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Frontiersman

Facing the truth, however great the cost.

April 2005

Simplicity Lost

Sam Aurelius Milam III

Every time that I'm disgusted by excessive complexity in a design, I hope that it will be the last time. It never is. A friend recently mentioned to me that his computer monitor has a computer in it. The computer in the monitor controls all those little settings like vertical height, horizontal width, and so forth. What nonsense. You don't need a computer for that. All you need is a little row of knobs along the front of the monitor. I heard a report on NPR in which a stapler company was praised for its ingenuity in developing high-tech ways to staple pieces of paper together. For Pete's sake! The old stapler that I use is so simple that it will never wear out. I've been using it for so long that I don't even remember when or where I got it. Why on Earth would I want a high-tech stapler that provides the exact same result — stapled paper — which will cost ten times as much, which will probably fail as a consequence of its complexity within just a few years, and for which a replacement oscillating gravistrut will not be available? I have an old Sony stereo that was built sometime during the 70s and, after 30 years, it still works.¹ Sure, I'll admit that over the years a couple of its controls have gotten a little dirty. Sometimes, I have to wiggle one or another of the knobs a little to get it to make a connection. So what? The stereo still receives NPR and even plays audio streams and CDs from my computer. If it had, itself, been controlled by an internal computer then it would have been "obsolete", incompatible, or failed to function about 28 years ago.

¹ Not only that, the stereo is still compatible with current audio components — even with my computer. With computers, incompatibility between components is notorious and pervasive.

I dread the day that my old washing machine finally dies for keeps and all of the available replacements are the kind that talk to me about the way I loaded the laundry. I dread the day that I need to buy a new refrigerator and discover that every model available includes a computer that scans the labels of the refrigerator's contents and automatically orders milk for me over the internet. I dread the day that I can no longer unlock my front door with a simple key but must, instead, stare into a retinal scanner, submit a DNA sample to the lock, and type a phrase into the house computer. There's nothing wrong with technology so long as I have a choice about using it. If some nitwits want to use a high-tech monstrosity to staple a couple of pieces of paper together then they should have that choice² but I want a choice, too. If I want a washing machine that doesn't verbally chastise me for leaving out the fabric softener then I want to be able to buy that kind of washing machine. If I go down to the K-Mart and pick up a product from the shelf and all I want to do is turn it over in my hands and look at it, then I don't want a computer to detect my action and launch an unsolicited dissertation regarding the product's alleged virtues. All I want to do is turn the thing over in my hands and marvel in smug superiority at its idiotic complexity.

The option to buy simple products is being slowly eliminated — today even some flashlights have computers in them — by the insanely ingenious designers who are designing only increasingly complex products, by the insanely mercenary marketers who are promoting those products, and by the insanely gullible customers who are buying the crap. In consumer goods, as in everything else today, simplicity is a lost art and complexity is a sign of incompetence. 🦅

² Vance Packard warned us decades ago in *The Hidden Persuaders* that it would happen.

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Johnny Appleseed

Fiction by Sam Aurelius Milam III

Not all of my dirty tricks are lethal. Some are just fun. My latest prank is a good example.

I bought a big box of diapers, for the box. I donated the diapers to the Goodwill. While I was there, I spotted a heavy duty vacuum cleaner that was just what I needed, so I bought it. I put the empty diaper box on the passenger seat of my Hummer. It was perfect for a big canister. I salvaged the blower from the vacuum cleaner and then decided that another diaper box would be a dandy way to hide it, so I bought another box of diapers. You gotta be careful about every little detail, so I bought the second box at a different store and donated the diapers to a dumpster. The size of the diaper boxes was just right. With the second box on the floor to hide the blower in, that kept the first box from slidin off the seat. I went to a hardware store and bought some PVC pipe and some duct tape. I connected some PVC pipe under the front edge of the box on the seat and ran it to a tee in the box on the floor. I ran some pipe from the blower to the tee and from there up to where it pointed out the passenger window. Of course, I didn't glue any of the pipe together. I just plugged it together so I could take it apart when I wasn't usin it and pitch it in the wayback. If anybody looked in the window all they'd see was a couple of diaper boxes in front and some scraps of PVC in back. Finally, I went to a camping supply store and got a power thingy that I could use to run the blower from the cigarette lighter. At first, I'd thought about puttin in a switch but I decided that pluggin and unpluggin the power gizmo into the cigarette lighter would work just as well and I didn't need to modify my Hummer.

