

Intent is everything. It is the call my photography instructor used, bringing the students to be accountable for every creation. It was subsequently integral to every following critique. That instructor taught, and somehow in the folds of the teaching an unspoken concept germinated inside of me. The concept began with a question...”what is an interpretation?” While training under the instructor, interpretation of truth was required in order to have an authentic message. Thing is authenticity could not be untwined without knowing intent. Consequently, each work and following critique began with the question “what is your intent?”.

I had experienced intent being tied to truth, in my mind (at least). I needed to understand truth, my truth, before articulating my intent. Long before this class, truth was something I hungered. I had been told often, what it was. You see, from infancy on I was taken, weekly, to a celebration of a sacrament. It was my upbringing and in that ritual I was told a version of “search no more....for he is truth”. It did not make sense to me so I looked further, because what I was being taught coddled a natural need to search and find truth. That natural need to understand the world meant I also needed to understand both my head and my heart. When others of the faith searched, as I did, there was an answer that could stop the searching. This answer acknowledged the mystery and stated we, as humans, just needed to have faith. Knowing something was a mystery and finding simple faith could stop all questions. That was something I could do if it had felt right in my body.

Truth appeared to be amiss, hence my searching evolved into an insatiable demand for truth. When I spoke I could be confrontational, in that very demand. It was difficult to listen, and be heard, in that confrontational format. It was exhausting, and either I needed to change my requirements, or my method. My method evolved, looking to find a more integral ways to communicate. One that reflected a strong side and a gentle side, in balance with each other, and those around. The opportunity to communicate this way was there for the taking, in my photography class. I was a greenhorn to both photography and making of art, but no greenhorn to searching for answers that required clear communication. The call “what is your intent?” echoed through and through. Lived experience and insatiable demand for truth rendezvoused

with student requirements using the tools of photography, in a room taught by a world class master. Twelve weeks of instruction and I was going to answer my questions. Realistic limitations were not for the faint of heart, which I ...was neither realistic... nor faint of heart.

Myself, hereafter known as Greenhorn, was in over my head and still determined to work with subjects such as sexism, death and self image. Greenhorn also needed to learn the tool being used...the camera and how it functioned. Interestingly enough that tool originated with the camera obscura, literally translated as darkened room. Poetic how the original intent of this tool and my training were to synthesize with life lessons and produce images on paper. What I did not know is the camera captured intent, quite deftly obscured from mine own mind and body. This was a theme I would find continued, long after the university training, as I walked my path through the alleys of policing. But for now....it is.....

...1990 and I am training under internationally renowned Canadian Artist, Suzy Lake. Conceptual art the intent, photography the method. I had ideas I wished to explore, and I cut my eye teeth in those classes. Meanwhile that professor had a plan - to expose Greenhorn, and the rest of us, to a number of issues including First Nations struggles and feminism among many others, all the while exposing each of us to our own particular falsehoods. In class the commercial photographer could not help but be slick and glossy while the photo documentarian could not help but shoot with an instinct. An instinct that fumbled over lighting, depth of field and shutter speed. Both would be called out and all of us would witness the process, wondering what our respective work unwittingly willed to the world. It was the theatre of the soul, when cameras were still film and darkrooms had trays to process exposed papers. That process is no longer prevalent but the skills and lessons learned, by Greenhorn remain. One of the lessons embedded was the power of metaphor. As a result Greenhorn set out on a lifelong journey commiserating between intent and metaphor. Today we start with the metaphor and find out what it will dust off the Shelves of Intent.

Now...it has become evident to me that the dust on aforementioned "Shelves of Intent" is altered

by little unsuspecting pieces in our lives. If we watch ourselves, quietly, we often find some formerly unknown information about our own intent. In watching myself I ended up dusting off this particular pondering you now hear over the air waves. This pondering came about with quiet watching, listening to a podcast by American speaker and author, Tara Brach. Brach's subject, mindfulness, that Greenhorn's method to manage the misery infused PTSD in day to day life. Between mindfulness and misery Greenhorn had hope mindfulness would become the cream on top of unpasteurized milk, separating from the misery. So during this particular podcast snake balls were referenced, specifically how a male snake would emit a false scent intended to attract other males ready to reproduce. The reason for the false scent was the original snake's need to warm up, thermoregulate.

