

The dance artistry of Diane Alison- Mitchell and Paradigmz: Accounting for professional practice between 1993 and 2003

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Diane Alison-Mitchell and the dance artist known as Paradigmz started their careers in the 1990s. They went on to become accomplished dance artists. Between 1993 and 2003 the independent dance sector expanded in terms of activity yet there was very little training in Higher Education for a career as a dance artist in the Dance of the African Diaspora (DAD) as a sector. Furthermore, the administrative debate over the definition of Black Dance at a peak made career definition difficult. Produced through a combination of narrative and critical inquiry, this paper looks at how Diane Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz developed careers during this period, through on-the-job learning and self-directed professional development projects and engaging with events organised by dance industry professionals. The DAD sector is posited as a community of practice that brings into view ways that the dance practitioners during this time generated discourses to create a context for professional practice. The career journeys of Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz display how their critical engagement with a range of activities and dance discourses in the UK and abroad enabled them to develop a dance practice with a hybrid but specific identity from a range of dance forms, techniques, modes of dance making and performance.

Introduction

Diane Alison-Mitchell (Adewole 2015a) and the dance artist known as Paradigmz (Adewole 2015b) started their careers in the 1990s. They went on to become accomplished dance artists. Amongst others dance companies, Paradigmz performed with Jonzi D Productions and Garth

Fagan Dance Company and Alison-Mitchell, with Sakoba Dance Theatre and Adzido Dance. Alison-Mitchell was also a dance manager, producer and consultant and Paradigmz founded a dance company, the London Diaspora Dance Theatre. In Britain, the terms 'dance artists' and 'independent dancers' refer to self-employed dancers, often with portfolio careers, who have built a dance practice on teaching, performing and choreography and other skills such as project management. They were both associated mainly with what in Britain is called the Black dance/ African Peoples' dance sector or more recently the 'Dance of the African Diaspora', or DAD sector. Between 1993 and 2003, the period the majority of this paper focuses on, the independent dance sector expanded in terms of activity yet there was very little training in Higher Education for a career as a dance artist in the Dance of the African Diaspora. Produced through a combination of narrative and critical inquiry, this paper looks at how Diane Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz developed careers during this period, through on-the-job learning and self-directed professional development projects and engaging with events organised by dance industry professionals. Academic research into the professional context for the Dance of the African Diaspora has recently grown due to two publications which both carry chapters relating to professional practice. These are *Narratives in Black British Dance: Embodied Practices* (2018) by Adesola Akinyele and *British Dance: Black Routes* (2016) edited by Ramsay Burt and Christy Adair.

Crossing paths with Diane Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz

I first crossed paths with Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz in dance workshops and forums in the mid-1990s, mainly in London, organised by the Association of Dance of the African Diaspora (ADAD) which was an organisation offering professional support to mainly black dancers working in the subsidized arts. I approached them for interviews years later for the reasons I have outlined in the introductory section and for the additional reason that I, like them, began a career in dance in the 1990s. Due to this shared background, I could discuss with Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz the task of starting a career in a context of emerging artistic and cultural discourses and changing infrastructure for independent dance. An established approach to narrative inquiry takes place in a three-dimensional space (Clandinin 2006, 47); that of interaction between the people involved in creating the narrative, its timespan and the places or locations in which it takes place (Clandinin 2006, 47). Following this approach, I recognise that the interviewees and I are co-creators of the stories produced. In the research role I point out the important themes in their stories using signalling words and the pronoun 'I' where required, revealing my positionality. I occasionally contacted Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz over the years informing them of the progress I was making in preparing this paper. In order to demonstrate how their career narratives are part of on-going 'social, cultural and institutional' narratives (Clandinin 2006, 47), I also engage in theorising the DAD sector as a community of practice (Figure 1).

Gonzalez deploys the concept of 'community of practice', in her chapter 'Framing and naming Black British Dance' in *British Dance: Black Routes* to group dance practitioners who use African and Diasporic forms within the subsidized sector (2016, 173). Gonzalez was invited by the editors to write a chapter reflecting on the contents of the book. The tensions that arise when 'communities of practice' seek 'sponsorship' is one of the recurring themes Gonzalez identifies across the publication (2016, 173). The designation allows her to delineate the struggles of the group into those related to ascribing a 'cultural identity' to their work and those

related to the discourses produced by arts funders who seek to 'categorise' their work in line with cultural policy (2016, 173). Through focussing on how a community of practice operates, I extend its use for the purposes of explaining how dance practitioners; managers, producers, educators as well as dance artists, generated a discourse that provided a 'cultural identity' for their work during the years mentioned, an occurrence which was overshadowed at the time by the administrative discourses of the funding system.

