

The National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs (1986-89): a community of practice

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Abstract:

The Foundation for Community Dance is the national lead body for community dance in the UK. It has been at the forefront of the development of community dance in Britain continuously for over twenty five years. It began, in 1986, as the National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs (NADMA). This professional association of dance practitioners (referred to at the time as animateurs) sought to raise awareness of a newly identified profession and provide a forum for the dissemination of the forms, working processes and techniques needed to work successfully in community settings. This paper seeks to instigate a critical assessment of NADMA's work by considering it in relation to theoretical debates concerning cultural provision and pedagogic practice of the time and, subsequently, to the theory of communities of practice. The paper considers the cultural and educational policy contexts within which the dance animateurs, who formed and ran the association, worked. This helps explain the multiple demands and tensions, inherent in the cultural and pedagogic politics of the time, to which the profession was subject. The paper suggests that these were ultimately managed through the cooperative and collective working of NADMA members. In the five years following NADMA's formation some key parameters for dance development in Britain were established. The paper suggests that NADMA made a significant contribution to such development by helping to create a more integrated, adaptable dance profession and an infrastructure for participatory dance that pre-figured the national dance agency network of the 1990s.

Community dance, in the sense of participatory, creative dance facilitated by professional practitioners, emerged during the 1970s and 1980s in the UK. It was one of several specialized disciplines prefigured by a community arts movement that developed in the late 1960s. It has become a key feature of the British dance ecology with values and practices that have gained international recognition. The sector has been led by the Foundation for Community Dance continuously for twenty seven years. Now an organization with a membership in excess of 4,500 dance professionals worldwide, the Foundation 'works with, and on behalf of artists, organizations and teachers involved in leading, delivering or supporting community and participatory dance' (Foundation for Community Dance 2012). The Foundation began in

1986 as the National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs (NADMA); in 1989 it became the Community Dance and Mime Foundation and in 1995 the Foundation for Community Dance.

This article is concerned with that first professional association, NADMA. The five years both preceding and following NADMA's formation in 1986 witnessed significant expansion and diversification of dance provision in Britain. It was a decade in which some key parameters for the development of British dance were established. I argue that NADMA members were key to that expansion and development. Their particular contribution was to bring the worlds of professional, community and educational dance closer together. In doing so they were key to determining the nature of the infrastructure for dance as it exists in England today.

This article seeks to instigate a critical assessment of NADMA's work by considering it in relation to theoretical debates concerning cultural provision and pedagogic practice of the time and, subsequently, to the theory of communities of practice outlined by Etienne Wenger (1998). It begins with a consideration of the cultural and educational policy contexts within which the dance animateurs (who formed and ran the association) worked. This helps explain the multiple demands placed on this 'newly identified profession' (Glick 1986:7) and the tensions to which it was subject especially in the 1980s. The article then considers how these were managed through cooperative and collective learning led by NADMA members.

'Animateur' is not a term commonly used today. Its origins lie in the applied theory of socio-cultural animation developed in France and continental Europe in the mid 1970s (Foth 2006). In 1976 animation was described as that:

which moves people to undertake a range of experiences through which they find a greater degree of self-realization, self-expression, and awareness of belonging to a society over which they can exercise an influence, and in the affairs of which they are impelled to participate (Simpson 1976a:1).

In other words, socio-cultural animation was one way of protecting democratic ideals in a post-industrial Europe experiencing economic recession and social upheaval. Simpson¹ goes on to suggest that:

In post-industrial Europe this stimulus seldom comes to the vast majority of people from the circumstances of daily life. It has to be contrived as something additional to the normal rural or urban environment. It needs the work of animateurs and the creation of facilities (Simpson 1976a:1).²

Animateurs worked not only in the arts but also in sport (Waters 1989:61) and were described at the time as 'a special, highly skilled

¹ J.A. Simpson was Director of the European Council for Cultural Co-operation's project on socio-cultural community development

² Simpson was writing in the forward to Jor's 1976 report on a survey (undertaken in 1975) of the operation of new cultural centres in Europe commissioned by the Council for Cultural Co-operation for the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers with responsibility for Cultural Affairs held in Oslo, 1976.

coach/teacher/leader of the unskilled public' (Walker 1978:14). They were seen as a kind of community activist at a time when 'community work grew as an activity in both statutory and voluntary sectors as the state became increasingly involved in the task of addressing social, political and economic change' (Popple 1995:15).

