

NEW EUROPE COLLEGE



*LOST IN SPACE*

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# SPACE/TIME – EN(TROPY): A DISTINCTIVE POSTMODERN ELEMENT IN THE ART OF ROBERT MORRIS AND THOMAS PYNCHON <sup>1</sup>

BRUCE BARBER

## **Preamble:**

Among the underlying precepts of postmodern discourse that have troubled those I will call, somewhat facetiously, ‘pomophobes’, is the destruction of master narratives, teleologies, paradigms, the questioning of verities, tradition and convention, normativities, systems and bureaucracies, produced of course, by those famous “dead white guys” of historical renown. The projects of the postmoderns, by way of contrast, challenge, decenter, suspend judgement(s), parenthesize, delimit truth claims, erase, and deconstruct master narratives. Martin Jay once said that you can always tell a postmodernist because they go like this (“ ”)<sup>2</sup> all the time. The postmoderns speak of “overflowing fields of discursivity”, propose critiques of history, critiques of meaning, critiques of philosophy, and worse, critiques of the individual

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<sup>1</sup> First presented as a lecture to the University of Kings College Foundation Year programme, April 2000.

<sup>2</sup> a sign achieved by outstretching one’s arms and quickly waving two fingers of each hand to inscribe parentheses and/or quotation marks in the air.

subject, surely enough to strike fear in the hearts of any truth promoter, devotee, individuated hetero-norm seeker and conservative system builder.

There is insufficient space here to annotate the list of modern/postmodern distinctions and privileged terms appended to this essay, which in any case would be a very unpostmodern thing to do. Rather, I am going to read somewhat against the grain and take two famous names from different sections of the list, the reclusive writer, Thomas Pynchon and the sculptor Robert Morris, and a few keywords: entropy, energy, process, time, space, subjectivity, presence and chance, with the aim of addressing some of the epistemological tears (and fears) of postmodernist hybridity and crossdressing in the realm of culture production and reproduction.

Albert Einstein once said that “God doesn’t play dice with the universe.” I have a sneaking suspicion that in the back of his mind, he thought HE did. And if he did, then Einstein could be considered something of a postmodern before his time. For if there is a moment that can be said to represent a signal moment for modernity and simultaneously “an epistemological tear along the fabric of modernity” (Friedberg, A. 1995:60), it is probably the social/cultural, economic and political, not to mention of course, the scientific consequences derived from Einstein’s general theory of relativity. But for my money – that is if we take modernity to be essentially a nineteenth century project – the epistemological tear/tear probably happened some fifty years before, in 1850, with Rudolf Julius Emmanuel Clausius’ (1822-88) formulation of a kinetic theory of gases and his enunciation of the second law of thermodynamics, that we know today simply as the big E word – Entropy.

### **Entropy:**

a) Physics: A mathematical expression of the degree in which a thermodynamic system is distributed as to be unavailable for work. (Shorter Oxford Dictionary)

b) Cultural trope: The irreversible tendency of a system, including the universe towards increasing disorder and inertness; also the final state predictable from this tendency. (American College Dictionary)

In this essay, I will explore aspects of the trope in entropy, that is its cultural meanings, as distinct from its specific scientific, mathematical, and technical uses. I will employ the uses of en(tropy) in the work of the sculptor Robert Morris and writer Thomas Pynchon as signal examples (among others) of the cultural divide – the liminal spaces, the temperature change, between modernism and postmodernism.

Energy/process has been an integral aspect of sculptor Robert Morris' activities through his years as a painter under the prevailing influence of Jackson Pollock and other members of the New York school of abstract expressionism, to his late 1950's and early 1960's move into three dimensions. Sculptural work from this period includes the extraordinary *Box with the Sound of Its Own Making* (1961); *Column* (1961), *Metered Bulb* (1963) and *Cardfile* (1963) plus a large number of works inspired by the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp and pop art experiments of Jasper Johns.

*Box with the Sound of Its Own Making*, as the title implies, contains a three-hour tape recording of the sounds of a plain wooden box being constructed. Morris used recorded sound to collapse one's ordinary sense of time by bringing the past

*Lost in Space*

(the initial making of the box), and the present (its completed state), together, thus integrating process and object into one temporal/spatial and physical form. The composer John Cage is purported to have been the only person to listen to the entire three hour work, an *objet d'art* that is simultaneously a recorder and player of a piece of music. As its title suggests, *Metered Bulb* (1963) represents the expenditure of intangible energy through the function of a simple 40-watt light bulb. Think of this the next time you turn on a light bulb! The emphasis in this readymade aided work does not lay in the object itself but what it does. Apart from its provocative character as an artwork, the work's process/function becomes here again, vital to its conceptualised identity in the perceiver's mind.

