

background media

Machines Don't Care
Machines Don't Care

Soma FM
Elektrokronika

Groove Salad

Bonobo
Black Sands

Tosca
Suzuki

Cougar
Patriot

Raven
Singularity

Obsidian
Fallout New Vegas

FreestyleGames
DJ Hero 2

JUSTIFIED
textworks
www.just-text.org

Tegan & Sara
Sainthood

Call of Duty: Black Ops

Treyarch

The Love Language
Libraries

Fauxliage

Mad Professor vs. Massive Attack
No Protection

Thievery Corporation
Radio Retaliation

Claude Debussy
Arabesque No. 1

Silversun Pickups
Carnavas + Swoon

Keny Arkana
Entre ciment et belle étoile

The Rogue Element
Lumina

Nonplace Urban Field
nuf

Nine Inch Nails
Ghosts I-IV

Dam Funk
Toeachizown

Sun Airway
Nocturne of Exploded Crystal Chandelier

Tricky
Mixed Race

The Conscious Daughters
The Nutcracker Suite

Rakim
The Seventh Seal

Raashan Ahmad
The Push

d o w n

a quarterly journal of politics, society, culture, and other stuff

volume 01 issue 01

winter 2010



Tea Party
economics

On Teaching

what this is

This is what I do when I feel like I'm not doing enough. This is a conversation on paper, something I can make that people can hold in their hands. This is (I suppose) part of me that I left behind at New College in Sarasota Florida, coming back because it won't sit quietly in the publications office anymore.

This is black and white because I want to make it cheap. Like all Justified Textworks (at least

won't someone please think of the trees?

I know print's not good for the environment. I'm using recycled paper and everything, but still — why not do it online? ("DO IT LIVE!")

Because it's good to have real publications, dammit. Because books aren't going away. Because words have weight and I want mine to exist in the real world.

fine print

Pretty Much Everything (This Time): Eric S. Piotrowski

Web: just-text.org/down

Madison + Sun Prairie, Wisconsin USA

so far), I pay for the publishing myself. I guess you could call it the cost of pamphleteering.

This is culture jamming text collage because our culture needs jam. ("Only one man would *dare* give me the raspberry!") There's no profit here, so everything not mine is claimed as fair use.

This is an attempt to reach people that I usually can't reach. I want lots of people — liberal, conservative, radical and moderate — to read this and maybe even respond. I won't hold my tongue (because I don't), but I have to keep it clean. I don't want to do this alone, so maybe you can write something for it. — esp

Obviously newspapers and magazines are struggling. I get all my news online, and other forms of writing are clearly headed in that direction. But in the meantime I want to make things on paper.

Even beyond the rhetoric of unplugging, I just like being able to hand someone a thing and say: "Here. Read this." — esp

3 Reasons the Tea Party is Wrong about the Economy

Eric S. Piotrowski

People in the Tea Party movement have a right to be upset. The US economy is still reeling from the 2008 meltdown, and working-class people have been hit the hardest. Some have written off Tea Party positions because of corporate donations to its various organizations. Others point to xenophobia, narrow-minded rhetoric, and racist signs at Tea Party events.

Although these are legitimate concerns, however, they do not eradicate the justified frustration of ordinary people who feel betrayed by the US economic system. Many people watched the bailout of banks and Wall Street firms while their own homes faced foreclosure. Unemployment grew while investment managers took home million-dollar bonuses. Who *wouldn't* be angry by such events?

Unfortunately, Tea Party leaders like Sarah Palin, Rand Paul, and Dick Armey offer a woefully misguided analysis of the US economy. It's not clear whether this failure of analytical precision

comes from lack of information, or from a deliberate attempt to lead working people to act against their own best interest. Either way, those who aren't millionaires should be aware of the following key points that the Tea Party leaves out of the discussion.

1. No President will let the US economy implode. The \$700 billion bailout of Wall Street firms took place because many of the companies were deemed "too big to fail". George W. Bush instigated the bailout, because he recognized that the consequences to the US economy would be apocalyptic without it. He is now being chastised by many Tea Party activists for not being a "real" believer in the free market.



A *true* believer, we're told, would have let these banks fail.