The listening of that podcast seemed to be choreographed with yet another emotive disclosure in the media, upon which I stumbled. This one was an emotive disclosure by a police officer suffering what I would identify as the acute stages of PTSD. Greenhorn wondered, could the call of the pained police officer be a call to thermoregulate? Could it be a call looking for a bit of human warmth? Greenhorn knew PTSD made one feel uncomfortable in their own skin, and very alone. Greenhorn knew this well and wondered whether there was a healthier way to call humans to drink the spirit of compassion, even for an ounce in time. I, while watching Greenhorn, wondered if the concept of snake balls could be a metaphor for this barrage of 911 suffering documented and even sensationalized in the media?

So, in the spirit of Greenhorn, I started to write, having no idea whether this metaphor would work. As I wrote I watched the unbinding of pieces, I observed myself and I sought truth. It appeared that my mind was creating a piece of art and ...to remain integrous to the process I needed to execute my own critique by unveiling mine own intent. During the critique a playful thought came to mind, I wonder if I be Greenhorn or myself? For now I am both and you have joined in this journey as we talk and listen over the radio waves.

What you are hearing is an audio work evolved from pen and ink, further fermented in sound

waves around our planet and received by thine ears. The audio work appears to desire the title “Snake Balls and 911 Walls”. I have temporarily accepted this title. As this piece is created, and the critique process is honoured, the working title will become one with the intent of our communed creation. Conversely it could also be a simple passing thought ... moving way for another title and calling for what really going on. So....where to now? Might as well start with asking if this metaphor could work. In order to ask the question, Greenhorn and I must start with some simple deconstruction and curious searching to authenticate intent. That means looking at the metaphor and seeing if it can genuinely apply to the thought of humans calling to thermoregulate.

Snake balls was the constructed metaphor. Ownership of how that concept came to this audio page has been noted: one podcast and one media clip on one of my moderately tormented days. From this point on, what is created can be termed as: authored by my pen, inked on paper and touching, gently, your ears and now your mind. This is now ours, yours and mine.

It is 2016, twenty six years after that photography training, and a lot has changed since 1990. Greenhorn has graduated, worked in Fine Arts, taught French, trained in the healing arts and settled on a career in policing. That career had literal lumps and bumps which are part of this story. Those lumps and bumps include the obscura’s darkened room of mental health and a four letter acronym called PTSD. It is as if the final career inked the mind, as cartographer’s ink mark boundaries on parchment or tanned skins. As the years passed, the inking process moved from the dye and fountain pen of my police notebook....to other methods. That four letter acronym was going to demand truth, in a brutal fashion, akin to the testosterone evident in the righteousness of younger years. Without choice I would die, hence I devised a choice. I could change how I listened to the raging, contorted, emotions in my body and find peace with a new truth. With it came a different life. Getting there meant acknowledging endings and knowing grief.

The search was no longer closed in a dark room and washed in chemical baths. Nor was it found

in the western world documents, imposed on some, written by others. I had no world class teacher to guide and challenge me. I had the documents determining right and wrong written in the Criminal Code and the Bible but determining right from wrong could not find solace in the printed page. Church and State separated lifetimes ago. Regardless they continue to have such sadly evident in democratic elections even today. Something was different. Clearly inked images and boundaries became mobile playfully evident in the portraits of the walls of Hogwarts. The world was changing, the world had changed. The icons were leaving their painted portraits. 911 walls were still there, but the world was very different. I had become history as you either are or will too become.

That difference was so simple to see, the inking now appeared to be an electronic depression of send button bounces and satellite repeat, with a catchment of earth. Snakes...well...how could they possibly hold the metaphor of calling humans to humanity with all these changes? Mind you snakes had held for centuries as meaning for the human contingent, so maybe it was not too far of a stretch to think this could work? The title “Snake Balls and 911 Walls” was just that question....a question about our own humanity. As the pondering is critiqued there appears to be a third intent, yet unstated. It is my intent as the speaker.... I wish to understand humanity (my own broken humanity) via this metaphor. Greenhorn’s naievty seems to approach and maybe, with the help of unsuspecting pieces..... truth may dust off the shelf. Can a hypothesis be formulated?

Hypothesis: Can the false pheromone metaphor allow better understanding of gut wrenching cries for help.

Method: start with the call to be human and combine it with the metaphor of false pheromones.

Acknowledge the pheromones are intended to thermoregulate.

Intent: to create a successful metaphor, allowing access to all and keeping vicarious trauma at bay.

As I perform the initial critique I find great caution surrounding snake imagery. It is historically

rift with meaning. Those inherent meanings make either the metaphor powerful or disintegrate it to dust. The Roman Catholic upbringing instantly hears the snake calling Eve to betray, the apple consumed and subsequent shame of the self. Final result is embedded in betrayal. Betrayal is a required ingredient to the four letter acronym PTSD. Presumptions of police, their role and rules make that betrayal even more profound when it occurs. This piece could work with the metaphor. It certainly speaks about the 911 walls needed to fall for the fissures, cracks and demolition of betrayal to flourish.

