The Ball // 30 Times in 2 Days

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Two photographs by Iris Benson-Sukzer, and one by Galileo, all edited by Kenneth Goldsmith

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I dreamed there was such a huge pile of poop in the toilet before I got there that I sat on it without yet realizing, then realized I’d spend a long time cleaning up before I could sit down again to have my turn. Debris from construction. The effort to write, clearing things out of the way, trying to decide when I hadn’t had that in mind at all. And all the chores there are to do today, including writing chores. Facing the constantly changing nature of reality as I experience it while still obliged somehow to follow through with what I said I’d do. I had forgotten I set a limit at both ends, or maybe didn’t. I can’t remember if I really did decide.
All those things are now in place, but there’s oatmeal smearing from my pinky onto the paper while I’m writing. Me me me. It was the newspaper that left those words behind, and then I copied its behavior. Am I right? I can’t seem to leave myself out of it. At least the penmanship is legible. What makes a horrible word like that attractive and intriguing or amusing or any other modifier for that matter. Again there is more to be accomplished or gotten out of the way to clear a space for accomplishment than time will be discovered for in this day, this lifetime, this species’ course of resilient life. About half a minute before it ends there is a sense of ending then, then it goes on, another ten percent.
I wonder if this is how she did it.
I doubt it. Leaving snail trails.
My eyelid appears to smear my vision.
Are you there? The world is not a visual
illusion, anyway. We go on from there.
What do you mean “we”? As my the
handwriting deteriorates. An old building
collapses inside out, the light shifts,
elbow slips along the tabletop and
through unidentified proximate space.
Are you there? I forget what time I
started, or stopped (was it one of
those? Let’s get lost inside this
parenthesis, assets unknown
Will the phone ring? I hear someone dialing. Exploring and approaching, I am all alone, sending out feelers and tentacles. Who is more confident than I, and how did they get that way? I suppose the poet presumes an audience (an auditor, a willing partner) and, having presumed such a one, presumes upon them. They are a one, or a many, depending on the writer’s point of view. Isn’t that funny? Are you writing an essay on poetics? Oh don’t bore me. You cretin. Let’s take opposite sides of the fence and plant things. But I don’t garden, I don’t rehab, I don’t even shop, I sit and write. Sit and write, which also involves pacing, eating, cooking, laundry, email, dental hygiene, foot massage, leftover paperwork, weather checks and
With so many interruptions, how much can you accomplish? How can you quantify that? I am not the only one to ask a lot of questions. I hope you will join me. But I was going to say, maybe I could get more written by using fewer words. I was going to say, less words. Maybe shorter ones too. So how can you that? I am only one to ask. I hope you join me going to maybe more by words. I was too that, only one hope to . . . hmm, looking for a good verb . . .
Are we supposed to stop everything just because the sun doesn’t rise? Maybe it’s in eclipse. Maybe the system’s down. Can’t we engage in a little talk or something, some relationship activity, or practice feeling our way around in the dark (it may be a long time – meanwhile, we can recall to one another the many advance predictions, and doubts voiced, regarding this pretty pass. We could impersonate Laurel and Hardy – what would they do? I think time will fly if we just keep the ball rolling. Meanwhile, here, let me see if I can boot up. Does the ipod work? There always seems to be half a minute to go, just when I stop to think, so I charge ahead –
You are not here. Time is passing.
Does that mean I am alone? If so, for
how long? How am I to handle the
same responsibilities tomorrow, when
the task definitions will be so very
different but the setting by and large
the same (this planet Earth, or mostly
home), you still not here. Who are you
anyway? Now don’t get an attitude.
Something they sell or give away at
Wal-Mart, I presume. If it’s the
world’s largest corporation, why does
it still have two capital letters in
a single word? How much do they
want? More time. Can hegemony be
more complete? How could anyone,
particularly the wealthy and am-
bitious, the so-called self-made,
ever define the nature of “enough”?
Oh yeah. No wonder. Did I write that?
Did I finish? He told he typed out the
entire issue of the New York Times,
ads and all, and then published it
as a poetry book – and not in 1974
either, but just lately! Then he told me
that he could tell, actually, for a fact,
that part of it was scanned. Walter
Benjamin is set rolling in his grave –
or is he always rolling there, dear
heart?, and perhaps only now
stuck, like a logjam in so vast a lake
its invisible shores no longer
sense the ripple of the erring
meteorite or fuselage that splashes
in the middle.
That was walking together. I held you on a leash, and you decided where we would go and at what tempo. In five minutes we got about twenty feet away from where we started. But I was going to say, rather, the discontinuity is at the beginning. The end is interrupted, true, but that’s artificial, arbitrary, I mean, or illusory – I forget why. Is this convincing? But the initial entry, getting underway, weighing anchor, setting pen to paper after not, shifting frame so radically that one “knows oneself to be” doing that which one was not before then up to – that’s where an interruption really occurs, and where confusion and disorder reign, as idea, act, being, consequence jockey for position, uncertain of advantage.
What do you think they were saying, or singing, in that foreign language? Brooding, pulling on their long pasty whiskers, daydreaming of a pastry shop on 5th Avenue, the reflections of traffic lights in wet pavement, a cold breeze despite a recent week of temperate whether; a daughter out of touch, far away, debts, inactive minimum in the savings account, will she write? The writing on the wall meant for somebody else. The neon advertisement met everyone abruptly, then was assimilated into the neighborhood. Would come to, there on the pavement, after the collision, wondering what had happened before and after having passed out. And are these people kind or not? What’s in it for them? And why not trust them? To imagine them well-intended is to give oneself the benefit of the doubt, is it not?
Multi-tasking, the pace speeds up, identity’s question is lost in the shuffle, labels flutter like nobody’s business, desire trumps every incidence of satiation, not least the wish to be done with it and returned to an embeddedness in destiny and fate, density and space. One name at a time would be nice. Dark beer and skip the French sauce. Neck twists around in a circle and we’ll call it wholesome, but don’t let the wrong person see it or they’ll take fright, presuming a sexual perversion is attracted to them. Clear my throat and fill it in with thick listening. One more week until tomorrow.
What do you do if the alarm doesn’t go off?
Why do you ask so many questions? Because there are so many of us in here, like kitchen matches packed into a box. How in Heaven’s name did you get there? That’s wishful thinking if I ever heard it. I whistle a happy tune in the dark, forgetting there was ever any other time. The eternal present is a godsend. Over a barrel and through the woods, into the roast we go. Huff and puff and fall into an exhausted heap, happy to be let down. Little flakes of something slip out of the sky for reasons known only to
Making great or little project depending what the progress is. It started out the other way around. We do go on. So much space is here once I stop rummaging through it so feverishly. How long can I hold it open? There it goes again. Astonishing how much confusion one person can set loose in the world. Come here and rest upon my knee and I will tell you a story about the origin of the universe. Suddenly voices were everywhere, echoing and contradicting themselves, I mean each other, in a hectic effort to fit in while distinguishing themselves from each other, second-guessing their own intentions, insisting on right and wrong interpretations.
Fold and unfold, fold and unfold. When will it ever stop? Who’s there, peering into my window? Are the neighbors home?
Each trigger is hit by another, indirectly, as the hand clenches in agony, then spreads and flails. Gazing serenely down the barrel, a swallow hums something bird-like. The air vibrates magically, or is it frantically, with all this being and becoming (see what I mean?), and my mother calls me down for dinner from my lonely, overpopulated bedroom (where, at age 13 or so, I was learning to type with 10 fingers by copying an entire issue of Time magazine on the Royal manual in my bedroom studio gallery . . .
Thinking about what a friend had said,
I was hoping it was a lie. I think I’ve
forgotten how. She’s so cunning, with those
freckles, arching eyebrows . . . Oh well, it’s only
a movie. Every home has its screen or
screens on which are projected pointed
substitute dreams, meanings, intentions,
rhythms, and associations all included.
So what will you be doing tonight? The usual,
reacting so someone else’s fantasy, or some
well-paid committee’s. The outside has grown
dark, cold, and distant, and maybe wet.
The cats are in. I could use a good
clearing of conscious and immersion
into tenderness, if only in my imagination