But that is not — and will never be — a legitimate option for the President of the United States. Allowing the entire economic system to crash (as it probably would have, if the government had not intervened in 2008) is political suicide for any president, regardless of his devotion to free-market principles. Therefore, if we wish to avoid future bailouts, we need to break up monopolistic corporations and banking institutions before they become "too big to fail". (This was made difficult by the repeal in 1999 of the Glass-Steagall Act, which for sixty years had restricted the size and reach of speculative banking.)

2. The IMF, World Bank, and WTO make the rules for the global economy. The last forty years brought a radical transformation of the world economy, led by free-market fundamentalists at the Bretton Woods institutions (World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and the World Trade Organization. These institutions (and others like them) have restricted the power of governments to protect their own economies, if such action inhibits international trade. Because the tendency is toward liberalizing (or lessening) restrictions on trade, these are often referred to as "neoliberal" policies.

The effects of these policies on the recent US economic crisis are too complex to explore here,



but an example is in order. The neoliberal economic model demands that governments allow companies to move production without restriction. As a result, clothing companies (to pick just one industry) have mostly moved production to countries with weak labor laws, a low (or nonexistent) minimum wage, and weak environmental standards. (Some governments — desperate for foreign investment — must participate in this "race to the bottom" by breaking up unions, gutting pollution laws, and so on.) The rapid and uninhibited flow of capital has led to an accelerated lust for profits among investment firms on Wall Street (and elsewhere). Restricting "barriers to free trade" in the realm of finance — also part of the neoliberal doctrine — means that US policymakers are reluctant to regulate complex and confusing practices like derivatives and credit default swaps.

If Tea Party leaders ever mention the IMF or WTO in their tirades against unjust governance,

I have yet to hear them. Such an analysis of the US economy, however, is dangerously shallow -- like trying to understand international relations without mentioning the United Nations.

I've written about these institutions elsewhere — please visit www.just-text.org and read "Global Economics 101: Five Things Everyone Should Know about the IMF, World Bank, and WTO". A sequel is also available on that site.

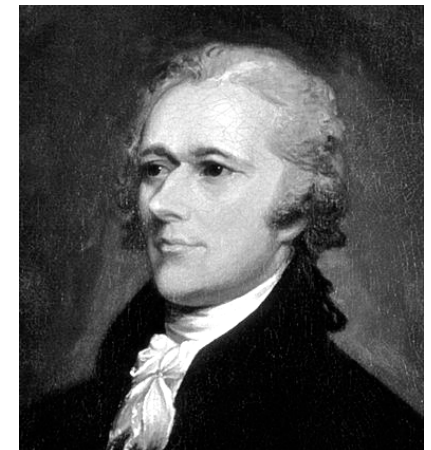
3. The US economy is not based entirely on the free market, and never has been.

Ha-Joon Chang's 2007 book *Bad Samaritans: The Myth of Free Trade and the Secret History of Capitalism* should be required reading for every member of the Tea Party movement (and anyone interested in economics). In it, he explains how Alexander Hamilton, as the first US Secretary of the Treasury, advocated — successfully — for a policy of protecting and subsidizing (in his words) "infant industries" so they could develop and eventually compete with power centers in other countries. This was a refutation of the free-market principles advocated by Adam Smith and Thomas Jefferson, but it led to massive industrial development in the northern United States.

US history is filled with similar examples of government involvement in the economy, with varying results. In the 20th

century, US transportation policy heavily favored automotive travel in the form of massive interstate highways, rather than rail projects. This became a de facto subsidy to auto manufacturers, since cars became more and more central to travel in the US. More recently, the US government (along with governments elsewhere) spent billions and billions of dollars for several decades to develop the internet, resulting in the powerful communications infrastructure that we all use every day.

This is not to say, of course, that private enterprise has no place in a sensible system of economic organization. Nor should we be naive enough to believe that government systems are always better or more efficient than market systems. As Martin Luther King Jr. wrote less than a year before his death: "[T]he kingdom of brotherhood is found neither in the thesis of communism nor the antithesis of



Alexander Hamilton

capitalism but in a higher synthesis [...] that combines the truths of both."

Many Tea Party leaders (especially Sarah Palin) promote a simplistic free-market fundamentalist vision of the past and present that obliterates the important role that government must play in a capitalist society. While it is obviously not a panacea for our current woes, government activity will continue to be an important part of our national recovery. Indeed, given the rapacious irresponsibility among Wall Street companies

leading up to the 2008 disaster, it's somewhat alarming that so few regulations and restrictions have been imposed as a result.