The physicist P.W. Bridgeman notes: "Like energy entropy is in the first instance a measure of something that happens when one state is transformed into another"<sup>3</sup>

Interpreting Bridgeman's statement in a famous essay titled *Entropy and the New Monuments* the artist/critic Robert Smithson wrote:

We are unable to experience time and likewise change of which time is a function via a reception of energy transformation to and/or loss from one substance to another. Time can be looked at abstractly; that is we can set up arbitrary units by which to make measurements of it, but our experiences of it depend on our perception of energy change.<sup>4</sup>

Morris' *Card File* is somewhat less enigmatic than the *Metered Bulb* and reveals the mark of a perceptive pragmatist

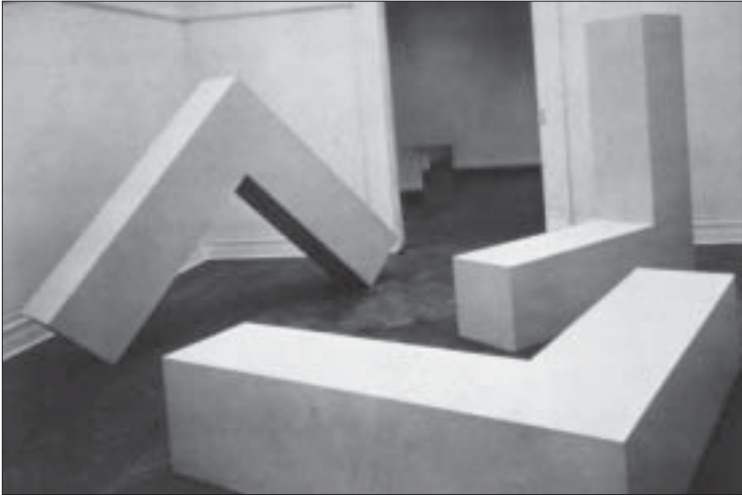
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<sup>3</sup> Bridgeman, P. W. quoted in Smithson R. "Entropy and the New Monuments" Art Forum June 1966.

<sup>4</sup> Smithson *ibid*.

(or solipsist) at work. On examining its entries one recognises that the artist is in part attempting to propose something that resembles a logical and linear in time narrative informing the reader of the creation of this piece during the month of July, 1962. The first entry under "Accident" reads: "12/7/62, 2.03 P.M.. three minutes late from lunch due to trip (see Trip)." Under "Trip" we read "12/7/62 1.03 P.M.-2.03 P.M. to Daniel's Stationery to look at file boxes (see Possibilities)." Under "Possibilities", the reader is informed that the artist had the option of purchasing four different kinds of cardfiling systems. This procedure continues through forty-four different subject systems and cross-references. The work is somewhat tautological, and it is as if the card file is metaphorically marking time; an object that holds within its confines a myriad of cross-referenced energy lines turning back on themselves through space in an elliptical fashion like some submolecular or macrocosmic model of the universe. Ironically under the entry "Dissatisfactions", the artist expressed disappointment "that everything relevant will not be recorded". On one level, the work is about the attempt to maintain control in a stochastic world ruled by chance. On another it is about the narratives we weave into the fabric of our daily life, which in a Proustian fashion, can never succeed in a total recall, representation, or remembrance of things past.

Proto-entropic process, as I am attempting to describe it, is also a key element of Morris' so-called unitary or minimalist forms of the mid 1960's, albeit at a more subliminal level. In one instance, it can be recognised in the making of the sculpture from its constituent elements – plywood or fibreglass – and secondly, in that special phenomenological relationship formed between the object, architectural space, and beholder.



Robert Morris: Untitled, fibreglass (1965)

It is this relationship that art historian and critic of minimalism Michael Fried, taking his cues from his mentor Clement Greenberg, father of one vector of modernism, termed “presence”. Fried tied presence to theatre and opposed this to a metaphysically transcendent “grace” that he argued was the highest achievement of modernist art (read modernist painting). For Fried, theatre was too close to the grubbiness of everyday life and therefore not an appropriate vehicle for stimulating an absorptive and contemplative experience infused with correct, Kantian inspired, aesthetic values. To investigate further some of these points would remove us from the object of this essay. The point I wish to make is that for Morris minimal forms do not represent process *per se* and are irrevocably tied to theatre and the aleatory conditions of everyday life.