Sociocultural animation became significant at a time of concern to many European governments and cultural policy makers to widen public participation in the arts. How to stimulate further access to and participation in the arts was a common theme underpinning arts policies in Europe in the 1970s (Walker, 1978). In 1978 it was reckoned that only 10% of the population in Europe considered themselves to be art-going; for the remaining 90% 'art is a closed, off-putting and indeed, irrelevant world' (Walker 1978:11). The 10% that did engage did so as appreciators and receivers of art—an involvement that 'is basically non-creative and non-participant' (Boothby and Tungatt, 1978:53). There appeared to be a gap between art and society in which art was a 'self contained entity' (Braden 1978:10) and artists a separate professional body selling their art to those educated and wealthy enough to appreciate and consume it. In Britain a 1976 report on support for the arts in England and Wales³ argued for placing special emphasis on efforts to widen public participation in the arts and on encouraging the artistic aspects of community development (Redcliffe-Maud 1976). In many ways the community arts movement in the UK, which was becoming a vocal and distinctive constituency at the time (Foth 2006: 640), sought to engage artists in community development and close the gap between artists and communities.

In 1976 Peter Brinson (writer, educator and arts manager) observed:

What's happened in a way, is that the artist has lost his relationship to society and it's no longer absolutely clear why he's there, what he should be doing ... And not only is it not clear to society but often not clear to the artist either. To place an artist in residence is to that extent to challenge him to relate himself to that community and work out his relationship to it; to see how he, as an artist, is to serve it and how the community should face up to the question of relating to the artist (quoted in Braden 1978:65).

Brinson is describing what has been called the 'animateur model' of community arts practice as opposed to the 'community model' (Waters 1989:61). In this model the animateur, or artist in residence, acts as a catalyst in a situation initiated by themselves, their employer or funder rather than by the community itself. This was the model most commonly adopted by British dance in the 1970s and 1980s.

That may be in large part due to the influence of Peter Brinson without whom, it has been suggested, 'community dance as we know it today would

³ The report was the outcome of an inquiry initiated by the Arts Council of Great Britain and the Standing Conference of Regional Arts Associations (Redcliffe-Maud 1976:8).

be nowhere' (Lockyer 2011:4).⁴ Since the early 1960s Brinson had championed the social relevance of the arts and especially dance (Brinson 1963). In 1964 he founded *Ballet for All*, a small touring company and later a popular television series⁵, whose specially devised programmes, which Brinson called 'ballet-plays' (Brinson & Crisp 1970:xviii) are credited with giving 'thousands of adults and children their first experience of the power and appeal of ballet' (Robinson 2004). It was, however, as Director of the UK Branch of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation between 1972 and 1982 that Brinson exerted the most direct influence on developments in participatory dance. In this role he promoted national initiatives in arts, education and community development. He chaired major inquiries into dance education and training (1975-80)⁶, the arts in schools (1978-82)⁷ and the arts and communities (1992)⁸. He is credited with instigating (in 1973) the Gulbenkian artists in schools programme (Braden 1978:11) that promulgated the amateur model of community arts practice⁹.

It has been suggested that the amateur model, in which the artist, their employer or funder initiates activity, was more likely to result in 'local imitation of national, established culture' (Waters 1989:62) than the community model. This may explain Peppiat's criticism of dance amateurs as 'pushing Arts Council policy' and prioritizing, indeed 'peddling', established contemporary dance work at the expense of grass roots, community needs (Peppiat 1985:27). About the same time, Ormston commented on the 'deeply conservative' nature of the British dance scene and suggested that the professional dance establishment was supported at the expense of innovation especially at 'grass roots' level. The challenge, he suggested, was how to bring that establishment into closer contact with dance in which 'people expressed their own concerns and diverse cultural backgrounds in the whole creative process—design, choreography, music and performance' (Ormston 1986:12). This was a challenge that many dance amateurs faced and attempted to tackle.

