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r/evolution begins within

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# r/evolution begins within

by d'bi.young anitafrika

**I AM** a child of the village. I was raised by the village. half of my life was spent in jamaica and the other half in canada. I am the result of the community taking time over and over again to give loving attention to the growing black girl child. what I share with you in the following story comes out of what the village has taught me about myself and about humanity.

I trust that I am doing my best to make choices that are good for me and the people around me. I trust that working hard is a sign of my relationship to what I believe in; to what will help me grow. I trust that I chose to come here in this human form at this time to do specific things. I trust that I am doing those things and I trust that as I go along I will learn how to better do those things. I trust that my actions are rooted in love and I trust that I do not hurt people intentionally. I trust that deep down I am loved by all. I trust that some people will show this love in loving ways and others in unloving ways. I trust that we are all learning how to better love ourselves and each other. I trust that I love my children and am learning day by day how to take better care of them. I trust that I am a spiritual being having a human experience and I trust that I love this experience. I trust that I am special and I trust that everyone is also special. I trust that everyday I bring change to the world and to myself. I trust you. I trust me. I trust we. I trust that what will be, will be.

it's through this ongoing developing trust that I navigate the world. it channels itself through my storytelling. I believe that I am a storyteller. I believe that we are all storytellers. we negotiate the world through the stories we tell and the stories we are told. I believe that we are accountable and responsible for the stories we tell

and the stories we believe. out of my own sense of responsibility and accountability to storytelling springs the *sorplusi methodology*. the word *sorplusi* is an acronym based on the seminal work of my mother, dubpoetry visionary anita stewart. trained during the early 1980s at the *jamaica school of drama* (now the *edna manley college of visual and performing arts*), anita stewart wrote her thesis *dubbin theatre: dub poetry as a theatre form* on the progressive movement of dubpoetry into a theatrical realm which radically dramatized both the socio-economic tribulations of the jamaican people, as well as their potential for rebellion against their imperial colonial oppressors.

in her unpublished manuscript stewart identifies four major elements of the then emerging art form of dubpoetry—*music, language, politics, and performance*—as bridges between the personal and the political and vice versa. stewart’s early documentation and analysis of dubpoetry as a working people’s

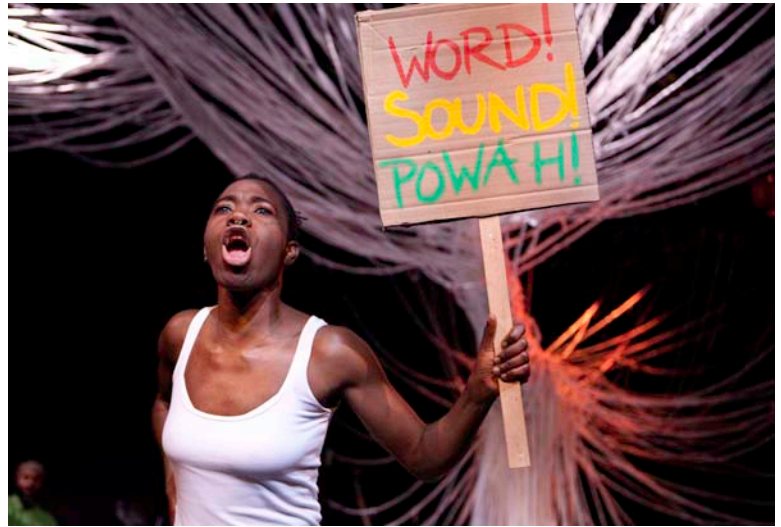
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sociopolitical movement provide the primary lens through which the *sorplusi methodology* focuses. dubpoetry is rooted in oral storytelling traditions that were brought to the americas by afrikan peoples. the main elements of dub as taught to me by my mother are (1) *language*, (2) *politics*, (3) *music*, and (4) *performance*. as I developed my own understanding of dub I added four more elements: *urgency, sacredness, integrity, and self-knowledge*. I then renamed the earlier elements of *music, politics, and performance* to *rhythm, political content and context, and orality*. I reorganized all eight principles into the acronym s.o.r.p.l.u.s.i. representing *self-knowledge, orality, rhythm, political content and context, language, urgency, sacredness, and integrity*. these ideas form a comprehensive eco-system of accountability and responsibility between my audiences and me. each principle in the methodology challenges me to not only be self-invested but to (re)position to the centre of my micro and macro communities, being both accountable and responsible (able to account for and respond to these communities). I fundamentally believe that my art mirrors society, encourages its self-critique, and inspires its self-growth.

when I write, these principles sit at the centre of my creative process. therefore my work is rooted in issues that concern the communities I belong to as a womban, as an afrikan, as a mother, as an artist, as a queer-identified person, as a working person, as an able-bodied person, as a not-so-new immigrant. engaging the audience is essential in communicating the story with them so it permeates the head and eventually rests in the heart. music and rhythm



d'bi.young holds a sign bearing the title of the third play in the *sankofa trilogy*, which premiered at the Tarragon Theatre in 2011.

Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann



d'bi.young reaches out to an audience member in the *sankofa trilogy* at the Tarragon Theatre, 2011.

Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann





d'bi.young in the *sankofa trilogy*, comprised of the three plays *blood.claa*t, *benu*, and *word!sound!powah!* that were generated from the *sorplusi methodology*.

Photo by Cylla von Tiedemann

and humour and honesty are good for that. the elements that I use to engage the audience as a dubpoet are the same elements I use to engage the audience as a playwright. it's all storytelling. I follow a cyclical–reciprocal model of teach and learn, mentor and be mentored, using art as a medium of self-interrogation and expression while mirroring the society around me.

these are the principles and I was taught by my mentors. the village who raised me and on whose art I was raised includes but is not limited to anita stewart (my mother), ahdri zhina mandiola, mikey smith, jean binta breeze, tracy chapman, amah harris, david reid, ava schurko, che kotari, donisha prendergast, weyni mengesha, amina alfred, jay pitter, jacqui alexander, trey anthony, angela rebeiro, iris turcott, djanet sears, layne coleman, and lászló marton. the theatre companies who provided an ongoing working example to me and space for me to create include: theatre in the rough, b current theatre, caliban theatre, nightwood theatre, buddies in bad times theatre, obsidian theatre, summerworks and fringe, canstage theatre, princess of wales theatre, soulpepper theatre, firehall theatre, gctc, and tarragon theatre. they have all influenced my work: teaching me that in the absence of what I need, I must create from what I have been given.

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being a young black afrikan-jamaican-canadian womban, what I have most needed is to see myself reflected in a positive, lovingly critical, and expansive way. therefore I create art that emerges out of my lived experience, grounded in afrikan oral storytelling traditions, and bathed in the magical realm of myth and folklore. coupled with the *sorplusi methodology*, I call the genre of storytelling that I am developing (influenced by many other genres and by

my mentors) *biomyth monodrama*. my use of the term *biomyth* refers to the abbreviation of the words biography and mythology. I first encountered the term reading audre lorde's *zami*, which she refers to as a *biomythography*.

in my reinterpretation of the term *biomyth*, biography pertains to the accounting of one's own lived experience; mythology, in this context, pertains to (a) the poetic reinterpretation of the lived experience and (b) the use of orature, folklore, myth, and magic in the process of reinterpretation. *biography-mythology* or *biomyth*, therefore, is the poetic space between what we interpret as real and what we deem make-believe. monodrama is theatrical solo-performance work. *biomyth monodrama* is a mythologized autobiographical play told by the story's creator/performer, using the eight *sorplusi* elements as the foundation of the creative process and also to weave the story together. poetry, music, magic/ritual, monologue, and dialogue (primarily with the audience) are by-products of the *sorplusi method* and are crucial stylistic, aesthetic, and technical considerations. a theatrical fourth wall is rarely present as the performer erases the divide between audience and storyteller, real and make-believe. the storyteller–audience relationship is crucial in *biomyth monodrama* storytelling: encouraging the biomythicist to constantly explore and expand the relationship with themselves, their communities, and their belief and practice in art as a tool for social transformation.

creating my own methodology and context through which to understand and develop my work as a storyteller allows me to continue to measure my growth by my own standards; like looking in the mirror and seeing myself beautiful as an antidote to what I was taught growing up, I see my self through my own eyes. storytelling allows me to repeatedly remove myself from scenarios that may compromise my ability to be empowered. self-determination is essential in identity, self-esteem, and community building. we are all responsible for telling our own stories and creating the means by which to tell them. we create. we live. we dialogue. we change ourselves and our families and our lovers and our friends.

I believe that artists are responsible for honouring the sacred in our present-day societies. people, our livelihoods, our planet, our cosmos, and beyond are sacred. I feel that if the work we create is truly for the people then we can't avoid asking questions about our present state of being (globally, nationally, locally, personally). no one enjoys being hurt, left out, disregarded, disrespected, used, abused, and not being celebrated. being loved, admired, celebrated, challenged, inspired, having food, a roof, and safety helps the spirit to not only feel good, but to find its own generosity. when we look around at our world, it's inevitable that some serious questions will be asked. the artist decides what questions, what style to ask the questions in, what characters to ask the questions through, and so forth. but undoubtedly the questions will be posed and maybe we will even uncover some answers.

this is how I challenge systems of oppression within myself and within society. there is much room for joy and celebration in this process. it is through this continuous cycle of storytelling that I find my happiness, peace, and liberation. I trust storytelling can do the same for you and all of us. and as a final note, remember: as you (re)negotiate storytelling within your life know that every action begins with inaction. by this I mean to say that through meditative silence all is revealed. be sure to ground yourself firstly in an ongoing personal practice of silence and from that place, all your truth (questions and answers and practice) will emerge.

to learn more about the *sorplusi method* see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so30jb93q5c>