In 1968, a radical shift in sensibility appeared in Morris's work, predicated to some extent by his earlier emphasis on process. The shift seems to have occurred in the summer of that year in Aspen, Colorado, where he executed his first so-called "Felt" pieces. As he wrote in a key essay titled "Antiform" published in *Art Forum* in April of this year.

Random piling, loose stacking, hanging, giving passing form to the material. Chance is accepted and indeterminacy implied as replacing will result in another configuration. Disengagement with preconceived enduring forms and orders for things is a positive assertion. It is part of the work's refusal to continue aestheticising form by dealing with it as a prescribed end.<sup>5</sup>

It is primarily through these and later artworks by Morris that I intend to explore those elements that I term "entropic", bearing in mind that these works are definitely linked to many attitudes Morris formed in his earlier work.<sup>6</sup> In this discussion, I will also refer to the work of novelist Thomas Pynchon whose activities as a writer in many ways parallel Morris's as a sculptor. In his novels and short stories, Pynchon represents a world in the throes of entropy, his protagonists either submitting to it willingly, or resisting at every opportunity. It is not my intention to isolate these two artists in their endeavour. There are many other late modern and postmodern artists and writers who

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<sup>5</sup> Morris, R. "Anti form" *Art Forum* April, 1968 reprinted in Morris (1993) p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> There are five references to entropy in Morris' collected essays *Continuous project Altered Daily* MIT Press (1993). The earliest is contained in his essay "Antiform" (1968). "Form is not perpetuated by means but by preservation of separable idealised means. This is an anti-entropic and conservative enterprise."(45).

have consciously or otherwise employed or exhibited entropic tendencies in their work. My choice of Morris and Pynchon is the result of pure prejudice on my part, and furthermore, to include others would have necessitated an essay of considerable length.

Morris' *Felt* pieces were his first soft sculptures since the so-called *Rope* works of the early 1960's. These, like the *Felt* works, as Morris suggested, assumed different configurations each time the work was hung or placed in a new context. Superficially, the main difference between a work like *Box* and *Rope* (1964) and some of the 1967-8 *Felt* works is that the earlier piece consists of more than one material – two geometric box forms connected by a sagging rope. The work flows from wall to floor. The basis of the *Felts* is that each one comprises one or more pieces of thick felt, anything from half an inch to two inches thick. These usually have a rectangular shape and are slit by a knife according to simple geometric patterns. They are cut on the floor and then assume a hanging position from pegs on the wall. The mutable "stuff" of the material when it is hung from pegs in the wall makes the initial slits almost impossible to read, and sometimes totally impossible to read in the final presentation. In both cases however, it becomes impracticable to attempt to re-establish the original geometric concept by laying out the piece on the floor, so that we have, in effect, a type of limited and reversible entropy. For any given arrangement of these felt pieces, a second entropic tendency is engaged. This is explicitly demonstrated in the way the work unfolds and 'dissolves' through the affects of weight, humidity, and minor accidents, so that the original placement of the work in time and space can never be perfectly restored. The work therefore becomes a different piece each time it is installed. The manner of working that Morris has developed here strikingly parallels



Robert Morris: Untitled felt piece (1968)

the efforts of Jackson Pollock and his drip method of painting and also the 'veil' paintings of Morris Louis.

In the most general terms entropy is concerned with the fate of energy – of objects, individuals, societies and the world, and as such would be of interest to artists like Pynchon and Morris. In their own way, these two artists are attempting to discern or establish the patterns that their culture is assuming. Entropy has also been shown to have a major connection to the transmission of information. A book that Pynchon and Morris probably encountered in the seventies is *The Human Use of Human Beings* by the American cyberneticist Norbert Wiener. Wiener described in his book how the American physicist Gibbs questioned the certainties of Newtonian physics by introducing the notion of probability. Instead of asserting the absolutism of universal laws, Gibbs operated with



Robert Morris: Untitled, felt and lead (1968)

contingencies in his exploration of physical phenomena. Wiener compared Gibb's recognition of elements of incomplete determinism in the world to Sigmund Freud's negotiation of the mind and his hypotheses of the irrationalities lodged deep within the subconscious. Wiener then relates both to the tradition of St Augustine and his recognition of an ineradicable element of chance in the universe.

For this random element, this organic incompleteness is one, which without too violent a figure of speech we may consider evil, which St Augustine characterises as "incompleteness, rather than the positive malicious evil of the Manichaens".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wiener, N. *The Human Use of Human Beings* quoted in Tanner, T., *City of Words- American Fiction 1950-1970* London: Trinity Press 1971.

He carries on with an interesting passage that for my purposes here deserves to be quoted in full.

