Comment on the Papers by Michael R. Lynn and Katrina Olds

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Good Morning!

We are nearing the conclusion of what has already been a magical workshop. I am Richard Nash, and in this session we have two wonderful papers by Katrina Olds and Mike Lynn.

Katrina earned her doctorate in history from Princeton, which led ultimately to the sentence that she is currently serving as Chair of History at the University of San Francisco. Her research, no doubt informed by her administrative duties, focuses on the picaresque and the Inquisition, about which more in a few minutes.

Mike earned his doctorate in History from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and I am still struggling with whether this was deemed a greater or a lesser offense. On the one hand, he is currently serving time as Chair of the Department of History, Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Purdue University Northwest, but it is only on an "Interim" basis. On the other hand, he is also serving as "Interim Chair" of the Department of English and World Languages. Reviewing his CV begins to resemble that of a repeat offender, as we discover that he has previously served, among other things, as "Interim Chair" of History at Agnes Scott, and "Interim Dean of the College of Liberal Arts," "Interim Dean of the Honors College," and "Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs," all at his current institution, which remains (unless I am mistaken) a minimum security facility. We are extremely grateful that both have been permitted to visit us this weekend. His research has involved Witchcraft, Magic, and popular science in the context of eighteenth century France, and you will recall that his contribution to our workshop discusses cartomancy with both playing cards and Tarot cards in late eighteenth century France, locating that discussion in the context of how we conceive of modernity.

In his wisdom, Jesse invited me to moderate this session, perhaps out of respect for my casual acquaintance with French culture, which extends from the theory of Latour to the vineyards of Latour; or perhaps out of deference to my complete and total innocence of all things Spanish, which might allow me to blush as modestly as any virgin called before the Inquisition. I suspect, however, that it may have had more to do with a sneaking suspicion that matters involving playing cards might not be entirely foreign to me. Whatever the reason, I was delighted to accept, and immediately threw myself into the challenge of acquainting myself with some material, at least tangential to this morning's conversation.

And what a treat that has been!

My reading in eighteenth century cartomancy (admittedly, only in the English context) has been eye-opening, and while I can hardly advertise myself yet as "an adept," I do believe that I have mastered enough of this particular art to attempt a short demonstration of what we are discussing. After all, it would be a shame to attend a workshop on magic, and have no one even attempt a demonstration.

I have read several eighteenth-century texts now, my favorite of which instructs you on how to tell a fortune with a deck of playing cards, and includes a poem that interprets the significance of each card in the deck. Fortunately, the last time I was in the nation's capital, someone offered to sell me a deck of playing cards that had once belonged to Thomas Jefferson.

I was dubious, since I pride myself on not being easily fooled; but it was actually in the Library of Congress, and the deck actually had Thomas Jefferson's signature on it, so it must be real. Show cards.

[Magical interlude. Let him reveal his fate. Look for interpretation. Best if he has it, or Katrina]

Well, I think we have demonstrated that magic doesn't work, since anyone who has read Mike's paper knows that he is NOT "a man of shallow parts," but one of deep and penetrating sagacity. As a reminder, Mike reviews the history of cartomancy in France, drawing our attention to the formative if not foundational role played by an episode in the memoirs of Casanova. One thing that I will say here is that my reading in the English context turned up several earlier demonstrations (one as early as 1699), with several clustered at the end of the Stuart dynasty shortly before the rise of Walpole, and then a long gap before a recurrence in the 1760s, and a growing popularity that seemed to more or less follow the chronology offered for France. As Mike points out, that timeframe loosely coincides with a rise in Egyptology and the coincident increasing popularity of Tarot cards, perhaps communicating some ancient lost knowledge practice. It would not seem amiss to imagine that a popular taste for cartomancy, with both playing cards and tarot cards, might be in some ways affiliated with the growing popularity of such occult notions as freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, and the developing popularity particularly within reform-minded aristocratic circles of ideas of a cognoscenti or illuminati. My thinking here, however vague and nebulous, leads me to my large question for Mike; and in turn, allows me to pivot to how I, at least, see his paper converging with Katrina's rather wonderful case study of a picaro.

