

## THE SENSE OF DRAWING: AN APPROACH TO DRAWING, MARKING AND EXPERIENCING TIME

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### ABSTRACT

Some things we will never know, such as what it is like to be a bat, or how someone else experiences time through drawing. (Nagel, 1974: 435-50)

While developing a method of working together that allows each artist to build on individual notions of drawing, the artists in the Performance Drawing Collective (formed in 2008, previously known as Drawn Together) investigate how each artist experiences the world differently through repetitious and durational activities.

Through our collaborative and individual art practice we explore performance drawing and its relationship to time. In this paper, we describe two examples of our collaborations that demonstrate how the dynamics of working together further our understanding of drawing. In *ARC: I Draw for You* (2010), we reference the written directives of Fluxus, in particular George Brecht's 'Event Scores'. Here, we relayed instructions to each other on *how* to make a drawing. We exchanged directives, or rather, short line texts for each artist to interpret and respond to as a drawing. In the second artwork, *Skype vs. Night Sky* (2011), we constructed a localised space for the drawing on one surface, reacting to the weather forecast being voiced, and a live projection of the night sky. From different locations and time zones we used sounds and movements that prompted ways of marking as a drawing. We performed both artworks for an allocated one hour, but the duration and experience of time through the act of drawing provided a sense of movement *alongside time*, always embodying an action, absent from a past or future, or a beginning or an end.

To collaborate and develop an approach to drawing as a way of thinking, we reflect and discuss our notions of marking, and question *how* we experience duration and the marking process. Some concepts that link and connect our drawing practices are defined in the artworks, as well as the differences and variations. Our approach to drawing is through a performative embodied action, uneasy to locate and describe in a written context. For us, this unfolding of an endlessly expanding field of drawing initiated our collaboration and our individual journey to define drawing and its relationship to time through practice.

Can drawing further our understanding of how someone else experiences time? If in working together we aim to extend ideas about the practice of drawing and to provide evidence of *how* we experience time, we consider there is a *knowing through drawing*. It is an embodied practice and time-based experience, individually and collaboratively.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

*Art is one of the ways that people communicate.* (Higgins, 1967). This universal and perhaps assumed remark is nevertheless at the heart of understanding collaborative art practice. Communication embraces interaction, contact, transfer, negotiation, dialogue, consultation and the exchange of ideas. Notions of communication and collaboration in the context of performance drawing could be interchangeable.

Performance Drawing Collective (previously known as Drawn Together), formed in 2008 by London-based artists, Carali McCall, Jane Grisewood, Birgitta Hosea and Maryclare Foá to focus on communicating through performance drawing projects. We share theoretical and research interests and express thematic affinities in our practices, such as the line, process and repetition. Our work involves live action mark making with graphite and light, sound and animation, and still and moving image. It also considers the non-visible mark, through experimentation with sound and movement. This marking and repetition, addresses the relationship between the

body and presence, time and space, to investigate drawing as way of knowing and communicating how the body traces and experiences duration through drawing. Drawing together collaboratively triggers questions about how we understand someone else's experience of time. In working this way we aim to extend ideas about the practice of drawing where we can address *knowing through drawing* as a form of embodied practice.

Each artist in the collective contributes performative acts to build onto the already variable and multi-interpretational process of drawing. Working alongside each other, we are seamlessly merging our commitment to expand the field of drawing. We use our body as a performative tool and endeavour to gauge our individual relationship to drawing and respond to each other's movements while mark making. As a practice, the notion of drawing is boundless and extends beyond the visible trace of graphite.

In recent artworks such as *ARC: I Draw for You* (2010) and *Skype vs. Night Sky* (2011) our collaborations have tested the physical limits of working together. By being in different locations and time zones, operating in diverse media, or by working through touch on the same 25-centimetre sheet of paper, we are exploring what it *means* to collaborate. Uncovering ways of working together has been at the forefront of our drawing research as a collective and suggests a different understanding of knowing through drawing. We are not concerned with fixture but with a fluid and flexible evolving practice that embraces rules and randomness and plays on the indeterminacy in art.

In this paper we are using two artworks to consider how each artist experiences the world differently through repetitious and durational activities in a collaborative context. We discuss the potential of collaborative practice as a methodology for communication and for acquiring a *knowing* through the process of *drawing*.