It is, perhaps, understandable that some bodies that financed amateur posts (including the then Arts Council of Great Britain) did so primarily as a way of engaging more people with the arts they traditionally funded (Braden 1978:6). This was part of an approach to arts provision commonly referred to

⁴ Such was his contribution that when NADMA was deciding on a new name in 1988 'The Brinson Foundation' was a serious contender (NADMA 1988a).

⁵ A seven part series made for Thames Television's Adult Education Unit in 1970 (Penman 1993:114).

⁶ Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1980) *Dance education and training in Britain*, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

⁷ Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (1982, 1989) *The arts in schools: principles, practice and provision*, London: Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

⁸ Brinson, P. (1992) *Arts and communities: the Report of the National Inquiry into Arts and the Community*, London: Community Development Foundation.

⁹ When Brinson left the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1982 it was to lead postgraduate studies at the Laban Centre in London instigating the UK's first postgraduate course in community dance.

as the democratization of culture. In 1985 Owen Kelly¹⁰ made clear that what community artists were proposing was not merely an extension of existing arts to more people but the animation of people's *own* creativity; individually, in groups and in communities (1985:5). This approach—known as cultural democracy—characterized the community arts movement in the UK so much so that, in May 1985, the annual general meeting of the Shelton Trust¹¹ for community arts voted to actively campaign for cultural democracy (Kelly 1985:7).

Democratization of culture and cultural democracy were two very different responses to the concept of democratising culture, which was, by the mid 1970s, a cornerstone of cultural policies adopted by many European governments. Democratization of culture suggested that works of art (including dance), being universally significant and relevant, deserved to be shared widely but also suggested that certain groups in society experienced barriers such as lack of opportunity, resource and education that prevented them engaging with art works (Bramham 1994). Democratization of culture was concerned with finding ways of overcoming aspects of disadvantage to make art accessible and attractive to a greater mass of people (as Brinson's *Ballet For All* was designed to do). Cultural democracy, on the other hand, held that culture was diverse and pluralist rather than universal and singular. It advocated that all social classes and groups should enjoy cultural autonomy and the opportunity to create and promote their own artistic forms. Exponents of cultural democracy emphasized art as participation, involvement and process (Coalter 1990:23) in contrast to the passive consumption, elitism and centralization that they associated with democratization of culture. In the 1970s and 1980s arguments between proponents of these approaches became quite polarized¹². As I go on to illustrate, the resulting tensions can be traced in the experiences of some dance amateurs. I also argue, however, that the dance amateur movement ultimately negotiated such tensions by successfully integrating aspects of both approaches into its practice.

At the same time as debates about the arts in society, there raged a 'back to basics' debate in education, which appeared to threaten arts education. Increasing numbers of unemployed young people in the deepening economic recession of the late 1970s led to suggestions that education be more closely geared to the needs of the labour market; with increased emphasis on the '3 Rs'¹³ and a statutory core curriculum (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1982, 1989:ix). Such proposals threatened to marginalize the arts (Flemming 2012:11), which were already 'undervalued and poorly provided for in state

¹⁰ At the time Kelly was a community artist working in Lambeth, London. The previous year, 1984, he had published what was to become a seminal work in the history of community arts in the UK, *Community, art and the state: storming the citadels*.

¹¹ In 1980 the Shelton Trust replaced the Association of Community Artists originally formed in the early 1970s (Higgins 2008:26).

¹² See, for example, the debate, published in 1981, between C.B. Cox and Raymond Williams.

¹³ Reading, (w)riting and (a)rithmetic

schools' (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1982, 1989:xv).

Dance provision in state schools in the 1970s was indeed patchy. Marie McCluskey¹⁴ recalls that no dance at all was taught at her school (2012). For Veronica Lewis¹⁵ dance at school was not taken seriously but was 'something that you did when it rained' (2012). Linda Jasper¹⁶, however, was inspired by a secondary school teacher (Emily Hargreaves) who ran an after school 'ballet club that was really concerned with choreography' and took pupils on trips to see dance in the theatre (Jasper 2012).