The historian loves the ouroboros, the snake eating its tail, where what is real is... and also consumed, changed in a forever cycle. It is not lost on me that the metaphor of the snake houses discomfort, implications of snake tongues, shedding skin and simple intrigue. All this, harnessed in allegory with police and power, could work. The title of police officer is a velcro title, just as any other title by which we call another being. The only title permanently inked on our body and skin is "human".

It all sounds good yet caution is calling..... an honest critique notes it is equally likely the history of the snake is too big to manage... in this metaphor.

Greenhorn knows that some things are too big, yet still persists. Truth be told....Greenhorn found some messages in the weekly sacrament also too big to be believed. Those messages had to be founded in faith and that willingness to believe made the congregants scheduled for salvation. It was, in my mind, blind faith used as glue to hold people, practices and a history undisputed. An imposed stasis. One piece undisputed is the existence of the story involving a snake, a woman and a betrayal which, in itself, was created to explain or define truth.

The faith had a number of sacred containers. A number of sacraments designed to make the whole manageable. If Greenhorn's metaphor was to hold, and the title "Snake Balls and 911 Walls" remain, the containment or boundary needed to adjust, just as the faith found separate containers to explain the whole, so must this metaphor. The entire structure of the faith was too large, just as the snake and the betrayal of Eve to Adam was also too large to manage. It was not

what I was discussing so I needed to adjust. These were not the discussions of this metaphor. This metaphor was about the false pheromones calling to thermoregulate.

Titles are like inking of boundaries, hence this inked boundary of “Snake Balls and 911 Walls” needs to touch its boundaries and know they hold firm. It is time the title change to “ThermoRegulation”. This time the boundary shall be found within the act of the snake ball itself. Specifically the act calling for thermoregulation. That act has what humans have termed a “false” scent designed to attract other snakes. It is a male snake sending out a female mating scent. Male snakes respond and wrap around the calling snake. That snake can then warm up, with the assistance of the others and in scientific terms - thermoregulate. In spiritual terms....we don't know, certainly neither myself nor Greenhorn know. Therefore the spiritual terms are not part of this dialogue. The hypothesis has now been identified and the portions of the metaphor have been narrowed to contain only the false pheromones as a call to warm up and live.

Moving on from the spiritual history of the snake to the physical call to thermoregulate. There is limited time within which that need can be met, or else the caller will die. Limited time and risk of death work well with the intent of this pondering. Breath is the link between the systems we have to live, the systems that are automatic and by choice. It is the only piece that speaks to both systems in our body.....it is part of regulation.....

Take a moment as we re-calibrate.....

....two simple breaths... and as you inhale you conjure in your mind a sphere.

....as you exhale that sphere becomes composed of snakes.

....as you breathe in look at what is in your mind's eye

....simply acknowledge whatever emotion or body feeling speaks.

That acknowledgement is a simply “I hear you are.... Or I feel your....”

Breathing out you know that what you have seen and felt is

....integrating with you and this shared listening.

Without knowing the emotions of any other in this solitary journey, we can safely presume were many as the sap of this sound art podcast reaches you and beyond. Some touched emotions may include fear, repulsion or intrigue. While those emotions, and others, pulse, smoothed with our breathing in for the count of two, out for the count of two and held momentarily with that simple pause at the top of one breath....and a mirrored pause at the bottom of the same breath.

As we breathe the sphere of snakes has room to exist in our minds. It is here, in that breath, we find compassion for ourselves and our other human compatriots. We breathe, we know what we see and we wait with the image as whomever is in the middle is warming up and coming back to a safe temperature. Our gender does not matter, our intention is simply to be and share some warmth and then move on, task completed. We are not called to take on the emotions, to agree with the litany of laws or to bow to any particular name of god, we simply breathe, hold the space and allow someone who is searching for their human warmth to return.

The metaphor holds strong. There is understanding sans vicarious trauma.

As we move on in our thoughts our emotions move on as well.

Shift!

Sphere finds human disinterest!

Conjured image disintegrates to dust!

Just as the sphere has just done... in your mind. Now the mind holds baited, while another phrase of sounds tumble your way. The tumbling brings Greenhorn quarter of a century later, still wet behind the ears and the year closes on 2016. Greenhorn knows if a metaphor can contain what is happening, then what is happening can be contained. Best of luck is what I say, and no harm in trying. Interestingly enough a different professor, said something to me during my final thesis critique. The words still ring, "yes, you are trying, very trying". I supposed that persistence inside of me is still trying which causes me to be trying for others. Note to self: wise words are not always welcome when issued.