According to Étienne Wenger, a community of practice is unlike a team where a group of people come together to carry out a task. It is the social activity of 'negotiating competence in a domain over time' that creates the community (Farnsworth, Kleanthous, and Wenger-Trayner 2016, 6). The domain is the area of common interest with which practitioners are engaged. Over time, practitioners develop a 'shared repertoire of resources' or narratives through common learning activities which might be as informal as meeting to discuss the experience of working in the field (Farnsworth, Kleanthous, and Wenger-Trayner 2016, 6). For the Dance of the African Diaspora this domain of interest is the use of dances of Africa and the Diaspora in the subsidized dance sector. The brief historical account that follows seeks to demonstrate the importance of the resources and narratives used by practitioners to generate a philosophical context that would provide the cultural identity for professional practice.

Professional practice as a community of practice: 1993 to 2003

In the early 1990s, the infrastructure for the independent dance sector expanded with the establishment of the National Dance Agencies by the Arts Council. At the time the professional context for the DAD sector had several touring dance companies. Some were established in the 1980s such as Union Dance, IRIE! Dance Theatre, Phoenix Dance Company, Kokuma Dance Company and Adzido Pan African Dance Ensemble and others in the 1990s such as RJC, JazzExchange, Sakoba Dance Theatre and Badejo Arts. The companies also provided training for dancers who performed with them regularly. Some offered open classes, masterclasses, summer schools and other events (Carty 2007, 16–21). The Black Dance Development Trust (BDDT) established in 1985 created the African People's dance sector for dance companies working with African and Caribbean dance and music. It was defunded in 1990 (Adewole 2017, 130–131). Just after the establishment of the National dance agencies, in 1993, Arts Council published the report *Advancing Black Dancing* to encourage discussion amongst dance practitioners about the kind of dance support organisation Black dancers needed (Bryan 1993a). The discussion raised questions over what kind of Black dance required this support triggering a debate over the definition of Black dance. According to Sporton the discussion documents produced during this era about dance related to non-western cultures tended to merge issues around 'social inclusion, economic hardship, creative

expression and immigration' (2004, 86) to produce a discourse useful for social agendas but unsuitable for illuminating artistic practice.

The response of dance practitioners to the debates around Black dance was to produce events and dance practices accompanied by a discourse which framed their work on their own terms. I posit as 'shared resources' concepts from these discourses that began to be circulated and discussed by practitioners at this time, such as 'Africanist aesthetics' and variants of this term, 'Black British dance aesthetics', 'choreographic fusion' and 'dance practice'. Moreover, new scholarship on Black dance in America offered inspiration to British based artists. The concept of Africanist dance aesthetics in particular became popular in the 1990s through two books: *AFRICAN DANCE: An Artistic, Historical and Philosophical Inquiry* (1998) by Kariamuw Welsh Asante and *Digging the Africanist Presence in American Performance: Dance and Other Contexts* (1998) by Brenda Dixon Gottschild. Africanist aesthetics is a conceptual framework which catalogues the similarities between African and Diasporic dances such as the use of flexed feet, soft knees, a fluid spine, high-low juxtaposition, polycentricism, polyrhythm. I remember differences of opinion amongst practitioners about the aforementioned terms and the histories in which they are situated. Some terms such as 'Black dance' have at different periods in the history of the dance sector been considered to be more of a hindrance than a help. Other terms like African Peoples' dance lost meaning for some dance practitioners when co-opted into an administrative discourse. I argue nevertheless, that these terms provided a means of agency for several dance practitioners, offering a philosophical context for their initiatives.