The next step was to get my seeds. My supplier was a little surprised when I wanted a thousand pounds of the stuff but he didn't ask no questions. I paid him and waited for the delivery. That turned out to be a hoot. The stuff was delivered by UPS. I swear to God! UPS! The driver didn't have a clue. He thought it was wild bird seed. I shouldn't be too hard on him. After all, the supplier had packed it in the exact

boxes that they sell wild bird seed in down to the Wal-Mart. The driver wondered why I wanted a thousand pounds of bird seed but when I started hittin on him for a donation to help me buy land for my bird sanctuary he remembered that he had some other deliveries to make.

That night, I dumped the top box full of seeds and went out to test my blower contraption. When I turned it on, it blew seeds all over the Hummer. Wrong way. They was supposed to go out through the pipe that points out the window, not out the top of the canister box. I had to redesign the plumbing. It took me a while to make it work but finally I did. It blew a good spray of seeds about 20 feet. After that, I started blowing seeds all over town. I went out about one or two nights a week, which was a tactical consideration. I didn't want to go out too often and risk attractin attention but I wanted to get them seeds all blown before the first ones started to grow. I blew seeds everywhere. All along both banks of the river. In the woods around the edge of the park. The entire length of the median on Main Street, where they got all that ground cover stuff growin. Anywhere that anybody had some kind of fancy place in their yard near the street that they wasn't gonna mow. Churches, City Hall, the Courthouse, anywhere. My only rule was that it had to be someplace that wasn't gonna get mowed and it had to be within range of my blower. There's a lot of good places within 20 feet of the street when you got the whole town to work with.

Once the seeds was all blown, I scattered the bits and pieces of my blower contraption into various dumpsters around town. I used the Dustbuster to make sure they wasn't no stray seeds in the Hummer. I figured that when all them plants began to grow and the story hit the news, that UPS guy might be smart enough to put two and two together, so I hit the road again. I gunned my Hummer out onto the highway an laughed for pure joy at how bonkers them drug thugs is gonna get when all them millions of Marijuana plants begin ta grow all over town. Yaaaahoooo! The Dirty Trickster rides again! 

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Understanding Gobbledygook

Sam Aurelius Milam III

A common practice among scientifically inclined people is to mistake nomenclature for understanding. What makes a motor turn? Electricity. What's electricity? Moving electrons. What are electrons? Well... If you ask how the Earth and the moon reach out to one another through space, the answer might be gravitons or a warp in "space-time". There's a lot of nomenclature available but the fact is that giving something a name doesn't mean that we understand it. Nobody really understands how the Earth and the moon stay in orbit.

That term "space-time" is one of my favorite pieces of nomenclatorial nonsense, prime gobbledygook. A good way to explain why is the old standby, analogy. Anybody who's studied Statics and Dynamics will be familiar with vectors. A vector has two components, magnitude and direction. Velocity is a good example in which speed is the magnitude. As with all vectors, it's possible in the velocity vector to change the magnitude (speed) without changing the direction. It's possible to change the direction without changing the magnitude. It's possible to change them both. Any one of the three changes will change the velocity vector but that isn't my point. Part of my point is that the components of a vector are totally independent of one another. Either one can be changed without changing the other. Another part of my point is that the components of a vector are utterly dependent upon one another. That is, if there isn't any speed then there can't be any direction. If there isn't any direction, then there

isn't any speed. Thus, either of the two fundamentally different components of a vector, each independently variable, will instantly vanish upon the disappearance of the other component. The removal of either component will also result in the entire removal of the vector.

Now, consider the term "space-time". If my analogy holds, then space and time are not the universe. They are the components of the universe. Space corresponds to the magnitude of the universe. Time corresponds to the direction of the universe. Saying "space-time" instead of saying universe is like saying magnitude-direction instead of saying vector. Magnitude and direction are not the vector. They are the components of the vector. Interestingly, if the universe works like a vector, then it might be possible to manipulate space without changing time. It might be possible to manipulate time without changing space. It might be possible to manipulate them both. Any one of the three manipulations would change the universe. The removal of either space or time would destroy the universe. However, the agenda of this article isn't cosmology but nomenclature. The lesson of the article is that the correct nomenclature isn't "space-time". The correct nomenclature is "universe".

Like any analogy, the vector-universe analogy might not work perfectly in every case but it's a good explanation of why the term "space-time" is gobbledygook. It's a little unsophisticated to substitute gobbledygook for nomenclature. Gobbledygook impedes understanding. Let's try to get it right. ¶

Stray Thoughts

Sam Aurelius Milam III

Zero-Brainer — I'm really annoyed when computer nerds start counting physical objects at zero. That's a stupid way to count. Zero is when you don't have any, before you start counting. The first one that you have and the first one that you count is number one.