As entropy increases, the universe and all closed systems in the universe tend naturally to deteriorate and lose their distinctiveness, to move from the least to the most probable state, from a state of organisation and differentiation in which distinctions and forms exist, to a state of chaos and sameness. In Gibb's universe order is at least probable, chaos most probable. But while the universe as a whole, if indeed there is a whole universe, tends to run down, there are local enclaves whose distinction seems opposed to that of the universe at large and in which there is a limited and temporary tendency for organisation to increase. Life finds its home in some of these enclaves.<sup>8</sup>

A work of Morris that best exhibits the entropic process is his *Continuous Project Altered Daily* installed in the Leo Castelli Gallery warehouse in January 1969. The materials used filled nearly all of the available space and were moved about and into various states of order and disorder day by day; first by adding materials: earth, paper, water, grease, plastic, wood, felt, electric lights and then by subtracting them until, by the last day of the exhibition, only a series of photographs of the work that had progressed was left on the wall. Here Morris is looking at space/time abstractly suggesting that our experiences only depend upon our bodily perception of energy change. The photographic documentation provides evidence of change that has been effected during specific moments of time. Morris has no qualms about what the Castelli piece is not:

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*



Robert Morris: *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York (1969)

Still a spread of substances or things that is clearly marked off from the rest of the environment and there is not any confusion about where the work stops. In this sense it is discrete but not object like.<sup>9</sup>

The Castelli inventory for *State I* of earth, paper, water, plastic threads, wood felt, electric lights and tape was slowly pared down until only the bare remains of activity and photographic documentation of this original stage remained. Disorder or chaos in Morris's works does not imply a lack of relationships, but rather that these relationships are of a different order. In another work, *Thread and Mirror* (1968) and his

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<sup>9</sup> Morris, *op. cit.*, 2.

so-called *Scatter* pieces of 1969 made of felt, lead and other materials, the emphasis is not on a part for part or contiguous relationship but on what Morris terms “a continuity of details.” An overall image occurs despite the fact that the work cannot be taken in a single glance. Besides the relationship between this work and all-over painting to minimise figure ground relationships, there is also some similarity, I believe, to the manner in which the novelist Thomas Pynchon structures his writing.

In Pynchon’s short story *Entropy*,<sup>10</sup> (originally published in the *Kenyon Review*, in 1960) the narrative is built around an architectural division between an upstairs and a downstairs apartment within a four-storey building. Downstairs (the third floor), Meatball Mulligan (Pynchon always has wonderful names for his characters), is holding a lease-breaking party that tends increasingly towards chaos, with promise of an ensuing torpor, possibly death. This is a recurrent motif in Pynchon’s novels [*V* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), and *Gravity’s Rainbow*] and short stories, clearly exemplifying the entropic process at work. The party, like Morris’s gallery spaces, is, to all intents and purposes, a closed system; the only termination point for Morris is the arbitrary finishing point and the photographic documentation to prove something happened in the space, and for Pynchon, sleep and potential entry into the phantasmagoric space of the dreamworld.

In the upstairs apartment, an intellectual named Callisto is attempting to warm a freezing bird back to life. Pynchon describes this upstairs space as “a hot house jungle”, specifically referred to in the text as a “Rousseau-like fantasy” that had

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<sup>10</sup> First published in the *Kenyan Review* and subsequently in Algren, N Nelson Algren’s *Own Book of Lonely Monsters* New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1961.

*Lost in Space*

“taken him seven years to weave together” (179). Callisto’s hermetically sealed environment is distanced from the chaos of the city, the irregularities of weather, economy, political struggle, and “civil disorder”. In this room exists a perfect ecological balance, which itself parallels two of Morris’s installation works; a quasi ecological environment, refrigerated to simulate a tundra climatic condition with trees, soil, wood, steel and fluorescent grow lights. In another work that to date has remained a paper project, the artist planned to conceal a number of NASA air conditioning and heating appliances amid trees and undergrowth in a specific terrain. His objectives for the work indicated that this equipment would have altered the thermodynamic conditions of the site and mini climates would have developed thus changing over a space of time, the general ecology of the area.

In the Pynchon short story, upstairs and downstairs are diametrically opposed. Chaos downstairs becomes the law of nature and upstairs a culturally imposed order prevails. “The house in effect becomes a kind of paradigm of modern (and, I would add, postmodern) consciousness.”(Tanner, 1970:154) High and low culture oppositions define the limits of communications between them. The lower apartment is subject to the noise and distractions of daily life with the accompaniment of jazz and bee bop music on the phonograph and one senses the breakdown of any significant communication between its inhabitants. Upstairs, Callisto and his girlfriend Aubade attempt to achieve the transcendent level of perfection represented by higher mathematics, philosophy, and classical music. Inhabitants in both spaces fear the encroaching entropic pulse of life but respond to this in radically different ways.