To think of the Dance of the African Diaspora as a community of practice is to focus on how the dance organisations and independent dancers with this shared domain of interest and used and circulated these resources through their work. Three notable initiatives in the 1990s which contributed to the identity of the professional sector were the *Bami Jo* summer school, the establishment of ADAD, and the conference *Ancient Futures*. The *Bami Jo* the summer school established by Badejo Arts in 1993 was responsible for bringing to Britain a range of important practitioners working with African and Diasporic forms in innovative ways, over the course of its thirteen years of existence (Omoloja 2013). I recall the visits of Georges Momboye, Zab Maboungou and L'Antoinette Stines. The second was the founding of ADAD in 1994, evolving out of several meetings of dance artists in 1993 to discuss issues around "Black dance/ Dance of the African Diaspora", "approaches to training" and the "politics of dance" and funding' (ADAD Steering Committee 1994). The third, *Ancient Futures*, was an 'international season of contemporary Black dance' produced by Beverley Glean, the artistic director of IRIE! Dance Theatre. It brought the companies L'Acadco from Jamaica and Forces of Nature from the USA to perform alongside IRIE! Glean hoped the season would demonstrate that culturally diverse choreography was characteristic of the Dance of the African diaspora and strengthen the context for companies like her own. Hilary Carty, writing in the foreword of the season's brochure as Dance Officer at the Arts Council of England, described the

event as taking place at a 'critical time' for Black dance in Britain, which was striving to establish its identity at home and abroad (Carty 1996).

Dance platforms were a mechanism used by dance producers and administrators to generate a critical discourse for choreography. According to June Gamble, the administrator of ADAD in 1994, the organisation founded the first Black dance platform, in order to the answer to the question 'What is Black dance?' The thinking of the producers was that the answer to the question would emerge if artists were given the opportunity to produce choreography. At the time the organisers hoped that a 'new British Black dance aesthetic' would evolve 'that would celebrate the diverse dance, cultural, and social experiences that influence the work of individual dancers in the UK' (Gamble 2004, 7). Additionally, there were dance platforms for choreography related to specific forms of dance such as Hip Hop and contemporary African dance were established during this time. Hakeem Onibudo ran a platform at the Spitz in East London from 1995 for about 10 years featuring British based Hip Hop dance crews. Other platforms, most of which ran for two years, included; Nubian Steps (1996), produced by David Byran, The Black Dance Festival (1998) produced by Vicky Spooner, Tilewa, contemporary African dance platform, (1999), by Badejo Arts and The Hip festival (2001) by Brenda Edwards. Dancers also took part in platforms like Resolution and MOSAICS. An explosion of what came to be called 'choreographic fusion' was the result which was celebrated by some and considered as a dilution of cultural forms by others (Barnes 2000, 28).

Two major training initiatives established in 1998 were the pilot certificate and diploma course in African and Caribbean dance established by IRIE! Dance theatre and the three-year Black Choreographic Initiative (BCI) established by Vivian Freakley and supported by a number of dance organisations in the Midlands and North of England. The first provided training in cultural dance forms and dance company repertoire (Bains date? 63) and the second was a professional development programme which took an artist-centred approach where each member of the all Black cohort set their own artistic and career goals based on individual and group decisions (Freakley 1998, 15–16). Both tested different frameworks to allow for reflection on the issues arising when working with cultural dance forms in a subsidized dance sector.

Amidst these developments, the debate over Black dance and the question as to what kind of infrastructure was required by the sector was ongoing, leading in 2000 to the publication of a report by the Arts Council called *Time for Change: A Framework for the Development of African People's Dance Forms*. The writers, Hermin McIntosh, Lorraine Yates and Claudette McDonald, offered a different approach to issues of infrastructure and the debate over Black dance. Firstly, they argued that the whole dance sector needed to support Black dancers and that this responsibility could not be left to one Black-led organisation, considering the work of Black dancers cut across racial lines. Secondly, the report devised a framework which broke the African Peoples' Dance sector down into four 'levels of practice' or 'categories.' This was possibly to encourage organisations to support dance artists working in a specific type of

practice as opposed to simply supporting Black dancers. The 'first level of practice' in the framework is called 'Traditional technique' to describe 'work grounded in the heritage of Africa and the Caribbean', the 'second level of practice' is described as 'African Contemporary', the third category is ascribed to a 'synergy of experiences of Black British Choreographers and Dancers', the fourth as 'Black people in dance,' those whose training and work came from a 'western contemporary heritage' (McIntosh, et al. 1994, 15). The significance of the framework offered by *Time for Change* is not the actual groupings as these might change over time depending on the interests of dancers, but the fact that the framework recognised that the dance sector was building its work on dance practices as well as dance forms. The 'levels' recognised that some dance artists develop a methodology for working with dance forms.