There was, however, generally little rapport between education and professional arts. Though the Arts Council encouraged its clients to co-operate with educators it admitted that some engaged in education merely as a marketing tool to attract new audiences—an approach that often antagonized educators (Arts Council of Great Britain 1981:6) some of whom complained that dance companies did not offer work suitable for schools (MacDonald 1980:20). There were some notable exceptions including, in 1976, the launch of Ludus (in England) and Footloose (in Wales) as specialist dance-in-education companies and London Contemporary Dance Theatre's educational residencies (in Yorkshire and Liverpool). In 1979 the Arts Council piloted three Dance Artist in Education projects (Briginshaw et al 1980) that were to lay the foundations for education work by dance companies throughout 1980s.

In 1978 Gulbenkian initiated an enquiry, chaired by Peter Brinson, into the arts in schools. Its report, first published in 1982¹⁷, highlighted the need 'for new patterns of co-operation between arts organizations and educational bodies' and suggested 'closer co-operation between regional arts associations and local education authorities' (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1982,1989: 124). It was just such patterns of co-operation that were key features of the emergent dance animateur movement especially as regional arts associations and local education authorities frequently co-funded animateur posts.

To bring the teaching profession and professional dance theatre into a closer, creative partnership some significant differences in philosophy and pedagogy needed to be resolved. The report expressed concern that:

some arts practice in schools was locked into a limited conception of individual development through creative self-expression that ignored or marginalized the equal importance of developing critical and technical skills in the arts and a growing understanding of other people's work (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1982, 1989: xiii).

This was true of much dance in schools at the time. Until the 1970s educational dance (derived from the ideas of Rudolf Laban) put emphasis on 'the process of dancing and its affective/experiential contribution to the

¹⁴ Marie McCluskey, MBE, was one of the first dance animateurs in the UK and is now Director of Swindon Dance.

¹⁵ Veronica Lewis was also one of the first dance animateurs in the UK. Professor Veronica Lewis MBE is now Director of London Contemporary Dance School

¹⁶ Linda Jasper, MBE, was Dancer in Residence for Berkshire from 1980 to 1990 and is now Director of Youth Dance England.

¹⁷ A second edition was published in 1989 with an introduction by Robinson following the Education Reform Act and debates about the National Curriculum.

participant's overall development as a moving/feeling being' whereas 'the opposing model [which] could be called the professional model' aimed 'to produce highly skilled dancers and theatrically defined dance products for presentation to audiences' (Smith-Autard 2002:4). Arguments about dance as a means of emotional development or as an art form were a source of bitter controversy and division in British dance education (Haynes 1987:141). Increased knowledge of Graham and Cunningham techniques among British dance teachers and the involvement of professionally trained dancers in education only served to sharpen the distinction between teaching that emphasized product, technique and performance and that which emphasized process, expression and individual development. Many dance amateurs recognized the need to bridge this divide (Thomson 1999:134) and, as described later, many did so with great sensitivity, skill and creativity.

[Fig. 1. Berkshire County Youth Dance Company performing *No Time to Hesitate* (Choreography by Cecilia McFarlane) in 1985 as a prelude to a performance by Extemporary Dance Theatre in the Wilde Theatre, Bracknell. Photograph by Bernard Ford, reproduced by courtesy of Linda Jasper.]

It was, therefore, in the midst of such debates about the nature of arts and the role of artists in society and in education that the dance amateur movement in the UK developed. Between 1976 and 1979 the first dance amateur posts were variously established and taken up by Veronica Lewis (in Cheshire), Molly Kenny (in Cardiff) and Marie McCluskey (in Swindon).