So no more superfluous metaphors, forked tongues, cartographer's ink or exposed darkened rooms. Only the life of the snake and a piece that allows for common ground in understanding PTSD. It is possible....the snake and the snake ball continue in this work of spoken art, to which we listen. The intent is to flow with how nature evolves, how nature does what is needed, sans apology, and creates what is required. PTSD is the body succumbing to nature, finding out the mind is not writing the script. PTSD lives the subsequent conflict or potential collaboration. The snakeball is a collaboration of two parts with different intents, one part to thermoregulate and the other to reproduce. It is simple and works. Where it gets interesting are the false pheromones. Something has to give in our story, or else the intent does not authenticate. The title of "Snake Balls and 911 Walls" shifted to "Thermoregulation" and is now considering a new title of "False Pheromones". The title is... as important as the content, it sets the stage and windows open the intent.

There are a number of false messages happening. One is that police are separate from the rest of society. They walk toward that which others wish to know does not exist. Police do this with a facade of masks, little emotion, or emotion easy to misuse. After a while of living this facade... some police discover they are more human than they ever wanted and find their body calling for help. That call for help is masked through stories, unshed tears and often fermented with the platoon after a long shift. It is also a call that can mask through adrenaline dumps and risk taking behaviour. All of these calls need to be moderated and brought to a healthy place.

Could all these false messages be the false pheromones....thermoregulation? Stories, risk or drink all bring about a sense of camaraderie. The rarely seen tears are held back waiting for geographic change finding rapids and waterfall be they with shedding eyes or creaky knees or fattened heart valves. Regardless, the waterfall is evident in any officer observed disclosing to the media. The drink....well it is a sedative and allows logic and reasoning to relax. All of these appear to work well with the snakes act of sending out false pheromones. The snake is cold, needs others, and has found a way to thermoregulate with false, or masked, methods of camaraderie.

Back to the hypothesis articulated earlier. If the human core temperature goes too low the medical crisis is called “shock” and there becomes a critical need to thermoregulate. Shock means the body takes blood being delivered to the extremities and concentrates that blood on the life support systems such as the heart and lungs. Cold and numbness does occur for victim of shock. The body cools to dangerous levels and warmth is needed to survive, to live.

The 911 disclosures, and even suicides, are cries for warmth, understanding and basic compassion. Those are situations of critical shock, either metaphorically or physically. Warmth comes from the physical rise in body temperature through body to body contact, blankets and other pieces such as warmth found in understanding and basic compassion. Humans need this to live, cultures need this to exist, calls for unanswered ... is a link to another story.

Could the tears, anguish and self injury be the false pheromone? For one, the actions of those calling audibly for help are in the minority. They call because they are now disjointed from what happens on a day to day basis. Our beloved First Nations have been calling for generations, waiting for the call to be answered. Their humanity stolen and relabeled. Our officers and soldiers were told there was honour in what they were doing and in the process humanity has been absconded. In everyday lexicon the absconding is lightly termed as “unhinged”. I wonder if the door used to keep things contained and hidden needed to unhinge and become an opening? Maybe what was being kept in order was never meant to be contained? Regardless of the judgment of what “being unhinged” implies, is the subsequent call for help false or is the life led false? I say it is both, Greenhorn agrees and notes it maintains the metaphor when we see the ouroboros. The ouroboros is not about judgement nor value...it is about an evolution of understanding.

Regardless of what is false or true, the method of calling out from the injured mind and body does not echo without conscience and consequence, particularly if you are any form of a peace keeper, embroidered badge or self titled. The form of the pained police officer disclosing to the media was powerful on that day I dusted the Shelves of Intent. That person publicly shared the

misery of PTSD having witnessed unnecessary loss of life and hallowed in pain compassion. That person was calling others to wrap warm around those that are hurting and find a way to thermoregulate. Do not leave the presumably unhinged alone to walk through the opening of a previously locked door! The metaphor stands strong.

Compassion or not, calls articulated in crisis always have a consequence. These calls might break down the 911 walls but those breaks are recompensed by being repaired and built stronger. Some remain in the job. Some hold to a faith that claims labels of sin assuming life after death is the goal. Change is slow. With this metaphor, false pheromones call for thermoregulation.....we need not make any judgement about the caller, we simply need to be present and know we are all human, before any title.....and after.