The approaches to working with dance forms created by dance artists in the Dance of the African Diaspora are often overlooked due to a lack of critical discourse around the commonly used terms of African dance, Caribbean dance or African Peoples' dance in professional circles. The invisibility of these creative approaches however limit the development of the sector because professional discourses are constructed from the know-how of the practitioners (Irimiea 2017, 110). The writers of *Time for Change* wrote of organising focus groups about each level of practice they identified to ascertain their needs. Not much academic scholarship however has since focussed on this area. In terms of raising the profiles of dance artists, the ADAD Trailblazer Fellowship established in 2003 was highly significant. Launched after ADAD became a programme within Dance UK, the fellowship provided money for mid-career artists to carry out their self-directed professional development projects.

The career journeys of Diane Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz show how they participated in the professional sector described above and forged their careers through self-directed projects. Their stories reveal how developing a dance practice can be a dialogic process through which both the dancer and the dance world evolves.

Diane Alison-Mitchell: 'cultural regrounding'

Originally from Birmingham, Diane Alison-Mitchell's first encounter with theatrical dance was watching Kokuma Dance Company rehearsals through a crack in the door. The company used the same building as the Queensway Steel Band that she performed with at different events in the Midlands. She was a teenager at the time. At 18 she left England to live in Paris for 4 years. During this period, she saw an advert for a dance class and went to go and see. She turned up at École de Danse de Bastille and met dancer and teacher Jean Fortuné de Souza from Benin. She later also met Congolese choreographer, dancer and teacher Lolita Babindamana. For the next two years, she trained with both these teachers learning forms from Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Benin and Congo. Additionally, she travelled with de Souza to Cotonou in Benin Republic for two months intensive training and performed with his company, Aidohéudo Dance Troupe.

After returning to England from France, Alison-Mitchell went to the University of Sussex to read Social Anthropology and Development Studies. During this time she performed with Mashango African Dance Company under Risenga Makondo which was supported by South East Arts, and toured with the company, performing in *Ekhaya* (1996). Peter Badejo choreographed a solo performed by Alison-Mitchell in this production. While working with Mashango, the company was trained by South African Dance Company Manyanani from Cape Town and British Caribbean dance artist, 'H' Patten. After graduating, Alison-Mitchell moved to London and gained employment with the Dance Department of Arts Council England and continued to perform.

The role with the Arts Council gave her an overview of the dance ecology of the time. She regularly met with independent artists and emerging companies. She also administrated the dance funding programme. 'I struggled with the huge difference between the level of funds available and the amount that artists and companies were applying for, and I witnessed colleagues in the industry miss out on funding year in year out,' she said. She provided administrative support for consultations and research projects that the Arts Council commissioned into the African People's Dance sector (as it was then known) which culminated in the Time for Change conference in 2001. She was acutely aware of the issues facing the sector – (in)visibility, funding, recognition, validation, lack of knowledge among reviewers, debates over definitions and labels. She noticed how little was being said about the actual dance practice itself. 'It was always difficult to reconcile that there was no formal technical training for the dance I was passionate about and on which my career was based', she said reflecting on this time.

On leaving the Arts Council in 1999, she continued to perform whilst working as a freelance dance manager/producer with companies such as Kwesi Johnson's Kompany Malachi, Joumana Mourad's Ijad Dance Company and Step Afrika! UK. She also expanded her training further into Caribbean forms. With the support of an Arts Council International Fellow Award, she went to study at Jamaican School of Dance in Kingston. She also had the opportunity to travel to Cuba, training in Afro-Cuban dance at the Centro Africano Fernando Ortiz in Santiago de Cuba. She became involved with Afro-Cuban companies in London. She performed with *Meta Meta*, an Afro Cuban jazz group led by Barak Schmool. With *Meta Meta* she was trained by and duetted with Cuban dancer and choreographer Rodolfo Hechavarria Fournier. She performed in a duet with Cuban dancer Guillermo 'El Iyawo' Davis.