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If I do this, does that exempt me from having to do that? Side effects are numberless, I vow to ignore them. In order to focus on the task at hand, you’ve got to, uh, . . . Just a glance at the hourly news headlines – that’s enough! The big picture: on the one hand there’s static, color distortions, snow, that rolling image effect, more focus problems, and the nerve-wracking jump cuts; on the other hand there’s terror, denial, numbness, overwhelmment, obsessionality, delirium, rage, and more trouble with the focus.
Sooner or later it was bound to happen: Defecation takes center stage. I could have put it off, or ignored it. A tilting windmill lands crashing on the ground. Is that an armored foot sticking out from under it? The ratio of questions to assertions or mere notations or digressions – one to another. More than two can play this way. Through the woods, wandering among the scat and mosses a squirrel hops, oblivious to the annual increase in highway usage. It comes out thick and slow, with some force behind it, leaving ambiguity behind.
Writing, I get so involved (and moving again among discourses – writing one document based on another, I break to write a note to someone to ask them to explain an apparent contradiction in the first) I don’t watch the time to get down to just sit, with others, silently, in time to get there when it starts. So I’ll go in at their next break. When I write I do nothing else. There are so many sides to it. Are these line breaks, or is this prose? The sun begins to challenge us from hopelessness. Clean hair, fresh air, despite my lousy sleep, fretting over money.
Don’t know nothing, nor everything. An admonishment. Maybe. Up for tea. Will you take a cup of tea? I will take it behind the house and pour it on the stones. No puddle there. More mosses grown in all weathers. For instance, this mild sun, feverish breeze, rising and subsiding like lakes. An incline I am at a break in, where the foundation rests, the building stands, the rocks collect, the feet perambulate circularly on the wooden floor. Like everywhere, the grasses tremble.
Anyone can do it, but generally speaking, few do. You can see it in the morning, a subtle glimmer behind the glare. Whenever treetops are brought plummeting down by winter winds, lightning, or collisions, some people, like animals, wake with a start. At each evident instance, I start again. What makes it seem one might be a perception of ending, or it might be my refusal to continue as I had been, as when, planning or daydreaming or rehearsing recriminations, I stop and notice that I am breathing again, what color the moss is in this light, the sounds no one is making.
Let’s see, where did I leave myself? I was just about to do something over here, and I overheard something.

