening process of rediscovery and restitution of self.

In my quest for a dramaturgical concept that locates the missing black woman in the
world of her fabrication, rules and modalities, I have found that visibility and audibility is not
always externally denied. The subject and/or object of study can deny the Other their
presence. The tools that allow for such agency rest in methodologies used and the resulting
interrogations. A socio-political reality is able to affect and influence artistic transformation
towards a reimagining or an imagining of a futurity where the one being excluded ab-uses
this exclusion for their own benefit and purposes. This does not mean that the status quo is
acceptable, but that in addressing it, there are many ways of centering the fringe and
aligning with it to allow for extensive experimentation on the multiple possible outcomes of
aesthetic and artistic inquiry.
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