## 2. DRAWING TOGETHER: CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE

In Elizabeth Grosz's text 'Lived Bodies, Phenomenology of the Flesh,' *Volatile Bodies* (1994: 95) we are introduced to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and his claim that the mind is always embodied and based on corporeal and sensory relations. It is accepted that all knowledge is based on experience and it is through our bodies we relate and understand how we live in the world, and with each other. How we sense time, or the duration of a drawing according to Merleau-Ponty is a temporal and spatial concept. It is through our bodies that we draw and attempt to trace an experience of time. A variety of marks can gesture the energy and expenditure of the body, but how do we mark time, the passing and feeling through our lived bodies? It is a concept and way of working towards describing this phenomenal experience.

*Constituted time, the series of possible relations in terms of before and after, is not time itself, but the ultimate recording of time, the result of its passage, which objective thinking always presupposes yet ever manages to fasten on to. It is spatial, since its moments co-exist spread out before thought....The problem is how to make time explicit as it comes into being and makes itself evident, time at all times underlying the notion of time, not as an object of our knowledge, but as a dimension of our being.* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:483)

Merleau-Ponty writes about how we experience the phenomena of time. This facilitates our reflection on a drawing practice that considers how the body senses a performative act. Lost in time, neither in the past, in the present, or the future but a passing and weaving of all tenses into a state of being. This notion of time, and our primordial experience of it, focuses our research to develop an understanding that our body is a subjective indication of time passing. We perceive and receive information of and from the world through our bodies. (Grosz, 1995: 86). In this way, we attempt to measure and map time as an object or a single point of reference by relating it to things. We try to consider the duration of events, however, time is experienced alternatively through our subjective bodies, which have different relations to time depending on our movements. The expenditure and transmission energy plays with our notion of duration.

Gilles Deleuze considered the body beyond itself, in a state of becoming and transition, where subjectivity becomes temporal. He expresses duration as a dynamic process of change, a *becoming*, which endures, embracing continuity and diversity.

*Duration is not merely lived experience; it is also experience enlarged or even gone beyond; it is already a condition of experience. For experience always gives us a composite of space and duration.* (Deleuze, 1991: 37)

In our performance drawing collaborations Deleuze's concept of becoming (as well as his philosophy of repetition and difference) provides a way for us to understand and describe the transformations that occur during the process of drawing. Becoming is movement, becoming is change, becoming is temporal. The nature of performance is that it operates in a constant state of flux. However, it has a doubling effect in collaboration

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whereby the convergences and divergences of individual performers different actions come together in a singular becoming. Time can be conceptualized as becoming, enabling the difference to create something new.

Time can transform the experience of a drawing. It is considered a condition for our performance drawings; the experience of 20 minutes may feel to the artist like 10 hours. Our bodies have an unconditional relationship to time that expands, shortens and disappears through repetitive experiences, or mindfulness and awareness. The relationship drawing proposes in relation to time changes the body's sense of *knowing* of a constituted time. It is harnessed and limited to our embodied mind. There is a *sense of knowing through drawing* but it extends beyond an immeasurable experience.

Our practical perspective is situated in a long history of collaborative art practice, and as Anne Ellegood curator and writer, explains, *this mode of art-making challenges ingrained notions of authorship, originality, ownership and working processes that still dominate our understanding of art*. She questions the differences between the wide range of artistic alliances, whether they be collectives, collaborations or movements, suggesting that the *many working methodologies are as varied as the artists themselves*. (Ellewood, 2010:74)

While the inspiration for working together comes from a wide range of sources that includes the Dada group launched in 1916, the *Surrealist Manifesto* in 1924, the anonymous Guerrilla Girls in the 1980s and Claire Fontaine founded in 2004, the collaborations that emerged during the 1960s have had most impact on our recent artworks.

