

*we move, we dance, we see, we draw, we think, we stand, we roam, we film, we wonder, we capture,  
we turn, we jump, we click, we feel, we walk, with light moves, across the ground, of the places  
where we live, where we belong, we move, we dance, we see, we draw, we think, we stand, we roam,  
we film, we wonder, we capture, we turn, we jump, we click, we feel, we walk, entangled in  
landscapes, steeped in history, we make light moves into the future.*

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In 2014, one of Wales' most creative choreographers, Jên Angharad, along with Courtney, Katie, Renee, Shonice from the [Forsythia Youth Centre](#), primary school children and a team of visual artists in south Wales (Seth Oliver/Fizzi Events and Heloise Godfrey-Talbot), created a film to capture the vibrancy of moving bodies in space. This film, entitled '**Light Moves**', was premiered at the AHRC Connected Communities Festival in July 2014 (Cardiff, Wales).

Through a series of episodes, we are recording the entire process of Light Moves, from its formation to the public premiere, as an example of co-production.

This first episode is produced by [Gabrielle Iverson \(University of Aberdeen\)](#).

### **Episode 1: The Engine House**

This story charts some of our early work getting to know each other before we went on to achieve great collaborative works! Our first collaborative film was called *Light Moves* but before we made the film, we first had to get to know each other.

The entire process began with a meeting between Seth Oliver, Jên Angharad, Emma Renold, and me at Jên's house in April 2015. Over dinner, we discussed the possibility of creating a film with young people in Merthyr. With the help of both Gareth Thomas and Geraldine at the Forsythia Youth Project, we managed to recruit four young women – Shonice, Katie, Courtney, and Renee – to help us with this task. We (me, Emma, Eva, and Gareth) arranged to meet Shonice, Courtney, Katie and Renne at the Dowlais Blast Engine House to explore some preliminary aspects of

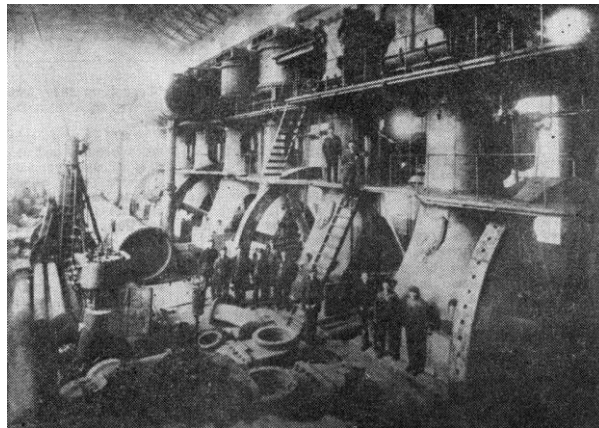
filmmaking. The Big Dance event<sup>i</sup> organised by choreographer Jên provided what seemed like an ideal opportunity to practice using cameras and audio equipment. The Big Dance in Merthyr involved four primary schools and they were all coming together to do the big Dance at 13.00 on 16 May 2014 along with groups from all over the globe.

Our Big Dance was to be performed in the impressive hall of the Engine House and we knew we would be in good company because children from four primary schools in the area were going to dance while BBC Wales would be there to film. We had commissioned our own filmmaker, Toby, to make a film of the event for the participating children and their families. They all duly received a DVD of the Big Dance.



The Blast Engine House was originally built in 1905 for Guest, Keen & Nettlefold to provide air for the new blast furnace plant at the Dowlais Works completed in 1909. Iron works had been on the site since the early nineteenth century and later Dowlais became one of the largest iron producers in the UK<sup>ii</sup>. The conversion from iron to steel allowed the industry to remain productive into the 1930s, when the Dowlais works finally closed – although steel continued to be produced in the nearby Ifor Works until 1987<sup>iii</sup>. In the early nineteenth century, the Dowlais Ironworks was one of the most important in the world, exporting 188 thousand tons of iron rails

each year to supply railways all over the world to Russia and beyond<sup>iv</sup>. The vast hall where the Big Dance took place would have housed the engines<sup>v</sup> that supplied air to 18 blast furnaces.