Just What You'd Expect — If I don't put sufficient postage on a letter, then the Post Office sends it back for more postage. If I put excess postage on a letter, then they keep the extra.

Imponderable — Why do Christians glorify suffering but condemn torture?

Enemy — The worst offenders, with regard to violations of the doctrine of the separation of church and state, are the evangelistic Christians. They insist upon using the legislative powers of government to prohibit sin. They insist upon using the executive and the judicial powers of government to punish what should be in God's jurisdiction. Crime should never be confused with sin. ¶

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The Door Is Opening

Jim Sullivan

Millions of people across America were thrilled recently to learn that “Intelligent Design” (ID) is going to be taught in some science courses as an alternative to Darwin’s theory of evolution, which has had a lock on the biology curriculum for years. The ID concept argues that all things found in the world, indeed the globe itself, do not come from natural causes alone, as biologists claim, but from God, the Intelligent Designer.

A public school district in Louisiana, one in Ohio, and perhaps others, will soon be instructing students on ID. Justice finally prevails for fundamentalist Christians.

Over the decades, the Big Bang Theory, too, was the only creation concept allowed to be taught in public schools. The Almighty had been completely removed from the story of the beginning. Now the idea that God created the land, sea, animals, and mankind, as spelled out in the book of Genesis, will be presented to public school children. And why not? Evolution and the Big Bang are not completely proven theories anyway.

Intelligent Design is actually an old belief that has been resurrected by the “Creationist” movement or certain of its followers. Creationists are a well-meaning group of Christians who want only to have God recognized in science classes as the Creator. However, those people were forever running headlong into hard-to-refute arguments emanating from biology teachers who wouldn’t budge an inch from their atheistic and agnostic beliefs. Those same biologists will now have to face the Intelligent Design crowd who, with merely a foothold in two American public school districts, are already facing opponents who are urging boards of education to relegate ID to religion classes only.

On the other hand, ID supporters probably hope that one day not far off their beliefs will be more broadly accepted and taught in additional science classrooms. Some supporters may even harbor the wish that Evolution and the Big Bang Theory will be proven erroneous and, hence, removed from public school teaching.

All that aside, what makes so many individuals happy about this ID breakthrough is that from now on other topics, formerly kept out of public classrooms, will have to be allowed. They are alternative theories, also.

To begin with, there’s astrology, your future based on stars and their relationship to each other, that can be taught as a reliable alternative to astronomy, which doesn’t give stars any predictive credit. Numerology, a science based on digits that can tell what will happen next in your life can be offered in conjunction with arithmetic and math classes, where things don’t always add up. Let’s not forget phrenology, the study of bumps on and shapes of people’s heads, that indicates the kind of person he or she really is. That study could be taught along with anatomy, which isn’t in the prediction business. After all, those studies about people and their futures are often eerily accurate and they’re about as scientific as are biology, chemistry, and physics. Other unfairly marginalized but authentic studies, like what happens in, around, or under the Bermuda Triangle, Crystals, Pyramids, and other phenomena, may be presented to school students, too. The Intelligent Designer, after all, started all of it, didn’t He?

Of course, once the curriculum door opens wider to let in the aforementioned, then such undeniably interesting topics as UFO sightings, alien appearances (like E.T. and ALF), the Mystery of Area 54 — or is it Area 91 or maybe Area 76? well, whatever — and the like will get their noses into the classroom tent, also. Such studies deserve to be there. For far too long they’ve been arbitrarily kept away from school children who could benefit greatly from such knowledge. Not far off, even the Loch Ness Monster (AKA Nessie) and the Abominable Snowman (AKA Bigfoot and Yeti) will be a big part of every school child’s education. Tarot Cards, Palmistry, and reading Chicken Entrails are still nebulous subjects awaiting a bit of additional proof of their validity before children are exposed to them in the classroom. But already those subjects have more reason for being taught than does that current, vile course known as Sex Education. →

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Therefore, those who hold family values and who have been, over time, shunted to the side for their beliefs will get their day. They now have a chance to let their offspring and the children of many others learn the concepts that have been passed on, like the family Bible, from

generation to generation. Parents who truly believe will at long last get to put forward their worthy ideas. ∞

He didn't even mention tea leaves, Ouija boards, or the chupacabra. Amazing! —editor

Which brings me to my real point. When Americans scratch their heads and ask how is it that Stalin could kill millions, that the Nazis could implement the Holocaust, etc., they really do not want to hear the answer, namely that these same Americans would have done the same. "Just following orders" is the ultimate defense. At least there was resistance to the communists and Nazis, but in the United States, the sheeple march on blindly.

