

ENTROPY

*Entropy is the measure of a system's energy that is unavailable for **work**. Since work is obtained from order, the amount of entropy is also a measure of the disorder, or randomness, of a system. Encyclopedia Britannica*

For all men strive to grasp what they do not know, while none strive to grasp what they already know; and all strive to discredit what they do not excel in, while none strive to discredit what they do excel in. This is why there is chaos. Chuang-tzu (369-286 B.C.)

The Executive of the International Council of Published Writers was having a non-scheduled, extraordinary in camera meeting, which had been urgently asked for by two of its leading lights, Morton Dilworthy and Sheila Gartner. The former was a novelist who had won every noteworthy literary award and whose novels were acknowledged to be among the best of those that dealt with most aspects of the human condition. The latter was an essayist who had been published in every important journal covering just about every all individual and collective conundrums that humanity frequently faced. She was famous for having a very keen sense of the contradictions between them and wrote with unerring accuracy and clarity of style, never pulling her punches. She too had won every major award for her articles and treatises. Both Gartner and Dilworthy had been praised and reviled, a real mark of their talents.

An illustrious academic chaired the meeting. He was renowned for his literary critiques. After calling the session to order he immediately turned the chair over to Gartner and Dilworthy. This had been prearranged. There was no formal agenda. Those attending did not know the purpose of the session other than it was to deal with a matter of great urgency. Gartner started by exhorting those present to total secrecy. To anyone outside the meeting chamber this gathering had not occurred. Nothing was to be leaked about it. Those who felt that this was too restrictive were asked to leave. No one did.

Ms. Gartner continued.

"For the last few years, Morton and I have become quite concerned with a trend that promises to destroy the modern world of literature. It seems that with the advent of the computer there has been quantum leap in the number of aspiring writers. That is an understatement. Software programs have become ultra-sophisticated. They allow anyone with an idea, no matter how trite, to create an article or a story or a poem. Actually it is worse than that. All someone has to do is provide a computer with the basics of an idea. It will then translate it into whatever literary format the so-called creator wants. Most of the time the computer turns out to be a better writer than the one who supposedly provided it with a theme. However the number of pseudo-writers has grown exponentially so that it has become impossible to separate the wheat from the chaff, that is, to identify new writers of promise. Further, too many voices have turned the field into a babble arena, like a cocktail party where everyone talks and no one listens. Readership has been so drastically reduced that it has become impossible to make ends meet for even those amongst us who have a long standing reputation. A state of chaos currently exists in our beloved calling. It is complicated further by the use of electronic reading devices. Paper has become a thing of the past. As you are all aware these devices vary in size and in function.

The problem I have just described is nothing more than the tip of the iceberg. To elaborate and to provide a tentative solution I turn the dais over to Morton."

Dilworthy then proceeded to the podium with a grim expression on his face. Weighing his words carefully, he addressed the group who had become silent with apprehension.

"What Sheila has described is unfortunately accurate. However, I am sure there will be some that will argue that this is a good thing. After all, the computer furnishes us with an enormous amount of freedom by providing the populace at large the means to explore our world in ways previously unheard of. Of equal importance or perhaps of more importance, it allows for very easy personal expression. They might go further by suggesting that this new found freedom permits the populace to be released from the yoke of the literary elite, a group to which most of us here belong. They may have a point. Many of us take our privileged position in society for granted and may even have abused it.

However, Sheila and I are not concerned about our probable loss of renown and financial reward. We are seriously worried about the future of literature universally. Yet if it was only the literary world that was being affected, a good argument could be made for lying low and waiting for this situation to become a blip in history.

We have consulted with many other professions and we have learned that they too find themselves in the same quagmire as we do. For example, well known artists are reporting a dramatic decrease in sales. Museums of art have become nothing more than repositories for old well known masterpieces. It seems that the sophisticated computers together with related technologies can produce original works of art based upon what the aspiring artist feeds them. These so-called works of art are then uploaded to the Internet but are not ever critically examined. Of course, the use of oil and water based paints, easels and canvases are a thing of the past. Modern artwork is simply projected onto walls that have a coating of a luminescent chemical.

Nearly everyone who wishes to have a new affordable home can simply input what they want and the computer will draw up a set of blueprints. Obviously this does not sit too well with professional architects who are at a loss as to what to do about it. Without going into details, the medical, legal, law enforcement, musical, cinematic professions, as well as many others, are having fits about having to cope with their respective chaotic situations. In a nutshell, this is why this meeting has been called.

