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Introduction

The following thoughts were initially prepared after reading [at the prompting of Russell Fox] this article on historian and author [Christopher Lasch](#):

[Local Culture 2.2: Christopher Lasch, by Jason Peters - August 28, 2020, Front Porch Republic](#)

I subsequently looked for a copy of Lasch's last book which, I was told, he found the time to finish by deferring urgent cancer therapy. His choice resulted in his death from the cancer soon after hurriedly completing his work on the book. I wanted to read a book that was more important to its author than science's latest life-enhancing therapy and I looked for it ... in vain.

Finally, the local Wichita public library found a loaner copy for me in the White Library at Emporia State University which [according to the "Due Date" slip] was checked out only 4 times ... 1995 [the year it was published], 1997 [twice] and 2001. And so, during an October snow storm with green grass on the ground and green leaves in the trees all covered with snow and ice, I settled in to read what few apparently had ... Lasch's last thoughts.

The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy [TROTE] was a revised [I think] and edited collection of Lasch's writings over the years which begins with this line

"Most of my recent work comes back in one way or another to the question of whether democracy has a future."

... and ends with this one

"But now that we are beginning to grasp the limits of our control over the natural world, [mastery] is an illusion - to invoke Freud once again - the future of which is very much in doubt, an illusion more problematical, certainly, than the future of religion."

The book is immense in scope but focused [even repetitive] in theme. It is timely and timeless, critical and affirming, repressive and liberating, complex and common. It is worth having for its bibliography alone even if you never read a word of it. I hope you encounter it soon.

On Education

Education is a recurrent theme throughout TROTE. Chap 4 presents a wide-ranging discussion of why Horace Mann's vision [in 1840-1850] for public education [which was generally implemented] has been followed by [if not actually produced] the very sociological curses which Mann feared would fall on American democracy if it failed to implement his vision ... including "violence, misrule, licentiousness, debauchery, political profligacy and legalized perfidy [breach of trust]."

"[Horace Mann] would be horrified ... with our educational system as it exists today [1995].

- We have **professionalized teaching** by setting up **elaborate requirements for certification**, but we have not succeeded in institutionalizing Mann's appreciation of teaching as an honorable calling.
- We have set up a far-ranging educational bureaucracy without raising academic standards or improving the quality of teaching. The bureaucratization of education has ... substituted the judgment of administrators for that of teachers ... incidentally discouraged people with **a gift for teaching** from entering the profession at all.
- The periodic rediscovery that intellectual training has been sacrificed to "social skills" has led to a misplaced emphasis on the purely cognitive dimension of education, which lacks even Mann's redeeming awareness of its moral dimension.

If there is one lesson we might have been expected to learn in the 150 years since Mann ... it is that the schools can't save society. ... Meanwhile, our children, even as young adults, don't know how to read and write. Maybe the time has come - if it hasn't already passed - to start all over again." TROTE, Chap 4: The Common Schools

The 3 e's

Lasch presents "**education**" as just another chapter in "life" which, although it occurs *in the school* instead of *on the street*, is subject to same tension between:

1. our understanding of **ecology** [nature] revealed in the interplay of
 - a. **debatable standards** of religion/morality/belief which impersonally differentiate and socially segregate us with
 - b. **common dialogue** via cognition/intellect/reason which personally equalize and socially integrate us and
2. our practice of **economy** [the state] revealed in the form of
 - a. **unequal capacities/capabilities** for achieving comfort and convenience which personally divide us into classes which
 - b. **common markets** nevertheless conjoin complementarily [even if exploitatively] but impersonally.

The controversy is over which approach [1a, 1b, 2a, 2b] prevails when.

- The extreme positions are 1a and 2b.
- The moderate positions are 1b and 2a.
- Mann preferred 1b in schools to achieve the personally equalized social integration [aka democracy] which he believed people need to flourish.
- In 2b life generally, the money not the individual is the basis for equality.

In TROTE, Lasch **generally argues** that

- “The elites” abandoned their progenitors’ pursuit of 1b in favor of 2b [what Mann called the replacement of morality with materialism] while simultaneously **dismissing 1a** as irrelevant/unhelpful and 2a as inevitable.
- But that without 1a, 1b stands alone and becomes meaningless and unusable, since “it is debate alone that gives rise to the desire for usable information [which permits us to] master the knowledge that makes us capable citizens”.
 - This is a Lasch paradox that embracing our differences enhances our strength as people [demos+kratos = people+power].
- And finally, the unconditional embrace of 2b causes 2a to become increasingly exaggerated in the form of income and wealth inequality which leads to social collapse in what Mann called “the revenge of poverty”.
- For Lasch, we must embrace **both 1a and 1b simultaneously** ... in our schools and in our lives ... so that we are collectively willing and able to moderate the inevitably detrimental effects of growing 2a inequality in a world otherwise run solely on 2b.