I am not — nor, probably, will I ever be — a member of the Tea Party movement. Its focus is too narrow, and the leadership is directing legitimate anger toward the wrong targets. Working-class families deserve more respect and representation from their elected officials, but the course of Tea Party activism will likely result in little more than future gains for corporate executives and heavy burdens for the rest of us. ▼

What Teaching Is

Eric S. Piotrowski

I decided to become a teacher when I was a junior in high school. I had a teacher who was really terrible, and I thought: "There should be more good teachers in the world!" Soon afterwards, I realized that I should try to become one of those good teachers.

I think I do a pretty good job. I don't grade papers as quickly as I should, but I strive to make my classroom a place for genuine, worthwhile interrogation of important knowledges — and we have fun along the way. It's not an easy job; the stress is apparently causing me insomnia and headaches. But I learned from my parents how important education is, and I've never found a reward like helping a student understand something, or discover something new about the world.

Being a teacher means coming to terms with owning the authority you once resisted as a youth.

Being a teacher means training yourself to have no idea who to believe.

Being a teacher means you — the lifeguard — must convince someone that he is drowning. He refuses to believe you, and you can't save him until he does.

Being a teacher means resetting your expectations every 36 weeks (sometimes 18).

Being a teacher means you never have the pleasure of ignoring someone — even (especially) if that person is annoying you.

Being a teacher means you are host to people forced to be guests in your home.

Being a teacher means doing variations of the same homework assignment 50 times in one day. (We call it grading papers.)

Being a teacher means blanking your emotional state once an hour every hour. If your second class was frustrating and annoying, you can't carry that feeling into your third class.

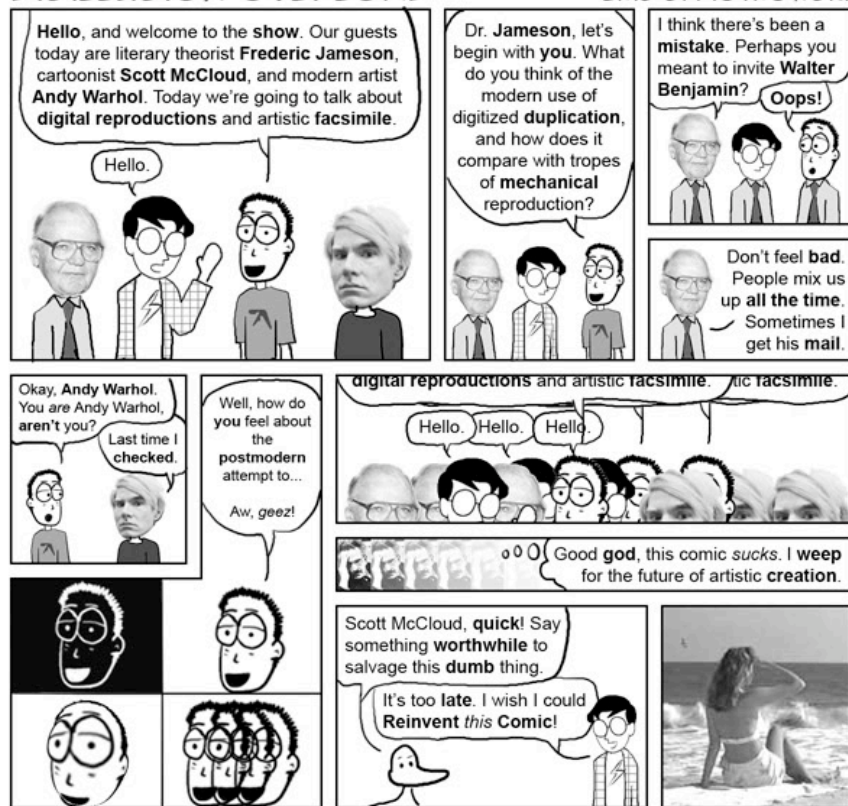
Being a teacher means you risk caring too much — to the detriment of your sanity.

Being a teacher means you must always fight against personified, abstract enemies.