Established in the early 1960s, Fluxus, emanating from John Cage's ideas on chance and indeterminacy and facilitated by George Maciunas, identified with artists, composers, filmmakers, performers and writers (including Dick Higgins, George Brecht, Alison Knowles Joseph Beuys, Yoko Ono). Higgins wrote that Fluxus *is not a moment in history, or an art movement. Fluxus is a way of doing things* (Friedman, 2002) and still exerts its influence today. The spirit of this 'way of doing things' pervades the thinking behind, and approach to, our practice as (and in) a collective. We operate as individual artists making our own work but we also work together in the creative process with each other and with other colleagues. In that collaborative art practice we are questioning the image of the solitary artist and attempting to define the limitation of the self alongside projecting our own experience of time. Higgins conceived the term 'intermedia' (Higgins, 1967) to describe his work and that of his colleagues, recognising the collaborative and performative approach that challenged categorization and distinctions between different art practices – between art and life. Within our collaborations we adopt this experimental and interdisciplinary approach bringing together the diverse activities within our varied practices.

Carali McCall investigates the relationship between drawing and performance, and how the lived body relates to the world through movement. A fundamental aim in her practice is to explore phenomenological methods to test the limits of her body. Through drawing processes her work uses graphite, still photographs, sound recordings, and descriptive writings to communicate underlying themes such as expenditure, duration and transmission.

Jane Grisewood explores drawing as a performative tool for negotiation and transformation, where the process of drawing is predicated on touch and derives from thought rather than observation. Her work explores themes of time and transience, dislocation and memory through works on paper, still and moving image, performance and writing. Grisewood's practice focuses on the interplay between sight and touch, rules and randomness, stillness and movement.

Birgitta Hosea's practice examines the tensions between the live and the animated, exploring different technological processes for creating moving marks. She regards the performances of drawing as an animation; a layered moving drawing that emerges over time. Partially drawn in graphite, partially drawn in light, it echoes the media of traditional drawn animation and is recorded in sequential photographs and video documentation.

Maryclare Foá is interested in breaking down the barrier between the performer and the observer, by including audience members as possible participants. The interaction of sound and space are central to her practice, which has influenced her to make artworks revealing sonic and spatial dimensions. Foá sounds within a given space as a mapping material to draw with, vocalizes as a method of actioning a mark, repeating noises of physical marks in the moment of their production.

The interdisciplinary and cross-pollinating methods of Fluxus have been influential in understanding what it means to participate in collaborative practice. We examine how the authority and the passive participant in collaborations shift to create a constant challenge in overcoming intentions and direction in the artwork. Our mode of communication is twofold; during a performance we embrace the simple idea of written instruction to make a drawing, while also using only the action of our bodies to prompt an idea. Without using our voices or words of communication during the art making processes, these loose rules of communication create impulsive ways to draw while testing the ways our body can physically communicate.

## 2. COLLABORATION: LINE, PROCESS, ECHO, REPEAT

Through a performative drawing practice, with shared interest in repetitive and durational processes, each artist works individually researching different concerns, or alternatively come together to work either in the same space or on the same surface to collaborate and develop different approaches to drawing. Our collaborative practice becomes the grounds for research to merge and develop ideas about the line, to mark, trace and record ways of movement, and to understand the relationship between drawing and time. While working together during a performance for a predetermined amount of time, each artist contributes to their individual work while allowing information to be shared and influences to permeate. However, what feeds the methodology of drawing alongside each other to be consequently self-identifying?

*By considering the body in movement we can see better how it inhabits space (and possibly time) because movement is not limited to submitting passively to space and time, it actively assumes them, it takes them up in their basic significance with is obscured in the commonplace of established situations. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962:100-02)*

How we respond to each other's movements while drawing is based on our relationship between our body as a subject as well as each other as objects.

*For Merleau-Ponty, although the body is both object (for others) and a lived reality (for the subject), it is never simply object or simply subject. It is defined by its relation with objects and in turn defines these objects as such. (Grosz, 1994: 87)*

There is an indefinable echo or doubling that occurs in the sharing of the space or the action, which is not present in a solitary practice. In the collaborative space, duration can also be experienced as stretched and limitless while also ruptured and discontinuous. Duration, Grosz explains *functions simultaneously as singular, unified and whole, as well as in specific fragments and multiplicitous proliferation* (Grosz, 1999: 17). We can explore the importance of duration in performance and play with the temporal dimensions – repetition, chance, uncertainty – to perhaps identify how they are connected to our own unique experiences of time.