A Gulbenkian Foundation artists in schools programme established funding partnerships with eight local education authorities each of which chose an artist. Cheshire chose a dance artist and in 1976 Veronica Lewis took up residence at Sutton Comprehensive School, Ellesmere Port in Cheshire (Penn 1985: 22). The situation in which she found herself was not unusual. There were no full-time dance teachers in Cheshire's schools and dance was a minor element in the physical education curriculum (Penn 1985:24,22). Lewis, who had trained in ballet, in contemporary dance (at the Place) and in historical dance (at the Institute of Choreology) but had no formal teacher training (Lewis 2012) set about organizing 'daily technique classes at 8am—open to anyone who can stand the early morning exertion' (Lewis in Penn 1985:22). In the same year as Lewis' appointment in Cheshire, the Welsh Arts Council used monies released by the demise of Welsh Dance Theatre to establish the Cardiff Community Dance Project and a post to which Molly Kenny was appointed (Glick 1986:7). In 1979 Thamesdown Borough Council established a post to which Marie McCluskey, who had been teaching as part of Thamesdown Community Arts in Swindon since 1977, was appointed (McCluskey 2012).

These heralded a rapid expansion throughout the 1980s as many Regional Arts Associations took advantage of Arts Council seed funding to establish amateurs in their region. By 1985 there were 31 dance amateurs (Glick 1986:7). By 1987 the number had more than doubled to 75 (NADMA 1988b). In 1992 it was estimated that there were more than 250 amateurs 'working in collaboration with an enormous network of freelance artists and teachers'

(Peppiat and Vennor 1993:5).¹⁸

The responsibilities undertaken by these amateurs included teaching dance (or mime)¹⁹, organizing classes, workshops and performances, encouraging understanding and appreciation of performance, assisting the development of existing provision and 'raising the profile of dance and mime within the whole community' (Glick 1986:8). So, for example, as well as running early morning technique classes Lewis, working in Ellesmere Port schools, ran dance clubs during and beyond the school day. She choreographed performances, for example 'a performance of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in its entirety by a group of thirty third-year boys and ten third, fourth and fifth year girls' (Penn 1985:23). In addition she organised theatre visits to professional dance performances and brought small-scale dance companies to work in the schools. Her dance groups performed in the community—in local churches and shopping precincts.

Lewis (2012) is clear that she, like most amateurs learned 'on the job' (Rubidge 1984:15) how to fulfill a role that demanded 'one person [acted] as administrator, adviser, choreographer, dancer, diplomat, entrepreneur, fundraiser, politician, promoter and teacher' (Glick 1986:14). For the most part they worked locally, singly and in isolation from each other. They faced pressures due to multiple, short term, funding arrangements, meager operating budgets and high—sometimes conflicting—expectations.

One source of conflict arose from the differing approaches to arts provision referred to earlier as, on the one hand, democratization of culture and, on the other, cultural democracy. The dance amateur movement embodied some of the ideas associated with cultural democracy; ideas such as decentralization of provision, recognition of the plurality of culture and an emphasis on participation and creativity rather than passive consumption of established arts. Arts Council support, however, rested largely upon an expectation that amateurs would stimulate demand and develop audiences for the work of existing (largely contemporary) dance companies (Jasper 2012). Two examples illustrate the tensions some amateurs needed to manage. Tamara McClorg was a dancer with EMMA, a dance company based in the East Midlands in the 1970s and early 1980s. Here she recalls her experience of leading classes in the community:

So the question was, how do we bring the audiences in, so we're not just four to five people, a sheep and a dog? How do we perform

¹⁸ Amateur is used here, as it was at the time, as a generic term since those fulfilling the criteria established by the 1985/6 national evaluation had many different titles including, for example, dancer in residence, dance worker, dance co-ordinator, dance fellow (Glick 1986: 56).

¹⁹ In 1981 the Advisory Panel on Dance at the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) had 'seed' funded amateur posts in both dance and mime. In 1986 the Cork report recommended to ACGB that mime be moved from the Dance to the Drama department and the recommendation was implemented in 1989. Dance and mime amateurs continued a professional association together and it was only in 1994 that the Community Dance and Mime Foundation relinquished responsibility for mime subsequently becoming the Foundation for Community Dance.

to more people? Go out, do workshops with them, explain the work, and then hopefully, they would come to see our wonderful and extraordinary performances. Unfortunately, what happened was we began to discover that they weren't particularly interested in seeing us - they wanted to do it themselves! [...]Adults, who had been dying to, since they were little children [...] suddenly, [they] had the opportunity to dance (2006:2).