Being a teacher means your short-term desire to care for

DISILLUSION OVERLOAD

ERIC S. PIOTROWSKI



others must be painfully balanced by your long-term interest in adolescent mental development.

Being a teacher means you torture yourself over decisions no one else will remember in a week.

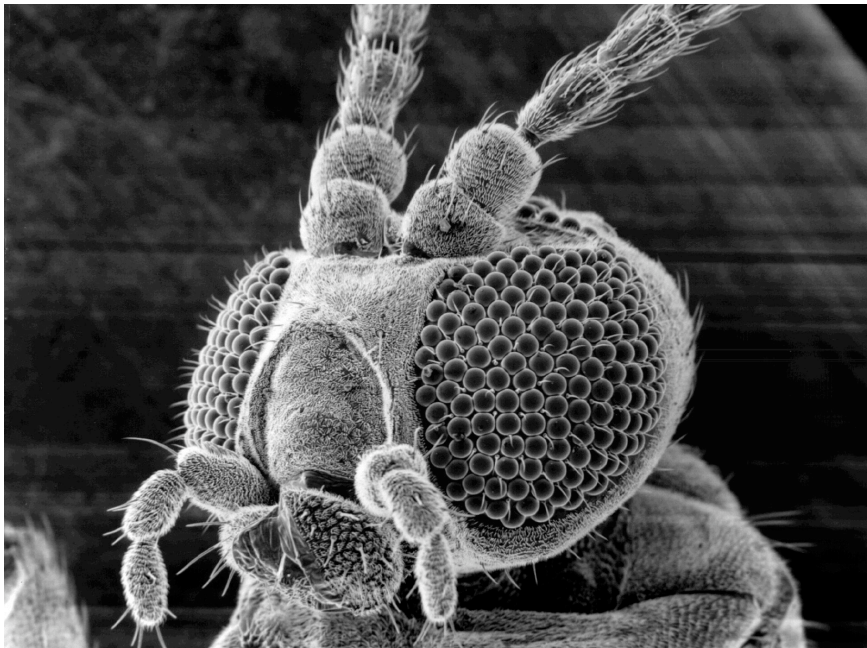
One of the things I have trouble with as a teacher is The Crustening. My general approach (in the classroom and the world) is cheerful and calm. When dealing with students, I always start out using logic and humor and patience. Most of the time, this works.

But a certain percentage of the studentry — repressed by over a decade of authoritarian environs and distracted by the carnivals of consumption — take this patient approach for granted

and "act a fool", as the kids say. (Talking when they need to listen or write; cursing after being asked to adjust their language for the institution their ancestors worked to give them access to, etc.)

What will work? Harsh, authoritarian tactics: yelling, threatening to send them to in-school suspension, calling parents. To get results, I have to be a cop sometimes — and I hate being a cop. Over time I feel myself slouching more and more toward using authoritarianism earlier and earlier in the year. I can tell — never with 100% certainty of course, but often with 80%, and apparently growing — when logic isn't going to work.

So why bother? ▼



The gall midge, Diptera Cecidomyiidae, is less than 3mm long. More than 3000 species exist in the world. Photo from Dartmouth College's electron microscope.

The Daily Arm

Eric S. Piotrowski

"Did you read his arm yesterday?" Kelly asked.

I sat up in my desk. "No. What was the headline?" Gustav's arm-based newspaper, *The Weekly Arm*, was my main source of news. I never missed an issue.

Kelly gave that smug little smirk of hers. "You'll just have to read it yourself."

"Oh, come on," I said. "Just tell me."

"Why don't you get a subscription?" she asked. For \$20 a month, Gustav would find you on the day of publication and roll up his sleeve.

"I can't afford that," I said. "C'mon, Kelly, just tell me!"

She smirked again and shook her head. Her plastic earrings flopped around. "Sorry, Fred," she said. "No dice. But it's a really good story. You've *got* to check it out."

"Argh!" I grimaced. "Now I've got to know!"

She giggled. "Ha ha! I know and you don't."

I thought for a moment, tapping my pencil on the desk. An idea struck and I raised my hand. "Mrs. Yechtinbach," I said, "can I go to the bathroom?"