While duration underpins the process, repetition is the means by which the process operates, allowing for difference and something other to emerge. As we mentioned earlier, Deleuze makes difference paramount and recognises the crucial elements of movement and return, not beginning or end (Deleuze: 1994), which is fundamental to a performance drawing practice. The open-endedness allows for difference in the experience of the passage of time, where the presence of the collaborator provides the opportunity for a different temporal understanding. However, although questions still remain on how time in the drawing process is shaped by collaborative action, we have recognised that something different from the sum of the parts is created, albeit temporarily.

While drawing, the distance and space between us allows us to have our own perspective of our relationship to each other as objects, as well as our subjective self. The familiar can seem unfamiliar, for example, a movement or gesture of drawing a line may seem strange when you see someone mimicking and adapting the position of your body making the same action. Through vision; seeing someone drawing, or through sound; hearing someone draw enhances and alters your individual expectations of an embodied practice.

However, the distance and space we occupy while we draw also identifies a place for a singular experience to be negotiated. We communicate through a shared methodology – marking, gesturing and sensing an understanding that can interrogate the body relationship. Our exploration of measuring duration and distance establishes one individual body from another, thus giving us a perspective on how we move and suggesting a collective lapse of time. The drawing space identifies a porous, organic form, undivided by rules, but guided by a structure to acquire new boundaries and new experiences of time through our movement.

Ellegood reflects on the Surrealists' 'Exquisite Corpse', developed in the 1920s, as a paradigm of collaborative artworks like the earlier Dadaists and later Fluxus artists.

*[They had] a system of creating art specifically designed to accommodate numerous visions. A process that can be applied to writing literature or music, film-making or art, it involves passing the work from one participant to another, each artist building upon the existing imagery (or text or score) so that the final piece is an accumulation, the outcome of a genuinely shared effort. (Ellegood, 2010: 74)*

Adopting a methodology that references the processes of Fluxus and the 'Exquisite Corpse', we as artists participating in the Performance Drawing Collective are concerned with ways to rework and modify these shared

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systems. For example, rather than passing on the artwork where each artist would build on the previous imagery, we work simultaneously alongside each other in a process of investigating different drawing methods. These include a wide range of media, which embraces sight, touch and sound whether in our smaller experimental activities or in larger projects. *ARC: I Draw for You* (2010) and *Skype vs. Night Sky* (2011) are two examples of performances where we are exploring and demonstrating a methodology of *drawing together* in an attempt to experience a *knowing through drawing*.

### ARC: I DRAW FOR YOU

At the Centre for Drawing (Wimbledon) London, UK, in January 2010 Performance Drawing Collective completed a collaborative residency entitled *ARC: I Draw for You*, bringing together our diverse practices. The methodology for *ARC* (Action Relay Collaboration) allowed each of us to participate in the making of the work. *ARC* developed from a previous project, a collaborative drawing exhibition in 2009, where we combined different material surfaces and marking tools following a series of rules in the tradition of 'Exquisite Corpse', which had origins in the Victorian parlour game 'Consequences'. However, rather than creating a single image from a series of drawings where the artists had not seen the drawing that preceded it, we produced multiple images.

The *ARCs* explored vision, touch, light and dark, time and duration, sound and mapping. Some rules denoted a particular duration or material while others were open to interpretation. Each text was one or two lines long and consisted of brief actions to be performed with an emphasis on the often playful style of Fluxus works. Our instructions in the 50 performance *ARCs* included:

- *Stand pressed against the wall. Draw around your body 5 times.*
- *Write 6 words that describe 'drawing'.*
- *Reach as far up the wall as possible – draw a line from top to bottom – half way stop and draw 2 large circles.*
- *Take two sticks and make a rhythm. Mark that rhythm on the wall. Duration: 2 minutes.*
- *Draw 40 circles in light.*
- *With eyes closed and kneeling on the floor draw a continuous line on the wall to the silent count of 100.*
- *Holding your breath draw a line around someone else's drawing for as long as you can hold your breath.*
- *With eyes closed and facing the wall, imagine walking the perimeter of the room clockwise and then draw the route on the wall, repeat imagining an anticlockwise perimeter walk.*
- *Draw 6 random points on the wall. Walking backwards, connect these points with a line.*
- *'Drawing to be constructed in your head' After Yoko Ono: In your head, start transforming a square until it becomes a circle. Select any shape in the process and transcribe it on to the wall.*
- *'Blind Time Drawing' After Robert Morris: At eye height, draw two crosses shoulder-width apart in charcoal on the wall, then with eyes closed make a larger cross below the one on the left, and then on the right.*