Alison-Mitchell said she was particularly passionate about investigating the technical basis of African and Caribbean dances. She read books by Hilary Carty, Brenda Dixon Gottschild, Kariamou Welsh Asante, and Zab Moubongou. She felt the emphasis of certain modes of presenting African dances fuelled stereotypes. 'African dances are not all about pounding the floor; there were other ways the body could be grounded – there are dances that have strong verticality or which place the centre higher than the pelvis' she says. It was whilst working as a freelance dance manager and consultant that she was selected to dance with Sakoba Dance

Theatre, a company she admired. She felt her dance technique arrived at cohesion whilst performing with this company through engaging with the choreography of Bode Lawal. The experience she says increased her confidence as a professional dancer. She also performed for Francis Angol's Movement Angol, the Dance Movement and London Diaspora Dance Theatre. She was a dancer with Adzido Dance, in work created by Gregory Maqoma and Zenzi Mbuli, before the company closed in 2005.

A significant moment for Alison-Mitchell was a trip she took in 2002 to South Africa for a two-month sabbatical with Moving into Dance Mophatong (MID). The sabbatical was conceived when she met Vincent Mantsoe, the deputy Artistic Director, in 1999 when he was in London for Dance Umbrella. As the recipient of a Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship and a Trailblazer Fellowship from ADAD she was able to go to South Africa. MID is both a professional dance company and a training organisation. It offers a one year performing arts course, an apprentice scheme and an outreach programme for recreational dance. Its founder Sylvia Glasser pioneered Afrofusion which is an approach to fusing African dances and Western dance techniques. Once in South Africa, Alison-Mitchell took part in the company's intensive programme which included classes in African, Afrofusion and contemporary dance, body conditioning, anatomy and physiology, anthropology, teaching methodologies and music. In exchange she offered workshops in arts management to cohorts of students and professionals from different institutions. She described the sabbatical as giving her the opportunity as 'a dancer of Jamaican heritage working in African dance aesthetics' to draw inspiration from the continent. It was the 'boldness and innovation' that she found in contemporary dance, South African traditional dance aesthetics, South Asian dance forms and live art' that was inspiring. Alison-Mitchell sought to engage with how MID sustained and facilitated the dance sector in South Africa, not solely through dance activity. Her greatest challenge on this trip she says was deciding what kind of class to teach to the dance students and professionals she had met through the centre. She recalls having to take time to study the arts funding system to understand what would be relevant in their sector. 'Cultural Regrounding' (Mitchell 2002, 33-4) is the title of the article she wrote on her return for the Foundation for Community Dance magazine. Referring to her time as a professional dancer in Britain she says she never quite felt like part of the independent dance sector but that there was certainly a community of dancers. She describes Jackie Guy and Namron as role models who had the ability to bring dancers together. Attending their classes and doing performances for them, she says she always felt like coming together with others to share practice and knowledge.

Paradigmz: 'Black British aesthetics' and Jamaican Dance Hall

Paradigmz started dancing as a teenager at parties and in clubs. He describes his 'street education' coming from hanging out with regular guys who were dancing in the jazz-fusion scene. He described himself as 'raw talent' – a street dancer, who had never stepped into a studio to

take class. He was not a member of any dance crews. He would go to Sheffield and Newcastle battling in the clubs, attending the all-dayers and weekenders. Originally, he wanted to be an actor, but he met a teacher from Central School of Speech and Drama and she opened his eyes to what he could do with movement. He decided he would go into dance while he was young and maybe go into acting at a later stage.

According to Paradigmz, it was watching *Gang of Five*, a piece that Aletta Collins choreographed for Phoenix Dance Company that made him decide to train in contemporary dance. In 1993, he enrolled for a B.A Honours degree in Contemporary Dance at Bretton Hall. He says he was one of the last people to get a fully funded education. Being the only Black person and male student on his course was amusing he says, as was being from South London but attending a university in a leafy town in the north of England. Bretton Hall, for Paradigmz, was an amazing experience. Wayne McGregor was an artist in residence and Janet Smith and Dancers were in residence for a time. Later Janet Smith joined the faculty. The work of choreographers of African and Caribbean descent was included in the theory taught by Christy Adair. He says he was also fortunate to work with RJC whilst he was studying. RJC had a piece called *Shared Testimony*, which they toured in 1994/5. In every city they had a section in which they incorporated a performance by a youth group. But in Leeds they had an audition which he got to hear about through hanging out in Chapeltown where he would go as a South Londoner to get 'a piece of culture' – this was where most of the Black communities were. He attended the audition and was given a place, combining rehearsing at the Yorkshire Playhouse with his university studies. That, he says, was his first experience of a professional company and a Black company. It was this experience that sparked his interest in 'Black dance' particularly as a theatrical experience. He also did a piece with Irvn Lewis in Leeds. He wrote his final year dissertation on RJC and Phoenix. He says there was a lot of discussion about Phoenix at the time, about it once being an all-male company which now had female dancers. Some people were in two minds about this development but Paradigmz felt they had brought a new energy and varied the aesthetics of the company.