I have taken the liberty to invite representatives of the various professions just mentioned to confirm what I have just described. I also have asked a number of computer experts to attend and offer a solution, if there is one. First, do any of the spokespersons for the various professional associations wish to add to what I have just described?"

An elderly distinguished looking gentleman arose. "We have nothing to add. You have summed up the situation satisfactorily. If anything, you understated the gravity of the situation. The only ray of optimism may be found in an adage of Henry Brookes Adams. 'Chaos often breeds life, when order breeds habit.' We also feel that the source of the problem is the ubiquitous presence of the computer and the myriad of its applications. We hope that the computer experts here will be able to respond to the plight in which we currently find ourselves."

He sat down. Morton Dilworthy asked if any of the computer experts wished to respond to the concerns just presented. Dr. Harry Smith, often acknowledged to be one of the world's leading computer specialists, rose and went to the podium.

"When Sheila Gartner and Morton Dilworthy first brought their concerns to my attention, my immediate and uninformed response was of skeptical disbelief. After all, I had spent most of my professional life working with and improving computers. I was convinced that they were of tremendous benefit. However, because of Ms. Gartner and Mr. Dilworthy's reputation I promised to look into the problem. Much to my horror I quickly learned that the situation was far worse than they had even imagined. I was reminded of an old process, called, "Technology Assessment", which, it seems, had been totally ignored when it came to computers. That process attempts to predict the impact of any new technology. However, its success was rather limited because no one had ever devised a valid way for carrying it out. We should have devoted much more time to it.

Everything Gartner and Dilworthy told me turned out to be agonizingly accurate. But the worst was yet to come. Because no one had foreseen the excessive inappropriate use of the software, there was and is the beginning of computer breakdowns. Let me briefly elaborate. In the early days of computers, users bought their software and installed them in each of their devices. In other words each computer was an independent mechanism. This is no longer the case. Today we use software programs from a centralized computer. This affords us a nearly unlimited access to a plethora of programs, each of which is far more sophisticated and complex than those of earlier times. However, the frequency of their use had been calculated on a statistical basis. This has turned out to be totally erroneous and has led to the breakdowns just mentioned, because the demands made upon them are far more than they can handle. In other words, our central computers are in the process of going chaotic or perhaps, somewhat facetiously, are in the process of having a nervous breakdown. In any case, the implications of these deteriorations are horrendous. It could mean a total collapse of society as we currently enjoy it.

Well, what can we do about it? One answer is to do nothing and just hope that it will all pass. That is simply not our way. Another is to do away with computers all together. This is both impossible and impractical. Besides we are not Luddites.

The solution that my confreres and I have come up with is rather drastic but may be the only way to resolve our problem. All programs that have the potential for major misuse should be available no longer. This will immediately alleviate the pressures put on our central computers as well as eliminate the spurious applications currently available to pseudo artists and professionals. However, it is severe because it may curtail the ability of legitimate professionals to do their thing. After much agonizing deliberation we concluded that those with real talent and drive will find a way to produce. After all, if Beethoven could compose his glorious music while being totally deaf, surely our writers, composers, artists and professionals can also discover means to provide outlets for their talents without computer support. What did Doctors, Lawyers, Dentists, Scientists and others do before the advent of the computer? Technology will still be around to assist in various endeavors. The computer will still archive enormous amounts of information and will still be used for fast and cost-free communication. In any case, this is our proposed solution. What do you think?"

Dr. Smith retook his seat. There was near unanimous consent to the proposal. A petition was drawn up, signed by everyone present and presented to the appropriate government authorities. They proceeded to act quickly on it. It has had the desired effect, but only after much controversy, and social turmoil. It nearly caused the very thing it was trying to overcome, namely chaos. Yet out the chaos eventually came a new or maybe re-established order. In any case, authors currently use pencils, pens and, occasionally, old-fashioned typewriters. Painters have rediscovered canvas, easel, paintbrush and paint. This return to earlier tried and true methods has permeated all the professions. Chaotic entropy in our society has been drastically lessened. In the future, when we learn to be more judicious about technology, the sophisticated programs may be reinstated. In the meantime no one is holding his/her breath.

EPILOGUE

The historical account just presented was written on paper using a pencil with an eraser. The eraser was invaluable. It allowed the author to edit while not wasting paper, a product very difficult to find.

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