What Lasch seems to imply is that the failure of Mann’s model of education led the elites to revolt. And although his TROTE chapter on “The Common Schools” is organized as a criticism of Mann and not a coherent statement of his own thoughts on education, we might infer that Lasch would agree that

- The institutional “bureaucratization” of education [ie. its formal, monopolistic ¹ and public segregation from the rest of life including the family, the street/neighborhood and even the market] disturbed the wider natural “**ecology of education**” setting in motion multiple causes of deteriorating effects.
- The simultaneous pedagogical embrace of 1b AND the exclusion of 1a eventually starved 1b of the very source of its energy and vitality ... dooming democracy.
- It was the starvation of 1b that led to the revolt of the elites who, **still seeking meaning**, turned to 2b [as noted above] as the only game in town setting in motion the exaggeration of the destructive 2a forces unabated by either 1a or 1b.
- With 2a exaggeration set in motion, Mann’s prophesied “revenge of poverty” became inevitable but would take place in a society without the social stamina or skills of 1a or 1b ... leading to civil violence, totalitarian suppression and collapse.

¹ “[Mann’s] program envisioned the public school system as a monopoly, in practice, if not in law. It implied the marginalization, if not the outright elimination, of institutions that might compete with the common schools.”

Although there is more that could and should be said ... both about Lasch's view of education and about the forces at work in this sociological tale, I hope this attempt to simplify Lasch's wide-ranging and thought-provoking discussion of education is helpful in framing some issue for further discussion.

Truth and Troth

*"[T]he **old dispute** between left and right has exhausted its capacity to clarify issues and to provide a **reliable map of reality**. ... [I]n some quarters the very idea of reality has come into question, perhaps because the talking classes inhabit an artificial world in which **simulations of reality** replace the thing itself." — TROTE, Chap 4: Does Democracy Deserve to Survive?*

truth (n.) - Old English treowð "faith, faithfulness, fidelity, loyalty; veracity, pledge, covenant"
troth (n.) - a phonetic variant of Old English treowð "faithfulness, veracity, truth"

<https://www.etymonline.com>

*"[A] given ideology prevails in the struggle with other ideologies not because its advocates have the power to silence opposition but because it provides a **better map of reality**, a more reliable guide to action." — TROTE, Chap 10: Academic Pseudo-radicalism*

Most of us have a right and left hand, a right and left brain and even bilateral members in other voluntary and involuntary organs. These divided functions provide both redundant capacity and/or specialized complementarity [which some characterize as using terms like dominance and submission]. But, in any case, most of us learn to accept [even embrace] this bilateral asymmetry as part of life.

And yet when we come together sociologically [or ecologically] one might say we are often "spineless" ... unable to tolerate [much less reconcile] the differences we identify as right and left. The division is even sharper politically where we are forced [by conscious design] to choose a side or be independent of both sides thus emphasizing and preserving what might just be artificial divisions.

Lasch suggests this sociological instability arises because we allow ² these differences to be characterized as universal ideas which are then dialectically detached from the local realities which initially embody and ultimately explain them. This permission, Lasch argues, is fundamentally an act of Dualism ... intellectual/spiritual Gnosticism which gives birth to moral/political Manichaeism ... which drives us to simulations of reality which divide us by

² This "allowance" results from the confluence of "subverting propaganda" by the elites who would control us with "systemic failure" by the various institutions [private and public] we depend on to educate, inform and unite us.

defining away the common wealth we ontologically and ecologically share as members of humanity and the planet.

One might recharacterize the error into which we have fallen as an attempt to distinguish Truth from Troth ... unity in theory versus unity in practice ... and to determine which comes first:

does truth produce troth or vice versa? And yet for Lasch, one thing seems certain:

Any dispute becomes “old” when it ceases to “clarify reality” and its advocates drift apart into their own increasingly disconnected “simulations” leading towards some sort of final breakup and collapse.³

Lasch [on whom I am a complete novice] seems to have had the ability to recognize and expose ageing disputes and diverging simulations in society long before they became obvious [and too late to arrest]. For this reason, he was often liked and disliked simultaneously by “both sides” in the various sociological conflicts on which he opined ... which made him a solitary voice during his day ... and a prophet in ours. Let’s think for a moment about just how Lasch did it.

