



# The Ball // 30 Times in 2 Days

STEVE BENSON

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*Two photographs by Iris Benson-Sulzer, 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 con-  
struction. 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 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, the reflections of traffic  
lights in wet pavement, a cold breeze despite  
a recent week of temperate weather, 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

~

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