Paradigmz had heard about some of the debates about Black dance but thought they were laughable. He knew there was an economic and political context to the debate, which people did not seem to see. When he graduated, he found the politics around Black dance disempowering and the way Black performers were described and labelled in publicity and in discussions very confusing. Henri Oguike was described as part of Black dance but was doing 'white work'. Kokuma, he says, was being described in publicity as an African dance company when it was a Caribbean dance company. There was no written material or policies around naming so the feeling he had was that all forms could be lumped together under banners like 'African dance'. There were so many disparate ideas about Black dance that the debates could not be resolved. The term 'Black dance' was problematic for him because all these African and Caribbean forms had their own names and were distinct despite their similarities.

Furthermore, there was no discussion about the relationship between choreographic practice and dance form.

A year after graduating Paradigmz confronted the problems around definition in a concrete way when he participated in two major auditions. He auditioned for Kokuma Dance Company, two years after the long-standing artistic director Jackie Guy had left. The audition comprised of a class and a workshop in which you were taught a piece of repertoire. He loved the class - it was a Caribbean dance class. However, the repertory piece taught by Patrick Acogny was African based. He found this incongruent. He felt this split in the identity of Kokuma was a result of the confusion about Black dance and how it affected decision-making by funding bodies and organisers and he was unsure he wanted to work there. Paradigmz' second successful audition was for Sakoba Dance Company founded by Bode Lawal. He was drawn to Lawal's philosophy behind his choreographic practice, described at different times as post-traditional and post-modern. He was known for applying postmodern compositional devices to creating performance with African dance forms. Paradigmz liked the clarity of the company's identity as an African dance company with a repertoire based mainly on Nigerian dances.

Lawal had a great impact on Paradigmz. 'Lawal's method of teaching was hands on. He would place his hands on your body at the point the movement should initiate from and ask you to observe in the mirror. It was a method that enabled him to articulate movement clearly. He loved Bode's choreography: 'I found it enthralling. So as mad and crazy as Bode was, I decided to do a season with him and I so enjoyed that season that I did another one back-to-back. That was me 1996 to 1998'. After

Sakoba he performed with Bullies Ballerinas on a piece which was a fusion of African dance movement and Lindy hop. Through this he got to work with Norman 'Rubba' Stephenson and Judith Palmer who he describes as awesome teachers who could break movement down. They were extremely patient and could 'teach from the ground up', referring to their ability to explain to dancers how to connect to the floor through their feet.

Paradigmz thrived on his versatility. 'When you are Black and male there are opportunities to work if you are prepared to be open and diversify your skillset. Some say, jack of all trades and master of none but I see it rather as being a master of dance', he said. Though Paradigmz trained in formal dance education, he sees his 'groundation' (foundation) in 'the street' as being a significant part of his training. Jazz fusion gave Paradigmz a way into other styles. "Some of Kuduro, a Côte d'Ivoire style, and Chicago foot work, even some of the Pansula moves – have some similarities to Jazz fusion. In House dance you see a lot of Jazz-fusion steps but with a different 'bounce'" he explains. Jazz-fusion continues to influence dance today says Paradigmz. He cites Irven Lewis as an influential dancer and choreographer who had an impact on the style of many younger dancers. He also remembers seeing choreographers like Robert Hylton at the jams, even the guys from RJC in the clubs.