In developing the *ARC* project we referenced the written directives of Fluxus artists, John Cage, Yoko Ono, Alison Knowles and George Brecht, in particular Brecht's 'Event Scores' (1958-1966), invented in Cage's Experimental Composition class at the New School for

Social Research, New York in 1958. These temporary events were a minimal form of performance that comprised simple written proposals and/or instructions for actions, inviting audience participation. Knowles was also active in creating and actioning events, calling her proposals for performance, 'propositions'. She stated in her 1965 'Great Bear Pamphlet': *Event Scores can be realised by artists other than the original creator and are open to variation and interpretation.* (Knowles, 1965) Other research led beyond Fluxus, in particular to Robert Morris, who used rules and a methodical framework in the making of his *Blind Time drawings*. Begun in 1973, the first series of 98 drawings were made with eyes closed and followed specific tasks with predetermined time frames. Subsequent series adopted further frameworks including collaboration. The drawings could be considered 'task performance', with principles that Morris often used in his work. (Criqui, 2005: 15).

The variable and unfixed interpretation that keeps the work developing and alive became evident during the *I Draw for You* performance and our interactions throughout the residency. The *ARCs* were transmitted by hand-written or typed notes, telephone, SMS messages, email and Skype. The instructions were transcribed on to cards, which were laid face down on the floor for the performers to pick up and action. The materials used to draw these action scores was a range from basic mark-making mediums of charcoal and graphite, through sound, to virtual marks generated from digital light. The digital light was projected onto the wall using a software application called 'Tagtool'. We used a nearby laptop to draw with as part of our collection of drawing materials. The tool was developed as an Open Source project in which programmers collaborated to develop the software. (Instructions for making it are freely available on the internet.)

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In the live performance, one of the instructions invited a member of the audience to participate; this fell to Professor Avis Newman, artist, curator and writer. Instructed to use 'the light tool', which projected the drawing in light temporarily onto the wall), Newman's interpretation was to draw very lightly, and with the lightest material available.

To enable a broader and more interactive collaboration, we invited national and international artists to participate in the project using a variety of everyday technology by completing an instruction or suggesting one. The notion of an image as a signal beaming from its source (in one location) and arcing over to its receiver in another place contributed to defining our idea of how drawing extends beyond predictable perceptions. From one location in the world to another an imaginable line is traced from one artist to the other. These external contributions produced further variation and layering in the project and enhanced the communication processes and our understanding of the relationship to drawing and time, alongside expanding the notion of collaboration. The mobile phone, in particular, became a key tool to deliver ARC instructions irrespective of location, providing an intimate and immediate connection. Technological innovation has enabled new tools and models for collaboration through Web 2.0 and Open Source methods. We have been using a combination of Web 2.0 technologies in our collaborative process, such as conference calls and video conferencing with Skype, documenting our work in progress through blogging and YouTube, writing collaboratively with Google docs and publicising our events through Facebook.

During *I Draw for You*, we attempted to explore further the nature of the collaborative process. Building on the notion of making and receiving an instruction to produce drawings, we shared ideas and opened up questions in our individual practices. We continued to develop a framework for collaboration to produce a creative way to communicate and exercise the use of being in different places and different time zones that led to participation in the Papay Gyro Nights Arts Festival, with artists from Argentina, China, Norway, Germany and USA in the Orkney Islands, Scotland.

### **SKYPE VS. NIGHT SKY: A TELEMATIC DRAWING PERFORMANCE**

For the Papay Gyro Nights Arts Festival's opening in February 2011, we created a live performance connecting London and the island of Papa Westray, Orkney. At this time of year, when nights are long and weather can be harsh, the island of Papa Westray was transformed into an art space and artworks were displayed in unconventional locations, changing perception of the timeless landscape. (Papay, 2011). The festival originated from an ancient tradition that was celebrated on the island in the first full moon of February until the beginning of the 20th century. Our performance was inspired by the moon and the night sky, focusing on the stars that were so vital for navigation in ancient times – a celestial navigation method before the existence of compasses and satellites.