—Joseph: Northridge, California

Dear Sam,

Thanks for another very good Frontiersman, and for publishing my modest piece.

If interested (I know you're busy), you can authenticate the Lucius Beebe (San Fran. Chronicle Editor) that you ran, by contacting my friend [*interested readers can contact me for this information* —editor]....

...The reptile thugs here have changed policy again. Right after I notified about 250 or so correspondents that they can't put labels on my incoming mail, the prison reptiles changed the policy, and said now it is ok to use them again....

—an inmate

It's unnecessarily insulting to snakes and lizards to compare them to prison guards.

—editor

Anagrams

Original Source Unknown. Forwarded by Don G.

- George Bush — He Bugs Gore
- Dormitory — Dirty Room
- Evangelist — Evil's Agent
- Desperation — A Rope Ends It
- The Morse Code — Here Come Dots
- Slot Machines — Cash Lost in Em
- Animosity — Is No Amity
- Mother-in-law — Woman Hitler
- Snooze Alarms — Alas No More Z's
- A Decimal Point — I'm a Dot in Place
- The Earthquakes — That Queer Shake
- Eleven plus two — Twelve plus one
- President Clinton of the USA — To Copulate he finds Interns ∞



Source: Liberty Artworx, Scott Bieser, Proprietor <http://www.libertyartworx.com/>

Tax Forms

Original Source Unknown. Forwarded by Don G.

The difference between the short tax form and the long tax form is simple. If you use the short tax form, then the government gets your money. If you use the long tax form, then the accountant gets your money. ∞

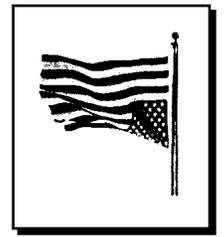
Letters to the Editor

Sam:

Regarding the food bank requiring you to show identification: anti-communists like to point out Stalin's use of starvation as a weapon to implement communism in the Ukraine. But here we have the exact same policy: either conform to the dictates of the state, or starve. One wonders how this fits in with President Bush's claims that the United States is fighting for "liberty"? (Of course, Bush's claims are a hypocritical joke, given the PATRIOT ACT and his pursuit of the war on drugs.)

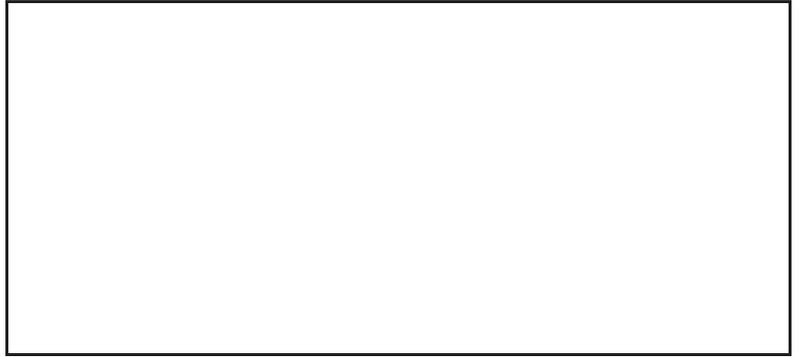
You'd think that liberals would oppose the ID requirement as it is a civil liberties violation, and conservatives because it is big government, and clergy because, as you point out, it requires them to serve two masters. No such luck, they are all on their knees before the state!

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Nation in Distress

Mandated and enforced
equality is a form of
repression.



Acknowledgments

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—editor

Buck Hunter Shoots Off His Mouth

Dear Buck

How often do you do a fast?

—Sanctified Faithful

Dear Sanctified Faithful

How often do I do a fast what?

Frontiersman

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- Your hairdresser is heterosexual, your plumber is homosexual, the woman who delivers your mail is into S&M, and your Mary Kay rep is a guy in drag.
- Unlike back home, the guy at 8:30 am at Starbucks wearing the baseball cap and sunglasses who looks like George Clooney really IS George Clooney.
- It's barely sprinkling rain outside, so you leave for work an hour early to avoid all the weather-related accidents.
- Hey!!!! Is Pot Illegal???? ∞

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