#### 4. *The Space of the Arts / Spațiul artelor*

Life in Pynchon's context is represented by the chaotic party downstairs and the environmental conditions outside the upper chamber. Callisto finds that the temperature has remained at 37 degrees Fahrenheit for a number of days and his education encourages him to detect an impending apocalypse. He attempts to articulate his theory of what is going on, and in a cool and detached manner. He lectures Aubade with the following third person soliloquy:

As a young man at Princeton – Callisto had learned a mnemonic device for remembering the Laws of Thermodynamics: you can't win, things are going to get worse before they get better; who says they're going to get better? (182)

Nevertheless he found in entropy or the measure of disorganisation for a closed system, an adequate metaphor to apply to certain phenomena in his own world..... in American 'consumerism' he discovered a similar tendency from the least to the most probable, from differentiation to sameness, from ordered individuality to a kind of chaos. He found himself, in short, restating Gibbs' prediction in social terms, and envisioned a heat-death for his culture in which ideas, like heat-energy, would no longer be transferred, since each point in it would ultimately have the same quantity of energy, and intellectual motion would accordingly, cease.(183)

The story has a different ending for each floor of the apartment building. Downstairs, Meatball Mulligan is driven to crawl off into a corner and sleep, but summoning up the remains of some residual energy from his exhausted body, he resolves to do what he can to arrest the party's deterioration into complete chaos. He begins slowly to tidy up the mess,

gets his hysterical new arrivals calmed down. In the upstairs apartment however, Callisto is trapped in his conscious fear of the impending apocalypse. The bird he has neurotically taken pains to keep alive, finally dies in his hand. Aubade realises that total paranoia has taken control of Callisto's behaviour through his obsession with the 37° F temperature outside. In a symbolic act, she smashes the window of their hermetically sealed room with her "two exquisite hands which came away bleeding and glistening with splinters" and turns to face Callisto on the bed until the moment of equilibrium is reached. (191) Tanner interprets this narrative as "a composite image of the pragmatic man actively doing what he can with a specific scene and theorizing man passively attempting to formulate the cosmic process" and later, "man is just a two storied house of consciousness, and in the the configuration of that shattered window and Calisto's paralysis, Pynchon suggests the potential peril of all pattern making, or plot detecting". (155)

Robert Morris's art encompasses both these approaches to theorizing and pragmatic action. His 1970 advertisement for several periodicals reads, with some postmodern irony.

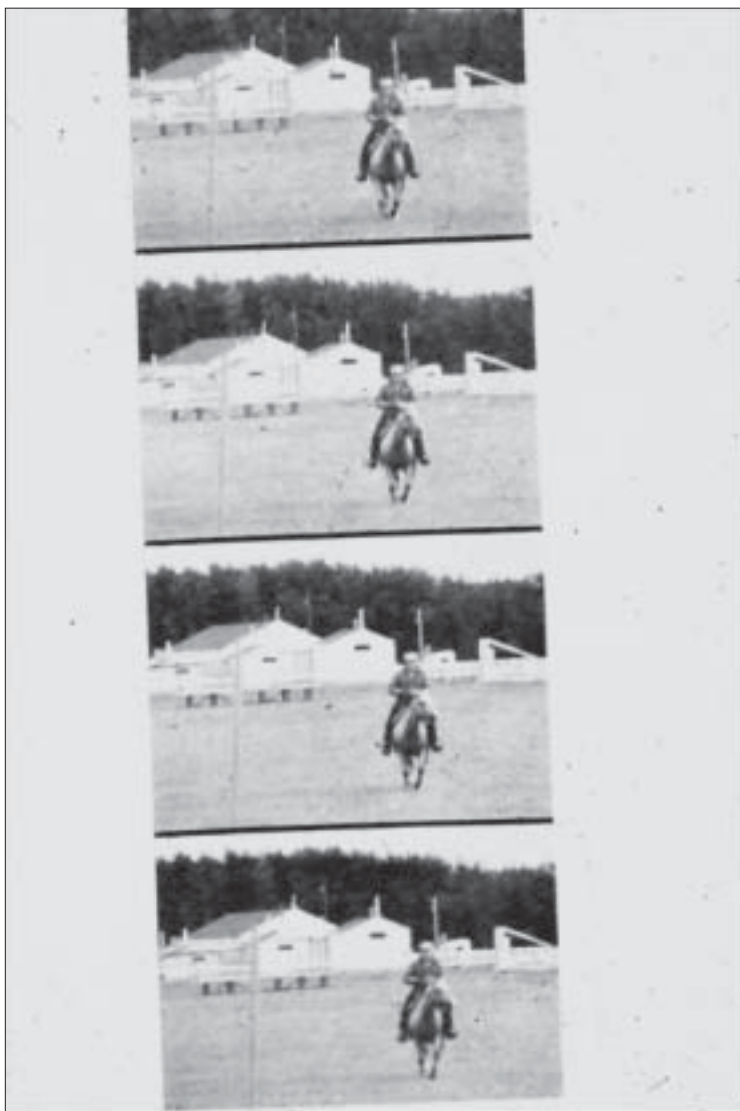
Available for commissions anywhere in the world.  
Explosions – events for the quarter horse – chemical swamps – monuments – speeches – outdoor sounds for the varying seasons – alternative political systems – deluges – design and encourage invention of mutated forms of life and other vaguely agricultural phenomena such as disciplined trees, earthworks – demonstrations – prestigious objects for the masses – epic and static films – fountains in liquid metals – ensembles of curious objects to be seen while travelling at high speeds – national parks and hanging – artistic diversions of rivers – sculptural objects.

