

**SECRET SANTA**  
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*WARNING:* Do not read this if you believe in reality!

Dr. Arthur Fischell, the abstractionist Santa, visited us last Friday. The appearance of fictional characters, being somewhat miraculous, is usually perceived in the form of undeniable coincidence. The unfolding story is Arty's Miracle.

Some history:

I first met Arthur in 1983 at Atari Research. He had one of the best offices in the building, and sent out some of the most interesting electronic mail, full of relevant gossip, fascinating facts, blue flames, embarrassing innuendo, luscious office trivia, and full-on moral and philosophical debate.

Art I. Fischell was imaginary. His mail reflected the anonymous contribution of the entire staff. His name stood for the community gathering place, the forum of mutually relevant ideas. His office served as a free lounge, where folks would work, sleep, drink, gossip, and commune.

Arty was also the hottest controversy around. When negative comments were posted into community information anonymously under Arty's name, the community responded with a sole-searching about the nature of the First Amendment. When personal slanders hid insidiously in public view under Arty's name, folks quickly brought the buried anger to the surface. When organizational evolution was necessary, Arty was the first to bring it to our attention.

A view from the Author:

I preferred to sign my name to postings under Arthur. For me, he provided a different *voice*, he was a direct channel to the community and to its leadership. He was not bboard, or trash, or business. He was, instead, the community conscience.

The miracle:

Coincidence is when things that are deeply related happen independently together. On the day Arty was scheduled to visit us, our sys-admin independently installed AMAIL, which is a functionally equivalent program to posting mail under Arty's name at Atari. By posting to amail, an untraceable message is sent under the pseudo-name Secret Santa. We have opened the Pandora's box of anonymous mail. Arty Fischell, aka Secret Santa, has come

to work for our great company.

Coincidence or co-incident?

The secret of Arty's mastery of time is in the control of coincidence, a trick he apparently learned from John Lilly. [In Arty's seminar, he says that coincidence control requires only two habits: stay awake and expect the unexpected.] His Abstract mentions both time control and secrets. He decided to visit during the Christmas season. He took the new name of \*Secret\* \*Santa\*. (Did you happen to meet Fischell somewhere before?) He is an abstract Santa. His implementation permits secret communication to everyone. And his manifestation as a UNIX program appeared on the day he advertised!

The existence proof in coincidental logic is irrefutable. Arty did visit us and he came to stay.

Relevance:

Arty's Miracle is a story that illustrates the journalistic practice of mixing reality with fantasy. This mixture is the substrate of our culture. What is news in West magazine is also a portrayal of our broader community. It is neither true nor false, but it is information. It should not be judged by verifiability, but by the emotions it raises.

After Christmas, let's continue to post from Secret Santa. It seems an ideal forum for discussion of Faludi incidents, evaluation parties, Christmas surprises, unrestrained compliments, group position and momentum, honesty in communication and pregnant coincidences.

Merry Christmas

secret william