Our live telematic drawing performance, integrating the use of telecommunications and information technology, contrasted ancient and modern forms as it travelled via telecommunications satellites at the speed of light between Papa Westray and London. A camera in Papa Westray pointed at the night sky and transmitted video images and atmospheric sound through a live feed channel to our drawing space in London. These sounds and images were projected on to the wall and we made spontaneous drawings as we charted the night sky in Papa Westray, some visible and invisible traces. The chosen materials for this wall drawing included graphite powder, pencil, water, chalk and white light from a torch. The performance also featured a live spoken word commentary transmitted by Skype from one of the group's members who was in Australia, who was simultaneously drawing the movement of the night sky relayed on Skype from the live feed in London. A camera in London recorded the work as it was created and a live video feed sent it back to the island, where it was projected onto a screen in front of festival attendees.

Our methodology continued with Fluxus and 'Exquisite Corpse' affinities, with the intent of privileging the process of the performance drawing over the individuality of the performers. A significant shift occurred in the process of working together, with the low light once again referencing Morris and his drawing with eyes closed or blindfolded, relying on touch and intuition. The collaboration extended to participants beyond the designated performance space through the use of telematics, which enabled a live audience to be some 800 kilometres (500 miles) away and one of us to collaborate from over 16,000 kilometres (10,000 miles) away in a different hemisphere.

*Throughout 'The Phenomenology of Perception', Merleau-Ponty describes vision in terms of an activity undertaken by a subject in relation to a distinct and separate object... The claim that subjects are always and necessarily embodied, incarnate, corporeal beings... That vision is always composed not of a given sense of datum but of a set of relations between figure and ground, horizon and object. The conditions of a visual field, then, involve the constitution of an horizon and the taking up of a perspective. (Grosz, 1995:97)*

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The influences and direction from both Papay and Australia infiltrating into the drawing space brought a heightened awareness of atmosphere, location and time. In London, the studio wall which we drew on seemed to act as a portal to collect a diverse range of sounds, moods and information. As a response and working methodology, the actual movements in the night sky alongside the simultaneous reading of the local Papay weather report and night sky review, triggered an unexpected energy in the marks and movement during the performance. Although the work was orchestrated by the artists drawing in the London studio, the island's night sky with the voice of the reader provided a unique and multilayered, multimedia collaboration.

### CONCLUSION

Challenged by the issues of our collaborative and individual practices, the relationship between drawing and performance explored in our Performance Drawing Collective undergoes constant transformation. How we experience time is based on our embodied sense of duration. However, describing a drawing practice which considers experience as a product of knowledge we may begin to explore an area of how someone else senses time.

In *ARC: I Draw for You*, a conclusion was made about the sense of fragmentation and mis-interpretation. We attempted to explore further the nature of the collaborative process, referencing Fluxus to build on the notion of making and receiving an instruction to produce drawings. We shared ideas and opened up questions in our individual practices that initiated a furthering of collaborative artworks.

During *Skype vs. Night Sky* we could experience a sense of moving beyond *drawing* as an individual or simply working together engaged in sensation and experimentation. Our London studio was a portal for something outside a performance drawing in one location, but transported telematically to different time zones and locations. The repetition of our actions being transmitted and returned simultaneously expanded our vision of working together collectively but also, globally.

Throughout the making of these artworks we reflected on and discussed our actions and personal experiences of duration in the marking process in an attempt to extend our approach to drawing as a way of thinking. Deleuze's concept of becoming has provided a paradigm in which to relate the transforming nature of our differences and variations within collaboration. Working intensively alongside one another, *knowing* the sense of each other's *drawing* actively encouraged us to discover differences between our individual practices. The meeting, and the crossover points, as well as the divergences, fed and stimulated our working model and operational term 'performance drawing'. Through strategies of movement, repetition and open-endedness we have communicated our particular journeys to define drawing and its relationship to time through collaborative practice. The negotiations and unanswered questions about time in relation to our drawing process have been shaped by our shared action as well as our individual quest.

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