Morris's most pragmatic works are the *Card File* and also his Whitney Museum *Track* piece. His most entropic work is the so-called *Steam* piece of 1968-9, which can be interpreted on one level as a direct pronouncement of the second law of thermodynamics. Steam released from a number of small valves in the ground escapes, gradually expanding to become part of the atmosphere – then dissipates and returns to its origins in an altered form – some of the original energy becoming lost and therefore, unavailable for work, in the process. Conceptual artist Robert Barry parallels Morris's gesture with a conceptual work from the same period *Inert Gas* series – 2 cu ft of helium to indefinite expansion.

Dullness, sleep, or inertia are recognised as being the conclusion or consumation of the entropic tendency. One of the apparent paradoxes of this tendency is that of movement leading toward stasis. There is a notable difference between the organic movement of something that eventually culminates in a full and irrevocable realisation of its inherent potential for development, and on the mindless repetitive motion approaching that of an automaton that denotes a collapsing towards inertia or sleep, that is the physical evidence of entropy.

A work produced by Morris that approximates this entropic condition was included in an important Canadian exhibition of the late 1960's held in Edmonton titled *Pace and Process*. In his work for the exhibit, the artist rode a series of quarter horses continuously in a straight line back and forth between two points. As each horse tired, a fresh one was provided for the artist to ride. The work was to terminate when either Morris or the horses became exhausted and therefore unable to continue the activity. A path was worn into the grass and for each horse he rode, a set of nine sequential photographs was

*Lost in Space*



Robert Morris: *Untitled*, *Pace and Process* exhibition, Edmonton, Alberta (1969)

taken. The work was conceived as a continuum in three parts: the activity as performance, the path left in the ground (a type of drawing or earth sculpture), and the photo-documentation of the whole. This work is a visual analogue to the process of energy expenditure through a repetitive action that can only lead to exhaustion and inertia.

The notion of Morris as “a theoretical man passively attempting to formulate the cosmic process” and engaging in a process of resisting entropy – the other side of the postmodern coin – seems to me to be embodied in an earthwork titled simply *Observatory*, executed in 1971 at Sonsbeek in Holland. The work itself is about one hundred feet across functioning, like Stonehenge, as a solar calendar marking four sun positions, two solstices, and two equinoxes. The artist was very pleased with the way the piece worked as a solar calendar. In his own words “it sort of embeds it in time”, giving the work a relationship to something beyond the earth – a distinct temporal aspect as well as a physical one. In photographs of its final form, *Observatory* appears like a man-made crater or circular dyke. The inner circle is built up with soil and sod into a wall higher than a man. It contains four openings, a main entrance and three breaks opposite the entrance that mark solstice and equinox sight lines. Ribs of earth extend from the inner wall along the equinox sight line to two huge rectangular steel plates set at an angle to each other, creating a triangular gap through which the rising sun is visible at the equinox. The plates are part of the outermost rim of the circle, a complex contoured ridge with smooth and raised areas. Two other humps in this rim to the right and left of the steel planes are crowned by rocks also angled to create viewing grooves in line with the solstice breaks in the inner ring.