Before we started trying to film the children's moving bodies, we went outside to play with the cameras and have a think about how to take different kinds of shots. Seth had kindly sourced a really excellent professional camera and we had three other cameras so that everyone could have a go at filming aspects of the Big Dance if they wished. We also had some audio-recording equipment so that we could conduct mini interviews. Throughout the day, we asked primary school children, their teachers, and anyone else who happened to be there, about what it had been like to prepare for, and take part in, the Big Dance event.

The Engine House is an impressive industrial building and we spent the morning outside taking pictures of the gardens, the building, and nearly sculptures on what was luckily a beautiful spring day.



We tried paying attention to 'the smallest of things' such as the bluebells hidden under the trees with the light shining on them.





We took full advantage of the vast steel sculptures just outside the impressive Engine House Building.



With the cameras, we played with perspective, distance, angles, textures and shadow.

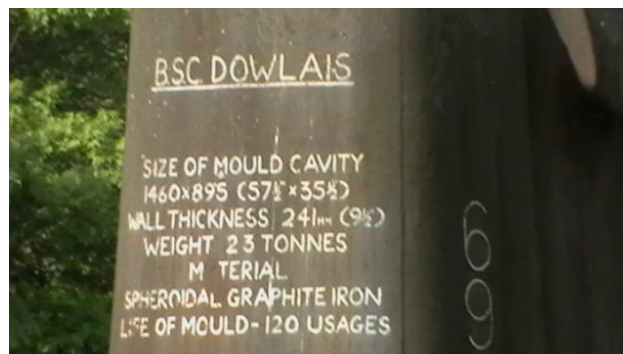




We experimented with foreground and background.



The sculptures create a link between the ironworks that used to be at Dowlais and our activities, as we played with the way that the sunlight shone and shadows appeared on the steel artefacts surrounding the huge piece of graphite iron that sits beside the newer pieces in the sculpture park outside the Engine House.



We looked around at the landscape and spotted a church spire in the distance that we compared with this steel sculpture.



We talked about verticality and spires; religious and secular spires. We asked, ‘do people still believe in God?’ and someone said ‘some do, some don’t’. I said spires look upwards to something beyond the world. We thought about how images can work as metaphors. I was thinking of D.H. Lawrence’s [\*The Rainbow\*](#) at this point. Many of the iron and steel workers, including some of the previous owners of the Dowlais Iron and Steel Works, are buried in the churchyard just beyond where we were standing.



Here, some of the men who might be buried in the nearby churchyard are sitting on top of one of the furnaces<sup>vi</sup>.

As we explored light, shape, shadow and the functionality of the cameras, children started to arrive from four local primary schools in coaches.





The children were excited. The hall started to feel like a meeting place, a crucible of anticipation and energy, an engine house once again... but this time, peopled with human potentiality that was about to be released in dance.



Jên started the warm-up and the tension mounted as the children waited to start the dance that they had practiced for the past four weeks, learning all the moves and rehearsing up to 16 times.

The BBC Wales camera crew arrived. Toby set up his equipment and we positioned ourselves on the balcony in order to get a good vantage point. The music started to play and the beat got everyone moving together. Jên did this amazing thing of introducing the four girls to the whole assembled crowd of 400 pupils and their teachers and in front of the professional camera crews. Courtney, Renee, Katie, and Shonice were recognised as one the film crews. From then on, they took their cues from the professionals who they were now working alongside.



The count down.... three, two, one... 'dance' and off we went. Bodies spun and our cameras rolled.



There was something extraordinary about being amidst this moving mass. The sheer number of children doing the dance gave it a particular quality. It was as if we were taking part in something really big. Here, we can see and feel the joy of moving bodies.





After the dance, Katie and Shonice honed their interview skills and asked groups of children what they had enjoyed about taking part in the Big Dance. Boys told them that they had been nervous before the event and had some worries about dancing but that as they had practiced gradually they had become less worried. Many boys said that before the dance, they were nervous but they were also excited. When it comes to dancing in front of your peers, boys have more to lose than girls so they needed strong structures to support their activities.

We spoke to two male primary school teachers. They both said it was fantastic that the boys had taken part. They described how at first the boys had been very wary and had not wanted to move much. When we interviewed Jên, she described how the boys gradually moved a little, like a bubble of movement, and then they stopped. Gradually, the little bubbles of movement got longer and longer. As the boys gained confidence over the practice period, the bubbles elongated and they danced all the way through. No-one had helped the boys to pay attention to their bodies and their feelings in quite this way before.