As a performer he was keen that each job was a learning experience and so chose work carefully. His memories include a jazz-fusion duet with Kwesi Johnson, performing in a piece choreographed by Ukachi Akalawu, presented at Resolution! which combined Jazz, Contemporary and African dance movement, performing with Jonzi D in *Aeroplane Man* (1995) which was for him, a return to Hip Hop. Phoenix inspired him to dance at a high technical level as did teachers Namron, Bill Louther and Stuart Thomas. He auditioned for the Lion King, a West End production by Disney when Garth Fagan was auditioning for the first ever British cast. Paradigmz was given the choice by Fagan of dancing for the Lion King or for his own company, Garth Fagan Dance. He chose the latter. He had been intrigued as to why American companies were technically stronger than British companies. He accepted the post of apprentice but found working with the company difficult. It was structured in a similar way to a ballet company, and having the background of a freelancer working with project-by-project companies he found its systems too rigid. He stayed for the whole season but left immediately afterwards. He had however achieved a goal of working for an American company and an understanding of how methods of organisation produce certain aesthetics.

A key moment for Paradigmz was a trip he made in 1999 to Jamaica. He wanted to find out about the dance culture that represented him as a human being. He found out from Jackie Guy that his mother was born in St Thomas in Jamaica which was a stronghold for the Kumina dance, and his father was from St. Elizabeth, close to the Jamaican Maroon compound. During a lengthy discussion Guy suggested to Paradigmz that it was time for him to visit. His first visit was when Guy was there working and so he could benefit from his presence. He later went back to Jamaica

in 2001 to research Jamaican Dancehall. During this period Paradigmz also began working towards establishing a company. Two projects lead to its beginnings; the Moving Arts Lab led by Emilyn Claid with Nigel Charnock, Vena Ramphal, Mavin Khoo, and other participants, and his own research project funded by Chisenhale Dance Space which allowed him to continue the movement exploration he had begun in the lab. The outcomes were technical exercises which combined Dancehall, western contemporary dance, Jazz and Ballet. In 2002, he established the London Diaspora Dance Theatre. Beside technique, rhythm was very important to Paradigmz' choreography. He would take his dancers out to nightclubs to ensure they could express themselves freely to music. He described his emerging aesthetic as 'Black British'.

The Hip Festival: a seminal event

The Hip Festival 2001–2002 was organised by Brenda Edwards, one of Britain's first Black ballerinas at the established Robyn Howard Dance Theatre in London, under the direction of John Ashford. Diane Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz performed in both years of Hip. Edwards used her cultural capital to attract media attention which was not an easy accomplishment at the time. I describe it as a seminal event because of the impact it had on the sector. As an audience member and part of the sector, I believe the excitement was for a number of reasons. The festival was built around solo performances putting the spotlight on well-known dancers who up until then had only been seen in company productions, as part of dance platforms or work in progress sharings. Additionally, it allowed soloists to show off their own choreographic approaches. Edwards celebrated the diverse choreographic approaches and cultural representation. At the centrepiece of the festival was 'Hip: 12 & 1', a night of 12 solo performances. Two international solo artists were also invited to participate.

On the festival's 2001 publicity leaflet, the artists are listed alongside their style or genre rather than the title of their piece, in keeping with Edwards' agenda of drawing attention to the diversity of forms and styles to be found under the umbrella of Black dance: Diane Alison-Mitchell (Caribbean dance, choreographed by Jackie Guy), Greta Mendez (Live Art), Melanie Teall (Contemporary, choreographed by Chris Tudor), Sheron Wray (Fusion Improvisation), Jane Sekonya (Street Fusion, choreographed by Robert Hylton), Brenda Edwards (Contemporary), Paul Henry (Jazz), Benji Reid (Physical Theatre), Andile Sotiya (Contemporary African) Curtis James (Contemporary), Alan Miller (now known as Paradigmz: Urban Caribbean). The festival was one of the first to give a platform to the new wave of contemporary dance artists emerging out of Africa in the 1990s in Britain. Julie Dossavi and Salia and Seydou with Dramane Diabate performed and led workshops alongside British artists Colin Poole and Paul Henry and the eight-woman artistic collective MPD (Music, Poetry, Dance).