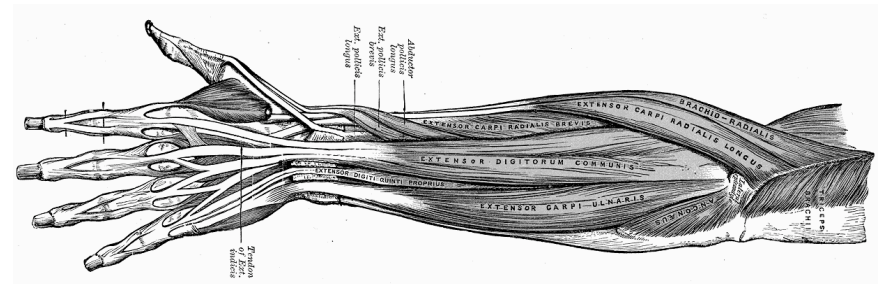
Mrs. Yechtinbach peered at me. "Have you finished your translation, Fred?"

I looked at my paper. "This is ridiculous," I said, flailing a hand at the messy page. "How do you expect us to translate all 2200 pages of Proust's *La Recherche du temps perdues* in one class period!?" I threw down my pencil. "I don't even speak French!"

"Yeah," Kelly added. "Why are we doing this in gym class, anyway?"

"Do two more pages and you can go," Mrs. Y said to me.

I grumbled and tried another sentence. It was no use — the



whole page was just jumbled letters.

Kelly leaned over. "You're gonna *die* when you read his arm," she whispered. "It's *such* a cool story!"

"Stop!" I cried. "You're gonna make me crazy."

"It's out of this world. Your jaw will literally drop out of your face."

"Augh!" I shouted, then stood and ran from the room. Mrs. Y gave chase, both of us stampeding through the hallway. I dashed toward the math rooms.

Third hour, I thought. *He's in geometry class*. With Mrs. Yechtinbach on my heels, followed by two other teachers and an assistant principal, I blasted through the door of Room 314.

I spotted Gustav near the window, putting the finishing

touches on a chocolate cake. I leaped into the air and tackled him to the ground, sending chocolate icing and egg whites flying.

"What is the meaning of this?" Mr. Kemlioff shouted. Mrs. Y and the other adults raced in, but I ignored them and pinned Gustav to the floor, shouting "I've got to know! Let me read your arm!"

"No," Gustav cried. "You didn't pay. Lemme go!"

"No!" I shouted back. "Lemme see!" I managed to grab his sleeve and yanked it up. I seized his arm and held it still long enough to read the headline: "Kelly drives Fred crazy with misleading info about this week's news! 15-year-old student faces suspension for insubordination, attacking another student, and disrupting classes."

I started to cry. ▼

The Fallacy of Empire's Ineptitude

For several decades, the most powerful people in Washington DC have insisted that they are simply unable to control the people who are ostensibly under their control. Nixon made perposterous claims of ignorance, but it was Reagan who really established the precedent of "plausible deniability" that allowed him to claim non-involvement with the most horrible violations of the US Constitution in the Iran-Contra affair.

Despite Clinton's womanizing, he rarely invoked the "I had no idea" defense on matters of foreign policy. The bombing of a Chinese embassy during the NATO bombing of Belgrade, however, was blamed (absurdly, though not impossibly) on "an outdated map" (to quote Defense Secretary William Cohen).

George W. Bush took this idea to ludicrous extremes during Abu Ghraib and other torture scandals.



I think as part of her new reality show, Sarah Palin should spend several months alone in Bus #142, along the Stampede Trail.

Obviously I don't want her to starve to death, like Chris McCandless (aka Alexander Supertramp) did in August 1992. But I would like to see her achieve the same anti-materialist and community-minded enlightenment that he reached.

Over and over, Bush officials insisted that low- and mid-level soldiers were solely responsible for the actions that caused so much horror and suffering.

But is this a satisfactory answer? Are we really comforted by the idea that our chain of command is so incredibly shaky and tenuous? Or is it just more palatable than accepting that our government does some really nasty things in the name of US interests and/or personal power?

Corporate spies are sometimes called "kites" — and when the dirty work is done, the company can "cut the string" to erase any evidence of affiliation. (Marc Barry explains his role as a "kite" in the superb documentary film *The Corporation*.)

I don't believe that the US government is all-powerful or incapable of error. But neither am I easily swayed by the constant assertion that wicked actions are the result of a few bad apples. ▼