One of the male teachers said that he thought that all children are not inhibited when it comes to movement, but peer pressure makes the boys become non-dancers. We asked two male teachers who had grown up nearby if they had done anything like this when they were about 11 years old. They looked at us sideways, to gesture that it would have been impossible and unheard of. When we look back to the pictures of the men in the industrial era, it is not difficult to see why boys might find it difficult to take part in a vast public dance. Bodies were needed for tough manual labour. Even today, boys expect to undertake jobs in which they get dirty from the exertion of digging and grafting, not jumping and whirling around for the sheer pleasure of it. The manual labour of the industrial era was not joyous, although we can imagine men taking pride in their strong, taut muscles, and lifting power. Boxing and football, sports which require strength as well as speed and agility, are still very important sports in Merthyr and other valley communities.

Both of the primary school teachers said it was great to see this progress and they were happy the boys were able to commit to the dance. One of the male teachers participated throughout the dance, moving his body to the beat and remembering all the steps. This helped the boys feel that dancing was legitimate. We have focused on the boys because this was the most obvious thing to talk to the male teachers about, but we also saw girls commit unselfconsciously to the dance and one girl, who was not slim, told us that dancing was about having fun and that she was 'having fun'. We have watched Jên work with many groups and have noticed how she intuitively feels the atmosphere, reads the energy levels of a situation, and responds quickly to make people feel safe about moving; moving with pleasure.

The choreographers' skill, the presence of the five camera crews, male teachers joining in, the vastness of the hall, and the sheer number of bodies moving together created an electrical atmosphere in the Engine House. This combination of parts, bodies, beats, cameras, space, sunshine, as well as the history of this place, seemed to combine into a dynamic, moving assemblage. The energy of the dance, conducted in synchronicity with dancers across the globe, created a joyous celebration of life.

As small and large bodies danced, the collective swirling, jumping, and spinning seemed to kick-start a new generation of movement. Once again, energy was generated in the Engine House at Dowlais.... a human energy that, we hope, will become a new productivity, driving the life force of these valley communities into a new era – harnessing imagination and creativity – to create new, moving, human power.

Courtney fell in love with the camera Seth had lent us and did not want to be parted from it. She has gone on to become a key player in our filmmaking ventures. Courtney was instrumental in many shots and editing decisions that were part of the process of making *Light Moves*. Renee was totally involved in the Big Dance filming alongside Courtney and is playing an important part in the artistic direction of our next collaborative film, *Graphic Moves*. Shonice and Katie also played a huge role in every aspect of the project. All the girls immensely enjoyed the Big Dance event and we have watched their artistic confidence grow. Together, we were beginning to pay attention in different ways.



Before, during and after the Big Dance, in small moments behind the camera, in the wild and in the vast hall, we came together as a team. As a team, we feel that we are a small generative assemblage. We went on to make *Light Moves* together which sucked a whole new stratum of artists into our expanding vortex of collaborative connections. But that story is episode II.

***Gabrielle Iverson***

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<sup>i</sup> The Big Dance is the UK's biggest celebration of dance and dancing! See <http://www.bigdance.org.uk/>

<sup>ii</sup> [wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowlais\\_Ironworks](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowlais_Ironworks) accessed 01/03/2015

<sup>iii</sup> [http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/Dowlais\\_Ironworks.htm](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/Dowlais_Ironworks.htm)

<sup>iv</sup> Owen, J. A. (1977). *The History of the Dowlais Iron Works, 1759–1970*. Newport: Starling Press. ISBN 0-903434-27-X.

<sup>v</sup> [http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/Images\\_D-H/Dowlais\\_BlastFurnaceBuilding\\_1910.jpg](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/Images_D-H/Dowlais_BlastFurnaceBuilding_1910.jpg) accessed 01/03/2015

<sup>vi</sup> [http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/Images\\_D-H/DowlaisWorks\\_FurnacemenSittingOnTopOfFurnace\\_C1900.jpg](http://www.alangeorge.co.uk/Images_D-H/DowlaisWorks_FurnacemenSittingOnTopOfFurnace_C1900.jpg) accessed 1/03/2015