Diane Alison-Mitchell describes participating in Hip as like being part of a family. When Brenda Edwards invited her to perform a solo, she created

one with Jackie Guy as choreographer. The outcome was *Know di I*. The piece drew on dance vocabulary from Caribbean forms using a modern dance compositional structure. She went on to create a second solo, choreographed by Christopher Walker from The National Dance Theatre of Jamaica, which she performed in the UK and abroad. Paradigmz also describes the festival as a great experience. He created a comedic dance to music by Elephant Man. Costumed as an English noble, his choreography juxtaposed movement from Jamaican dancehall with classical ballet. Commenting on the mixed reviews, he says the irony was lost on some of the audience; he, however, was satisfied with the piece. Thea Nerissa Barnes wrote about Hip 2002 festival as part of the ADAD Critically Crucial Writing Scheme. She did not write reviews of performances but reflected on the relevance of the festival. She described it as an answer to the need to show the variety of aesthetics that both Black and white dancers employ. Of the performances she wrote 'The use of African/South African, Caribbean, and street dance lexicons of moves and moods illustrated the breath of movement expression used to achieve singular modes of art practice. Hip illustrated how a person takes embodied knowledge and welds it to exemplify and personify her or his life' (Barnes 2003, 6).

The dancer-artistry of Diane Mitchell and Paradigmz

Diane Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz worked successfully as dance artists and contributed to a range of memorable performances with companies from the 1990s into the 2000s (Figure 2). Through years of sustained work in dance, they produced dance practices through which they could perform, teach and choreograph. Their accounts reveal that though their dance practices were hybrid, yet artistically focused. Diane Alison-Mitchell's professional development was shaped by her interest in investigating the technical basis of dances from South and West Africa, Cuba and the Caribbean. This was combined with a strong interest in how African dance aesthetics are framed within different artistic genres and formats. She gained insight into the ways dance organisations provided support for dance practices that draw on traditional and social forms through her experiences at the Arts Council and MID.

Paradigmz's vision as a dance artist led him to explore the relationship between choreographic methods and social dance forms. He preferred choreographic practices that illuminated the technical basis and features of dances from specific regions. He also developed a teaching practice in Jamaican Dancehall. Paradigmz looked into the support provided for choreographic development through organisations such as Chisenhale Dance Space to develop his practice. The professional dance sector as a community of practice provided opportunities for their learning as seen in the common themes in their narratives. The 'shared resources' of the sector, particularly concepts such as 'Africanist dance aesthetics' and 'Black British dance aesthetics' were useful in supporting how they negotiated the confusing debates around Black dance by offering a direction for their cultural and artistic exploration. The professional sector offered mentorship and inspiration, in this case through Jackie Guy and Bode

Lawal, seminal events such as the Hip festival, and grants such as the Trailblazers fellowship which enabled them to situate their work in the international terrain of transnational exchange.

Diane Alison-Mitchell went on to study actor movement practice and movement direction in theatre at the Central School of Speech and Drama after she decided she had come to the end of her journey as a professional dancer in 2007. As part of her research in movement direction she investigated ways of using the aesthetics and techniques of African and Caribbean dances in training actor's bodies. She has credits on shows at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC), Almeida Theatre, Royal and Derngate, Bush Theatre and Young Vic and has written a chapter in *Shakespeare, Race and Performance: The Diverse Bard* (2017) edited by Delia Jarrett-Macauley which documents how she used her movement direction method to create the physical life of the RSC's *Julius Caesar* in 2012. She is now Head of Movement at Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She co-founded and co-leads the Movement Directors' Association, and continues to work as a freelance movement director. Paradigmz continued his research into Jamaican Dancehall with a trailblazer Fellowship in 2004/5. He also studied for an MA in Arts Management. In 2009, he closed the London Diaspora Dance Theatre. Though disappointed by lack of support, he was pleased that the company had provided a launchpad for a number of dancers' careers. He went on to develop *Lenba*, a trademarked Afrobarre training system produced from his knowledge of African and Caribbean dance and Classical Ballet. Paradigmz has since founded an online platform M.E.C (Movement Exercise Choreography) which is a vehicle for his dance pedagogy and work in dance for health.

In conclusion, Diane Alison-Mitchell and Paradigmz' journeys show they developed as dance artists through studying dance as performed in varied and nuanced contexts. They critically engaged with the dance sector to develop their practices which in turn have invigorated and inspired the sector. Additionally, the community of practice model reveals that dance practitioners working in Dance of the African Diaspora between 1993 and 2003 produced a viable philosophical context for practice within independent dance.

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