Your paper, opening with the marvelous image of "ambulating magicians" asserts (at the bottom of 314) that the development of cartomancy "in the second half of the eighteenth century belies the notion of a 'decline of magic' and most directly forces us to confront the nature of modernity and disenchantment." Hear, hear, I say! But when (top of page 333) you return to this perception, by way of Latour, I find myself saying that my reading of Latour differs from yours, in ways that I hope you will consider as effectively a friendly amendment:

> Bruno Latour has argued that we have never been modern. The assumption is often that modernity must be the rational counterpoint to the previous age of irrationality. However, in this instance, riffing on Latour, it is not that we have never been modern, but that we have always been modern (arguing here that modernity need not be linked with rationality or disenchantment).

My reading of Latour is precisely that the "assumption" you allude to is the self-deluding self-representation that constitutes the modernity that we have never been and yet pretend to. The project of separating Culture from Nature, Rational from Irrational, Modern from Primitive; and then privileging the former over the latter IS the project by which Modernity deceives itself in representing itself to itself. In that reading, I would suggest that the practice you describe is quintessentially Latourean: professing an Age of Reason, one keeps alive, especially among the elites, doctrines of cognoscenti, illuminati, and privileged secret knowledges. One even hears of secret societies at ivy League universities and Oxbridge. Modernity, it seems to me, is defined by

the capacity collectively to profess a purified understanding precisely by denying a hybridized "both-and-edness" that would complicate such formulations.

And this seems to me, as I turn to Katrina's paper, where intellectual and material histories confront one another most dramatically, and compellingly. Katrina sketches for us the eventful life of an eighteenth-century picaro, Joaquin Munoz Delgado: (bottom of 340) "Munoz Delgado's case reveals the fertile terrain where charlatanry, erudition, artisanal practice, and popular culture intersected, at the margins of, but not completely separate from, high culture."

Like Mike, Katrina urges us to view his history in relation to our understanding of modernity: "part of a broader history of a 'magical' eighteenth century—one that takes into account enchantment, credulity, and illusions, not only as the foils to modernity, but co-constitutive with its emergence." Again, I say: hear, hear!

I want to open the floor to questions which I am sure you have, so I will try to keep this last part very brief. I am thinking simultaneously, throughout this weekend, but particularly with these two papers of three figures, and the convergence of intellectual and material history: William Hogarth, particularly his wonderful engraving of Mary Toft—that "vile hoax and imposter"—giving birth to rabbits beneath the pulpit in *Credulity, Superstition, and Fanaticism*; Jonathan Swift, at his most brilliant in satirizing deceptive Christianity while commenting on it in the voice of a mad narrator who notes that once a man makes a fool of himself, it is easy to bring in others; and Donald Trump, currently on trial for fraud, with his sycophants and surrogates outside the courthouse, trying to take his case directly to the people.

Intellectual history is, I would contend, a modern invention; and like many modern inventions, both incredibly useful and potentially self-deluding. It takes seriously that ideas—especially important ideas—must come from somewhere, and understanding that process is valuable. In doing so, it often risks—and occasionally falls into—formulations that usually serve Modern interests at the expense of less consistent, but more accurate, formulations. The easy shorthand favored by undergraduates is the "before Newton, people believed" variety. There is little room in such formulations for a "magical eighteenth century," and a preference for a timeline in which people's belief in reason succeeded the previous failure of their belief in magic.

But, as eighteenth-century theologians liked to argue about Nature and God, the existence of magic presupposes the existence of a magician. And furthermore, whenever magic is performed, two things are required: a believing witness, who is as certain a believer of what he has witnessed as any empiricist could wish; and a performer who cannot possibly believe in the truth of his performance without descending with Swift's narrator into madness and self-delusion.

This, it seems to me, is the richest question posed by the case of Muñoz Delgado. Certainly, he runs afoul of the inquisition by seeing through the deceptive performance of the Catholic church. But what of his own magical performances? How much of his charlatan career is straightforward exploitation of his audience's willingness to believe? And at what point does he begin getting high on his own supply, believing his own claims, making a convert of himself? What people believe, even individuals, much less whole populations, is no easy question. This leads those of us working in the Anglo-Irish tradition to Swift; and Kristina and those working in the Iberian tradition to Cervantes. She writes in conclusion on 359 of our need to imagine another manner of constructing an intellectual history from below, promising "a future

study to examine which other windmills this latter-day Quijote thought he was tilting at, but also, perhaps, the question of whether he believed his own *quijoterias*."

I will end my comments here, extending an invitation to each of you to respond to and/or redirect the focus of my remarks; and then will open the floor to questions and comments while doing my best to keep track of who wants to speak, who has preference to speak, etc., etc., all while struggling to remember who people are.