Distinguishing the symptoms from the disease

*“**Real healthcare** occurs outside of the doctor’s office and hospitals, not when the patient shows up to make a complaint once their **symptoms** have developed.” — Emmanuel Fombu*

Perhaps, the most important skill in the task of exposing simulations of reality is the practice/art of recognizing then distinguishing apparent symptoms from the underlying disease that causes them. How does this work?

First and foremost, it requires the person attempting a diagnosis to possess a persistent and cautionary prescience and/or patience that although “what you see” may **appear** to be “what you get”, it is not necessarily “what you have” **really**.

Perhaps, it was his recognition of their **obsession with appearances rather than reality** that led Lasch to label erring social thinkers and actors as “narcissists”. But although most of us think the sin of narcissism is selfishness, Lasch clarified it as delusion and constantly confounded his audiences by finding virtue in selfishness [such as his praise of the family unit] when it was “real” as opposed to “delusional”.⁴

³ The pro-life v pro-choice dispute, to pick just one of many, has certainly reached this point.

⁴ Distinguishing appearances from realities is a constant theme in all the “magical” writings of the Inklings ... and shows through clearly in CS Lewis’ sermon [“The Weight of Glory”](#).

Living by every word

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry. And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON **BREAD ALONE**, BUT ON **EVERY WORD** THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'"* [Matthew 4](#)

The next sister-skill which Lasch seems to have possessed was what might be called "living by every word". One might think of this as choosing the **"All of the above"** answer on a multiple choice question. But in the real world, as Lasch understood, "all" are not always "listed" so one must search them out and then relate them to one another in order to arrive at a complete answer. This is not an impossible task for anyone, but it is arduous and time consuming for most of us and so we neglect it and accept "partial solutions" that spawn "further complications" which we then dismiss as logically necessary when they are not.

Lasch showed us this skill in 1994 when he correctly judged "the elites" as guilty of subverting moral choosing with numerical ciphering:

"[The monetized free market] puts an almost irresistible pressure on every activity to justify itself in the only terms it recognizes: to be a [profitable => benefit\$ > cost\$] business proposition.... It turns news into entertainment, scholarship into professional careerism, social work into the scientific management of poverty. Inexorably it remodels every institution in its own image." — Christopher Lasch, [The Revolt of the Elites](#) (1994)

This "bread alone" approach to living, Lasch argued, subverts the nobleness and obligation [aka kith and kin] which attach us to one another in **local commonwealth** and inexorably drives us towards a social order that is **global in scope** [like the currency that nominalizes everything for comparison of marginal utility] but **fragmented in nature** [like the wealth/income gaps, broken families and cities of homelessness we see growing around us].

Unleashing Lasch

"Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day." — A.A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*

"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop." — Confucius

As we gather together to consider the life and work of Christopher Lasch, what better tribute can we offer than to press on in his footsteps and in **OUR USE of his methods of thinking** ... Lasch who chose to continue his work rather than pause for a potential but debilitating cure of the cancer that killed him. Lasch understood that he was only one in a long line of thinkers [past

and future] who have and would challenge the contradictions of contemporary culture by tracing their roots backwards and their branches forward to expose “what we have” ... really. Some who sounded the alarm before Lasch might be new to you.

In 1977, Andrew Lytle’s agrarian essay [The Hind Tit](#) exposed the destructive effects of monetizing the small Southern farmer along with the large plantation owner.

“There are those among us who defend and rejoice in this miscarriage [of the commonwealth], saying we are more prosperous. They tell us - and we are ready to believe - that collectively we are possessed of enormous wealth and that this in itself is compensation for whatever has been lost. **But when we, as individuals, set out to find and enjoy this wealth, it becomes elusive and its goods escape us.** We then reflect, no matter how great it may be collectively, if individually we do not profit by it, we have lost by the exchange. This becomes more apparent with the realization that, as its benefits elude us, the labors and pains of its acquisition multiply.”

In 1920, JM Keynes’ essay [The Economic Consequences of the Peace](#) judged the post-WWI monetary debauchment in Europe and came to agreement with Lenin on the inevitability of class struggle and social disorder.