Duncan Holt²⁰ (animateur for Clwyd at the time) recalls an expectation by the Welsh Arts Council that he would provide performance opportunities for the companies it funded. Tension arose when, instead, he engaged companies and artists whose work and skills he saw as more suited to the needs of his local dance constituency (Holt 2012). Animateurs, then, could find themselves caught between the expectations of funders to create audiences and the needs of the community they served.

By the mid 1980s despite, or perhaps because of, its sudden expansion the dance animation movement appeared to be embattled. During the 1980s increased proportions of the Arts Council's and Regional Arts Associations' dance budgets were allocated to outreach, educational and community work. An animateur appointment was seen as more a cost effective way of meeting the demand for dance than supporting a regional dance company (Kay 1984:11). In 1984 Sarah Rubidge observed:

It is fast becoming a cause of concern to some performing members of the profession who feel the diversion of funds from the creation of dance work is not only placing the development of the art in some jeopardy, but also putting dancers out of work. (1984:12).

Dance animateurs needed to explain and define their relationship to the dance profession, to cultural policy makers, funders, employers and educators whilst working all hours to meet, and raise funds for, the demand for participatory dance. A national evaluation (published in 1986) depicted a profession weathering the pressures of multiple demands but in danger of exhausting the energy and creativity of its members (Glick 1986:18). National representation was needed. And so to the formation of NADMA and the beginnings of the institutionalization, in the sense of structuring, defining and organizing, community dance in the UK.

[Fig. 2. The front cover of the first issue of *Animated* in 1986. Reproduced by courtesy of the Foundation for Community Dance]

Encouraged by Peter Brinson a meeting of animateurs in 1985²¹ determined to form an association. NADMA was formally constituted in April 1986. Funding from the Gulbenkian Foundation (£4,500) and the Arts Council (£2,500) enabled the appointment of a full time coordinator (Vivienne

²⁰ Duncan Holt is now Lecturer in Dance at the University of Hull

²¹ In 1984 and 1985 a national conference of dance animateurs was organised (largely to contribute to the national evaluation). Both conferences were chaired by Peter Brinson.

Raffaele) with a base at South Hill Park arts centre in Bracknell²² from October 1986. All other roles and activities were undertaken voluntarily by the animateurs themselves. The association's first Chair was Marie McCluskey and its first Vice-chair was Duncan Holt. A management committee representing animateurs from across the UK, from dance (including South Asian dance) and mime, from rural and urban-based projects was elected.

The aims of the association were to raise awareness of the nature of dance and mime animation, to develop the profession and its status and to create a forum for sharing and improving practice. *Animated*, a newsletter and bulletin (later becoming a professional magazine) was first issued in 1986 and has continued uninterrupted to the present. The association ran training weeks, summerschools and conferences addressing, for example, principles and practice of education, combined arts, health and ability (what might now be called integrated dance). Attendees discussed their relationship to national developments as well as to local communities and environments. They debated values, shared practice and offered mutual support. In doing so the association provided a vehicle to develop and disseminate the new forms, working processes and techniques needed to work successfully in community settings.

The programme for NADMA's first Community Dance Summerschool (held in Swindon in July 1987) gives an idea of animateurs' practical concerns: sessions included Class, Creative Choreography, Working in Schools, Children's Dance, New Dance, Streetwise Dance, Music, Mime, Dance for Men, Folk Dance and an open forum called Teaching Swap-Shop. Describing this first Community Dance Summerschool, *Animated* (October 1987) reported that 'participants did daily class with the emphasis being on teaching technique in community settings where you are likely to have a range of levels together'. Sessions were led by experienced animateurs including Duncan Holt, Linda Jasper, Debi Barnard and Jeanette Siddall. Such practitioners were developing new ways of teaching, leading and creating dance in community settings drawing upon the methods of both educational and theatrical dance. Some animateurs, such as Linda Jasper, had both formal teacher training and professional performance experience. Jasper, who describes herself as a 'hybrid artist-teacher' at the time, was drawing on educational methodologies (including a conceptual framework based on Laban analysis) and professional experience of contemporary techniques and choreography to develop 'a framework with which to teach in the community' (Jasper 2012). Marie McCluskey came from a purely professional training at Arts Educational and the London School of Contemporary Dance. She had taught in private dance studios for many years but found the examination system of the dance teaching associations unsatisfactory as it was 'not child centred' and did not encourage creativity (McCluskey 2012). McCluskey also 'worked out' a practice to operate 'in a melting pot' of schools, private dance studios and community arts organizations such as Thamesdown Community Arts (McCluskey 2012). Animateurs such as Jasper, McCluskey and Lewis were developing new ways of

