

# One-liners

## *Arranged in Volleys*

(10 + 1 as revised January 2016)

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### First Volley (The Power of Positive Thinking)

We expect too much of the dishonest, the unreliable and the lazy. They have their hands full accusing others of being dishonest, unreliable and lazy.

If the “is” is intolerable, you’re left with the “is not.”

With science we scaffold a hollow building.

The role of imagination in sensation is underestimated. The highly sensitive add to sensation imagination, and thus they—seeing both present and not present—see more.

*Cf., Ian Craib, [The Importance of Disappointment](#): “[T]hinking involves a realisation that there are things in other people that I am blind to and things that are not there, but which I see too easily.”*

We Americans believe in positive thinking, and can be quite negative about people who are not openly positive, and quite afraid of not being sufficiently and demonstrably positive ourselves. It takes all our remaining energy to turn on the TV.

A young woman who, thanks to her youth or beauty or to a certain admiring softness, receives preferential treatment from an older man will be doubly pleased if she is not made fully aware of why she is receiving this special treatment.

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## **Second Volley (What we choose to speak about)**

The boy in wiping away his mother's kiss felt it.

A person you want to have sex with is not necessarily a sex object, and a sex object is not necessarily a person you want to have sex with.

In an invisible New York the police obey the laws.

If we had better memories would we be less destructive and less hopeful?

In the United States economic inequality corrects itself, a little bit, when businesses need customers more than cheap labor.

What we choose to speak about is more important than what we say.

## **Third Volley (I have not lied on my résumé)**

I have not lied on my résumé—does that make me untrustworthy?

It's not a democracy if the citizens do not share more or less the same standard of living.

*Cf.*, Pablo González Casanova: "It is not enough to . . . imitate all the specific forms of classic democracy in order to have democracy: democracy exists to the extent that the people share the income, culture, and power; anything else is democratic folklore or rhetoric."

Is male interest in the vagina spurred by its otherness, or does the vagina (and penis) makes otherness interesting?

Later generations may not be as contemptuous of the theories in which we are putting our faith as astonished by how much faith we put in them.

We wander in a world of our projections, encountering our rejected selves in people we call strangers.

You can count on your enemies not to disappoint you.

When you find yourself talking about justice, your position is weak.

## **Intermezzo (The Secret Life of Bureaucrats)**

We are no longer so inclined to fire people because of the color of their skin or who they may be having sex with, and we count this as progress and find other ways of getting rid of people who are not part of our group or who are in our way.

I reply too quickly to e-mails. All our replies are too quick, we can only reply too quickly. It is only through replying that we can realize we have replied too quickly. It is only in speaking, or in publishing or sending out a text, that we can realize that there was something we have forgotten to say, or would have done better to keep to ourselves.

Those who think technology can be advanced are behind the times.

We begin by handing you a notice of privacy practices. Once you have signed it we ask you to fill out a form full of personal questions that have nothing to do with the purpose of your visit.

It is difficult not to imagine that human beings everywhere act as we see them acting around us. And it is hard not to hope that in this, too, we are misled.

When television companies realized televisions could simply be left on in homes and public places, they may not have realized or cared that the programming would then adapt itself to casual viewers and empty rooms.

As our machines do more of our thinking for us, we do less.

We agreed among ourselves and told plenty of others that he was a problem, not a positive force, but every time one of our staff would work with him, they came away with such a good impression, it was hard for us to make progress.

Driving is a form of anger management.

You know the monster is there because he hasn't pushed you off the cliff yet.

## **Fourth Volley (Thank You)**

"Please" can express hostility, and "thank you" grab power.

Answer to an apologetic waiter: It's good to be a little forgotten.

In love, you listen to your lover breathing.

Through our speech, silences, posture and positioning we regulate what can be said to us, and a few may wonder at the repetitiveness or the narrowness of their conversations.

What if God did bless America?

### **Fifth Volley (Statements)**

“In the few seconds between when I knew I was going to die and when I died I had some of my best ideas, and no paper.”

“Where were my parents when I was growing up? Talking on the telephone? What did I learn as a result? That love is words, and for telephones.”

*And, the more modern version:*

“What did my parents do? They texted. What did they teach me? To text.”

“It is not that I am unaware of my circumstances and feelings, I just don’t like speaking openly about them (particularly to myself).”