Robert Morris: *Observatory* (1971), Sonsbeek, Holland

This work is interesting because it was probably conceived with an earlier work in mind that is his minimal fibreglass circular ring with fluorescent “light gaps” from 1965. *Observatory* is implicitly neg-entropic, as the artist suggested, “embedded in time”, and thus may be understood as a quest to reverse the entropic tendencies evident in his earlier process works, particularly the *Steam* installation and the quarter horse ‘performance’.

I have attempted to reveal how entropy is at work in Morris’s art using Pynchon’s short story *Entropy* as a comparison, or foil. You may now be thinking that but for his work *Observatory*, which I suggested was neg-entropic, Morris’ work is inherently pessimistic. But Norbert Wiener, if I may quote him once again, reveals that anti-entropic processes are also present within isolated systems. In particular, he suggests

that it should be remembered that a human subject is not a closed system. Architecture, a gallery space or room, may be considered as such, but an individual subject is another matter, except perhaps, for those who may have some form of psycho-pathology.

Nature's statistical tendency to disorder, the tendency for entropy to increase in isolated systems, is experienced by the second law of thermodynamics. We, as human beings, are not isolated systems. We take in food, energy... but even more important is the fact that we take in information through our sense organs, and we act on information received.

As long as the individual is not an isolated system, that is to say, not like the solipsistic theoretician upstairs in Pynchon's short story, then he/she need not and often cannot be in a state of equilibrium, psychically, physiologically, or intellectually. S/He cannot therefore be in a perfect harmony with the prevailing ethos of the society of which s/he is a part. As Weiner suggests, "In a system, which is not in equilibrium or in part of such a system, entropy need not increase. It may in fact decrease locally."

In showing his intellectual in a state of forced (self-imposed) homeostatis, Pynchon involves him in a loss of any distinct inner reality he could have had. To that extent such a figure has relinquished all claims to resist entropy and is set adrift into a stochastic space/time continuum. The relevance of this concept becomes evident when we apply it artists such as Morris or Pynchon or for that matter most artists.

In a book titled provocatively *Rage for Chaos* (1968), the writer/theoretician Morse Peckham described the artist's role in these terms: "The distinguishing attribute of the artist's role is to create occasions for disorientation and for perceiver's role to perceive it." Peckham contends that

*Lost in Space*

art does not order our experience of the world which is already ordered in the act of apprehending. It is the discrepancy between our prior orientations and those produced by a work of art that makes the experience meaningful. (18)

For the self to hold out against the drift of the surrounding environment may thus become an act of life – a counter or neg-entropic gesture. There is however, in more ways than one, a great risk involved in this gesture in that to secure the self against the coersions and intrusive persuasions of society, the individual subject may turn him/herself into an isolated system, with the resulting increase in their own entropy. This is the paradox involved in the intellectual's solipsistic activities in Pynchon's short story.

Wiener suggests that it is highly probably that the world will one day be reduced to a vast equilibrium in which nothing happens because all has been reduced to a drab uniformity. Artists like Pynchon and Morris are acutely aware of the dangers we face and their work demonstrates the kind of stance we may adopt in order to both accommodate and resist some of the affects of entropy in our lives.



**Appendix:**

**Modernism/postmodernism  
general distinctions (and privileged terms)**

Modernism

Postmodernism

General/Economy

Nuclear Threat

Environmental Threat

Industrialism

Post-Industrialism

Resource economy

Information Economy

Fordism

Post-Fordism

Corporate Capitalism

Multi-national capitalism

Mass production

Micro-marketing

Class Struggle

No historically

Party Politics/Revolutionary  
subjects

Privileged Revolutionary  
subject

McDonalds

McDonaldisation of society

Disney

Disneyfication of society

History/Social Movements

Nationalism

Localism/globalism

World Revolution

Local resistances

History single vector

Histories (plural)

Homogeneity

Heterogeneity/pluralism

Class politics

Identity politics

Heteroculturalism

Multi-culturalism/pluralism

Culture/Literature

T.S. Eliot Wasteland

Thomas Pynchon Entropy

Author authority

Reader authority

Experimentalism

Recycling

*Lost in Space*

Innovation dissociation	New languages genre mixing
World as text	New concepts of dis-order
Universal truth claims	Relativism
Analysis	Interpretation
Hegemony	Computer as substitute consciousness
Fixed identity	Identity floating/unfixed
Subject eroticism	Sado masochism, solipsism nihilism,
The fragmented modernist self versus	New integrated multi-voiced identities
Melancholy anomie eroticised/repressed modernist self.	Manufactured self
Elitism, irony, abstraction	Integrated self Purity and danger, utopianism