²² Where Linda Jasper, Dancer in Residence for Berkshire, was based.

marrying technical, creative and educational dance to engage and empower a wide range of participants. Lewis, who as mentioned previously was engaging participants in full-scale performances, said in 1987, 'I think I've found a way of working that allows people to achieve at their own level. Because we encourage the work to be made from the inside, not imposing 'fancy steps', everyone is dancing to their own ability the whole time, doing the best they possibly can in their own terms' (Lewis in Burt 1987:17). In such ways dance animateurs in the 1980s were resolving tensions, identified earlier, between the professional and educational models of dance teaching that had divided the dance sector in the 1970s.

NADMA relied on the voluntary efforts of working animateurs. Summerschool tutors gave their services free of charge; animateurs worked voluntarily on sub-committees dealing with contracts, conditions of work, training and professional development. They provided the membership with advice and information: a Job Support Team devoted time to listening, supporting and advising those experiencing difficulties. Members could telephone 'Uncle Dunc' (Duncan Holt) for peer advice and mentoring. NADMA produced a handbook—'a practical guide to organising dance and mime work in the community' (Greenland & Peppiat 1986:1)—designed to support newly appointed animateurs together with advice sheets on funding and guidelines for employers (National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs 1987). NADMA ran on the commitment, generosity, creativity and sheer hard work of its members.

In 1988 NADMA took stock producing a discussion document, *NADMA into the 90s* (National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs 1998b). It claimed (with some justification) that dance animateurs had been 'at the forefront of change in the public understanding and appreciation of dance and mime ... raising the profile of dance and mime at grassroot level' (National Association of Dance and Mime Animateurs 1998b). It acknowledged that this had been achieved through the voluntary efforts of working animateurs. It recognized that further development required organizational changes and workloads, which it was unrealistic to expect working animateurs to undertake. Funding was sought, and gained, to appoint a full-time Director and Administrator.

At the same time NADMA recognised that 'besides the identifiable network of professional dance and mime animateurs, many others are engaging in animating activities' (NADMA 1989). As mentioned previously by 1992 there were reckoned to be more than 250 animateurs 'working in collaboration with an enormous network of freelance artists and teachers' (Peppiat and Vennor 1993:5). Expansion in further and higher education dance provision²³, increasing numbers of freelance practitioners and the legacy of partnership

²³ In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s a range of universities, polytechnics and colleges introduced higher education courses that included dance so much so that in 1978 the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) established a Dance Board to validate degrees in dance (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1980:72). In 1981 a postgraduate course in Community Dance and Movement was established at the Laban Centre for Movement and Dance.

working with schools, youth, community and care organisations meant that a wide range of organisations and individuals were involved in developing what was now widely called community dance. A more inclusive definition that emphasised *what* was done rather than *who* did it was needed (Peppiat and Venner 1993:6). Consequently, in 1989 NADMA was reformed as the Community Dance and Mime Foundation to develop community dance and mime at a national and strategic level. In 1990 it gained annual Arts Council funding.

In conclusion, NADMA was an organisation run by and for practitioners. During a formative period in the development of the British dance ecology, it was the amateurs themselves who, through the activities of the association, defined, developed and consolidated what has become internationally recognized as a distinguishing feature of that ecology. By the 1990s when community arts had largely fragmented and lost visibility (Dickson 1995:118) community *dance* was vibrant, articulate, organised and purposeful.