Will you watch this for me for a minute? I’m not just trying to confuse you, thank you very much. Articulation is, by its nature, emphatic, someone once said. End quote.

Excerpt from untitled text by countless monkeys on keyboards.

You would like to listen in on something else.

A walk through the park, not to the park. Car door squeaks shut, human voice talks to dog or you stand there motionless, as if not becoming at all just to spite.
Nothing ever changes, but thinking makes it so. Who said that? Is there an echo around here? We leave in the night, we arrive in the morning, like a good rain, grieving nothing, but weeping spontaneously everywhere. What were you saying when that simile so hypnotically interrupted you? That was no simile, that was my life! Joined at the hip and everywhere, helplessly empowered by one another, whether against our own will or the other’s . . . Well, let’s relax and join forces. Lacking a comfortable chair, it is good to be allowed to lie down occasionally, sayeth the popup. On the front lines, we watch, look, listen, but we are expected to kill, now!
Are you still here. A wonder I haven’t scared myself away by now. I always think it’s a complement when someone thinks I’m crazy, or acting unlike myself. But when I told my mother she was the craziest mom in Princeton, I was trying to shatter her certainty – which, I later learned, was only a requisite façade that got her through the day. However, I found her contradictory. I wonder if I am contradictory enough. Is someone looking for me? Is that egotism? The mom in me feels itself needed, and kneaded, by the places where the stitching falls out in others. I remember a sewing machine but not any needle and thread.
Why don’t the calendar pages flutter ahead in real life like in the movies? Clouds rerun and evening sniffs the air. Wind, traffic, and barking complement the laptop’s fan. What used to be a homespun image is now electronic—a commodity, variously disintegrating in situ. I guess you can’t plural Latin that way.
The ancients understood something we don’t. Don’t remember. Can’t identify.
I am back where I continued from and
can’t remember a thing. Hum. Was Berg
opera, now Mingus and Pullen. Reading lamp.
Half-eaten apple. I was here. Ergo, evidence
it’s not the same time = evidence of my own
interventions in the order of things, or so
ego sees it. Can I be more mundane or
to the point? It’s happy hour, if there were
one on Sunday. Three big writing chores
are done: the Functional Behavioral
Assessment Report, the Summary of Minutes
article, and the Minutes of the Annual
Meeting. Time to play with scissors.
Reading can be nourishment and so can broccoli. Everything in moderation – even serving others, if you can afford it. I was relieved when, receiving a phone call from a stranger in New York City (instead of the relatives I’d left voicemail with, trying to get a conversation started), she asked me to do what I’d already done (save pregnant women by asking my senators to vote against the nuclear option – well, you know what I mean). If you live in New York City, right next to so many people, how do you ever get to stop serving others and get some sleep, nourishment, reading? Even reading I am often doing for others, asked for acceptance or suggestions. I am not annoyed, I am annoyed, I am not. It’s a real heart, even if it’s displayed by sleight of hand.
I will be late to my meeting. One cat is missing, and one bathtub is cluttered with cat dung – all dry. Is this a clue? I will be late but it may be just as well, though I don’t know why. There is the question, is all this egotistical? Not just writing it, but the tone, the inner intention, the unforeseeable intention in it? When rain falls on the windshield, it does not splash, it creates irregularities called distortions in the scene beyond as I perceive it, as though a picture were being altered (rain falls on paper that way, setting the ink free
Over night, the long haul, and out.
Back in the saddle, words, sliding, down.
In the nick of time, tensions, escapably.
What one has come to believe tensile
aerobics and acrobatics highwire hotdog
perplexed specious tea reader. Elusive
is what I think you mean. The President
relents – Can you imagine? We have come
to expect someone always to be right, at
least by his own lights, as something good
enough for us
Soon another alarm will go off, announcing it’s almost time for sleep. Climbing the headlands, I met a young woman about my age and we felt a spark illuminate the ambience, although it was a sunny day. Although it was a sunny day, there was no need of sunglasses or shady trees, because it was a dream or a memory. Daydreams are ubiquitous, and children are being born in them all the time, as well as out of them. You and I making babies, isn’t that the meaning of life, kind of like a religious, I mean, a spiritual thing? I mean, metaphorically.
The person and the person he might have been are about to embrace. The longing to become is identified with the longing to have been, but both of them already still are, so all they can do is embrace, one way or another, or abandon one another. No matter what they say or do, they are still simply the same person, longing to know and accept himself and to let himself go. The magic of discovering a connection is just the revelation of the true nature of things as they are. The pain of alienation and of self-absorption are just reactions to the frustration of losing touch with the actual, of never getting enough because of just not getting it.
[Saturday and Sunday, April 23 and 24, 2005, every hour on the hour, when my wristwatch alarm sounded, I wrote five minutes in a brown book Lyn gave me several years ago, as well as I could. This is the transcript, completed two weeks later.]

Steve Benson