Film/Television

Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1926)	Bladerunner (Scott, 1982)
Psycho (Hitchcock, 1960)	Pulp Fiction (Tarantino, 1995)
Peyton Place TV series	Twin Peaks (Lynch, 1990)
Dracula (Todd Browning, 1931)	Scream (1996)
Star Trek.	S.T. The Next Generation
The Ed Sullivan Show	MTV
The Flintstones	The Simpsons & Beavis and Butthead
Spectacular	Ultra spectacular
Televising of events	Television is the event
Documentary distinct genres/ news	Different sound bites
Hegemony of Hollywood	Ascent of national cinemas
Masculine/feminine	Androgeny [trans/cross]

Architecture and City

Paris/London, New York	Las Vegas/Los Angeles/ Tokyo
Form follows function	Complexity and contradiction
Urbanism: human supremacy	Resurrection of inner cities
Nature in doubt /Nature destroyed	Late conservation efforts
City as cosmos SciFi	McLuhan's Global Village
Futurist city on/under earth	Interplanetary colonisation
Technologism: City and Machine	Fragmentation, anarchy
Worker management (Taylorism)	The workless society
Extreme technical / labour differentiation	Substitute
Progress---millennialism,	Androids, Robots,
Flux and decay	Food chain probs /health food
Panoptikonic Prisons	Body/city Urban renewal
	Prison riots, urban crime

Visual Arts

Form	Anti-form
Fragmentation ( Picasso)	Allegorised images (Salle)
Organicist sculpture (Moore)	Orlan (Body as sculpture material)
Work from Earth (Modernist sculptors)	Earthworks: Robert Morris
Runaway technology	New tech materials valorised
Progress in Tech invention	Hypertech valorisation
Changeold tech & Luddism	Arts reaction against tech
	New tchnology
	technophilia
	New Tech Luddism

*Lost in Space*

Content (immanent meaning)	Context (interpreted meaning)
Reduction, abstraction, finite object	Simulacrum/ representation
Metaphor	Allegory
Reductivism	Recidivism
Order/disorder	Disordered order
Genre	Multi-genre/no genre
Quotation	Irony/parody
Object	Performance
Entropy	Neg/entropy
Single vector art history	Cultural histories
Art history (connoisseurship)	Cultural studies/ Visual culture
Artist as hero	Collaboration/artist
Alienated genius figure	Psychically intact entrepreneur
Suitable case for treatment	Analyst/psychic

Philosophy/Science/Technology

Reality	Virtual Reality
Logic	Paralogic
Structure	Deconstruction
Temporal spatial finitude	Temporal-spatial infinitude
Relativity	Black holes/Worm holes
Empiricism triumphant	Empiricism questioned
The body inviolate	Genetic engineering / cloning
Analogue	Digital
Seven types of ambiguity	Multiplicity of ambiguities
Structure	Agency
Theory	Impossibility of theory
Dehumanisation	Rehumanisation/tecnhno-bio replicants
Entropy	Neg en(trop)y



cuvinte-cheie: entropie, energie, proces, timp, spațiu, subiectivitate, prezență și întâmplare, pentru a discuta unele dintre rupturile (și spaimele) epistemologice ale hibridării și travestirilor postmoderne în sfera producției și reproduției culturale.

Albert Einstein a spus cu un prilej că “Dumnezeu nu joacă zaruri cu universul”. Am o vagă suspiciune că undeva în adâncul minții Einstein credea contrariul. Și dacă e așa, atunci Einstein ar putea fi considerat un fel de precursor al postmodernismului. Căci dacă există un moment care poate fi considerat crucial pentru modernitate și în același timp “o ruptură epistemologică în țesătura modernității” (Friedberg, 1995:60), acesta este reprezentat de consecințele social-culturale, economice și politice, fără a mai vorbi de cele științifice, ale teoriei lui Einstein. Dar din punctul meu de vedere – și dacă alegem să vedem modernitatea ca fiind esențialmente un proiect al secolului al XIX-lea – ruptura epistemologică s-a produs cu cincizeci de ani mai devreme, în 1850, o dată cu formularea teoriei cinetice a gazelor de către Rudolf Julius Emmanuel Clausius (1822-88) și enunțarea celei de-a doua legi a termodinamicii, pe care o cunoaștem astăzi sub numele de Entropie.

În acest eseu explorez aspecte ale tropului în entropie, adică semnificațiile ei culturale, prin distincție față de aplicațiile ei științifice, matematice și tehnice. Mă voi sluji de recursul la en(trop)ie în lucrările sculptorului Robert Morris și în scrierile lui Thomas Pynchon ca de exemple grăitoare (între altele) pentru ceea ce desparte cultura modernismului de cea a postmodernismului.

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