This article has suggested three factors that contributed significantly to that situation. The first of these was the amateurs' decision (albeit, perhaps, taken intuitively) to chart a path between the more radical aspects of cultural democracy and the more conservative aspects of democratization of culture. This enabled NADMA to work within existing structures and funding systems from the beginning rather than, as some community arts organizations had done, fight a way in from the outside (Brinson 1991:133). One commentator at the time observed that 'Unlike community film and video, mural and theatre, dancers have been reticent in conceptualizing or sloganizing their work, and there is little in the way of a political identity to the movement' (Ormston 1986b:12). Linda Jasper recalls that 'We were not especially political, we were about creating access to dance' (2012). As Veronica Lewis put it, 'I just wanted to get everybody dancing. In three years I wanted to get everybody in Cheshire dancing' (2012).

This, I suggest, was a pragmatic rather than a naïve approach fuelled by an enthusiasm for dance and for engaging people in dance. Dance amateurs were well aware of the political impetus of much community arts practice. McCluskey, for example, worked closely with Thamesdown Community Arts in a building alongside visual artists, 'a band in the basement, a potter and, in the 1980s, a media facility making films' (2012). She acknowledges the profound influence of Terry Court—visual artist, founder of Thamesdown Community Arts and someone deeply imbued with the cultural radicalism that characterized much community arts practice (McCluskey 2012). Like McCluskey, Linda Jasper also worked closely with community arts practitioners but also chose to resist adopting an overtly political stance.

Whilst this might have exposed amateurs to charges of being Arts Council lackeys, even 'misguided missionaries' (Peppiat 1985:27), the practices they developed *were* creative, innovative and inclusive. As one cultural theorist suggests:

true cultural democracy can only come about when formerly elite elements of culture have been made accessible to the man in the

street [by] interpreting and presenting them in a more democratic way and making their practice accessible and attractive to the broad mass of the population (Simpson 1976b:2).

It seems to me that this is what many dance amateurs, working individually and through NADMA, did.

Secondly, amateurs successfully brought together theatrical dance performance, education and community arts. In doing so they epitomised the original notion of an amateur as a new kind of artist—not one that produced art that was ultimately sold to the public but one that enabled members of that public to make their own art (Jor 1976). To do so necessitated, as Linda Jasper recalls, cutting through organisational and financial barriers; ‘we had fingers in every pie—education, youth and community, arts’ (2012). Amateurs synthesized professional and educational dance to develop creative, pedagogic practices. They integrated performer, teacher, choreographer, professional and amateur. By working with educators, private dance teachers, promoters, performance companies, arts councils and local authorities—sometimes in the face of distrust, even hostility—they helped forge a more integrated, fluid and adaptable dance profession on which, it could be argued, the regional dance agencies of the 1990s were built (Venner 1990).

Last, but by no means least, was their willingness to learn together through the association. Marie McCluskey describes NADMA as ‘a learning journey about how to professionalize without losing the vitality of something that had grown organically’ (2012). In many ways NADMA operated as a community of practice rather than a putative institution. In communities of practice members are brought together not merely by shared interest but by engaging in a process of collective learning (Wenger 1998). Wenger (2006) outlines three characteristics crucial to a community of practice. Firstly, membership demands a *commitment* to a shared domain of interest; a community of practice is not merely a network of connections between people. NADMA certainly demonstrated such commitment. It was fuelled by the ‘overwhelming enthusiasm’ (Penn 1985:23) of members seeking to establish a new profession with new practices. At the time there was a sense, recalled by Marie McCluskey, ‘that community dance might not be here to stay. It was a bubble that could burst. It felt like an experiment’ (2012). This fragility perhaps explains Linda Jasper’s recollection that ‘we were very fired up—that’s what enabled us to work as hard as we did’ (2012). Secondly, in pursuit of their commitment, members of communities of practice engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other (Wenger 2006). This is just what NADMA sought and achieved through its training weeks, conferences, summer schools and peer support activities. Thirdly, communities of practice comprise *practitioners* who develop a shared repertoire of resources; experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing problems—in short a shared practice—through sustained interaction (Wenger 2006). It was just such resources and practice that NADMA created and disseminated. Therefore, it may be said that commitment, cooperative

learning and shared practice—distinguishing features of communities of practice—also characterized the birth of professional community dance institutions in Britain.

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