“Lenin is said to have declared that the **best way to destroy the Capitalist System** was to debauch the currency. [And] while the process impoverishes many, it actually enriches some. The sight of this arbitrary rearrangement of riches strikes not only at security, but at confidence in the equity of the existing distribution of wealth. Those [Capitalist & Bankers] to whom the system brings windfalls, beyond their deserts and even beyond their expectations or desires, become “profiteers,” who are the object of the hatred of the bourgeoisie [Middle Class], whom the inflationism has impoverished, not less than of the proletariat [Labor]. As the inflation proceeds and the real value of the currency fluctuates wildly from month to month, all permanent relations between debtors and creditors, which form the ultimate foundation of capitalism, become so utterly disordered as to be almost meaningless; and the process of wealth-getting degenerates into a gamble and a lottery.

“Lenin was certainly right. There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency. The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law on the side of destruction, and does it in a manner which not one man in a million is able to diagnose.

“... By combining a popular hatred of the [profiteers] with the blow ... to social security by the violent and arbitrary disturbance of contract and of the established equilibrium of wealth which is the inevitable result of inflation, these Governments are fast **rendering impossible a continuance of the social and economic order** of the nineteenth century. But they have no plan for replacing it.”

And in his 1958 speech on [Property and Liberty](#), Ludwig von Mises linked easy money and the welfare state as two sides of the same coin, arguments to the contrary on the left and the right notwithstanding.

“However, one does not exhaustively describe the sweeping changes that capitalism brought about in the conditions of the common man if one merely deals with the supremacy he enjoys on the market as a consumer and in the affairs of state as a voter and with the unprecedented improvement of his standard of living. No less important is the fact that capitalism has made it possible for him to save, to accumulate capital and to invest it. The gulf that in the pre-capitalistic status and caste society separated the owners of property from the penniless poor has been narrowed down. In older ages the journeyman had such a low pay that he could hardly lay by something and, if he nevertheless did so, he could only keep his savings by hoarding and hiding a few coins. Under capitalism his competence makes saving possible, and there are institutions that enable him to invest his funds in business. ... But, of course, this trend can only develop where the market economy is not sabotaged by allegedly social policies. **The welfare state with its methods of easy money, credit expansion and undisguised inflation continually takes bites out of all claims payable in units of the nation’s legal tender.** The self-styled champions of the common man ... [fail] to see the obvious fact that those whom they feign to aid are creditors in their capacity as savers, policy holders, and owners of bonds.”

Stimulation is Simulation

*fiat (n.) - 1630s, "authoritative sanction," from Latin **fiat** "let it be done" (used in the opening of Medieval Latin proclamations and commands), third person singular present subjunctive of fieri "be done, become, come into existence" (from PIE root *bheue- "to be, exist, grow"), used as passive of facere "to make, do." Meaning "a decree, command, order" is from 1750. In English the word also sometimes is a reference to **fiat lux** "let there be light" in Genesis i.3.*

God said “let there be light”, but it took central bankers to say “let there be credit” [aka fiat credit or quantitative easing] And so today we inhabit two worlds in conflict with one another ... a financial world of perpetual growth and the need for increasing and almost unbelievable levels of stimulation ... and a real world of limited resources and climate change. The dispute over which world we will choose has become “old” ... and we are withdrawing into opposing simulations to soothe the angst which is now upon us... people are suffering and dying.

Meanwhile in Portland, poor and even middle class families where both spouses work cannot maintain a stable much less rising standard of living ... they cannot afford childcare ... cannot send their kids to schools that are closed due to the worst air quality in the world caused by the smoke of millions of acres of forests on fire ... cannot quit but cannot go on ... so they break apart and cast their several [now separated] members into what remains of various tattered social safety nets ... as starter home prices climb towards assuming \$1,000,000 in debt. And Portland is not alone ... just more obvious. **Something is wrong in America and around the world.** But what is it?

Where do we start? How about where Christopher Lasch stopped ... “The Revolt of the Elites”? But we must CARRY ON from where Lasch left off because there is MUCH MORE TO REVEAL everyday ... and I believe Lasch would be the first to tell us so.

And how do we address it? What we do NOT need to do is invent new methods of thinking about our problems. We can safely and productively follow Lasch's example of

- distinguishing between s[t]imulations and realities ... and
- living by every word.

If we will start at the right point and use the proven methods of sound thinking ... and hold each other accountable as Lasch held his peers accountable ... we may discover that "old disputes" can be transformed into "new dialogues" which deliver us from perishing in fatal simulations and put us back on a path towards the vital reality we must share with one another and with all the rest of creation.

[Something Remarkable Happened This August](#)