“The reason I’m in a hurry to cement this relationship is because that will be one big thing crossed off my list.”

“I could have done X, but I was doing Y.”

“I can no longer reach my breaking point.”

### **Sixth Volley (Lessons of the body surfer)**

Lesson of the body surfer: The size of the wave matters and so does your position, and your courage.

Are the powerless nicer, or the nicer powerless?

It might be easier to change our behavior if we lived long enough to understand it.

The question is not when you will talk to your child about sex, but when she will find out about the Holocaust.

Justification for having children: to be able to say “Splutch!” when you go to the bathroom.

We pray for the unknown to save us from the known.

### **Seventh Volley (Odds without Ends)**

If you go to a restaurant bathroom, and, before using the toilet, you clean the urine off the seat, and then, an hour later, you return and find the seat again yellow-spotted—

The intermediate learns to sit on nails without feeling anything, the expert that he is sitting on nails.

May each say to each, “I wouldn’t like your life, and you wouldn’t like mine.”

Humankind will have reached a next level when the little packets we are given are no longer openable.

In New York anarchists wear the pants.

For millennia human beings survived and died without umbrellas.

At times it may take courage to be different, more often what is required is money.

Not paying attention, how can we be surprised?

### **Eighth Volley (A Fish Swims)**

At 1 so curious; mistrustful in old age.

Environmentalists compensate for the shortcomings of human nature with a fierce belief in the greater goodness of nature.

Liberals get lost in their fantasies; conservatives lie. (PS: My sense is that liberals lie too.)

If New Yorkers didn’t have so many rules to ignore, we wouldn’t know what to do with ourselves.

A good way to relieve one pain is to find another.

*And,* The arrival of new problems makes old ones seem less important.

A fish swims, a writer writes.

### **Ninth Volley (Before you start looking for someone to blame)**

Ambition is a parasite that takes over the host. (*Cf.*, Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, Ambition is the death of thought.)

If our food is to have no taste or to taste of artificial sugar, would we like it to look like foods that were once richer in flavor?

Everything is true, and most everything short-lived. Rare, though not necessarily precious, are the truths that endure.

The best givers know how to receive.

Life, too, is a book without answers.

Intolerance is a way of coping with (a sense of) failure.

*Or, Intolerance is how we cope with our sense of failure.*

It will be hard for some of us not to write about how some women are now tucking their cellphones in their bras.

We who have been so astounded that so many people—some of the most brilliant among them—have believed in God have underestimated the human predicament.

Before you start looking for someone to blame, ask yourself what counts as a significant mistake, and why.

It is not that a child owes his parents anything; it is that much of his anger is taken out on the next generation.

We imagine that we will feel the most pain at the moment of our death, but this is rarely the case.

A pleasure: On a summer day to put on a sweater.

## **Tenth Volley (Difficult People)**

**(a)**

If he forgave us our faults, could we forgive him for seeing them?

She remembered her father as a great man, and perhaps he was. Her life would have been easier with a different memory.

No one had any use for them, for years, until wages sank. Then the people felt lucky and pleased, finding bosses eager to exploit them, taking their free time.

We didn't kill him because chimes in his apartment sounded early in the morning. It was when we realized how pleased he was to be bringing beautiful music into our lives.

It is easy to place excessive faith in the possibility that someone in a position of authority might be hit by a bus, and that the replacement will be a better manager or more liable to bus accidents.

(b)

Looking at a homeless man lying on the sidewalk, you are not confused. You can see that this person was not well treated when he was young, and you can appreciate that from certain kinds of mistreatment there is no escape.

If you did her a favor, she would reply, "I owe you big time," and shortly thereafter ask you for another favor.

The founding principle of the American economy: find other people to do the work for little or no money.

That they made mistakes and were afraid to admit them, this was merely human. That principles were then used as a smoke screen; this, too, was merely human.

(c)

In decades past, I had hopes and ambition. Now, so that it will be quieter, I am waiting for most of the people to leave this restaurant.

What she really didn't like about sex was that it could lead a man to become attached to her, and she to him.

Bande de vipères, ne sortant de l'ombre que pour sucer les derniers rayons de soleil. Band of vipers, only slipping out of the shadows to suck up the last rays of light.

It got to the point where, not knowing his colleagues' names, after twenty years he had to retire.

Lonely, one becomes a tourist in one's own town.

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