

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour

*Enculturation*

Episode Nine: “Manual Rhetoric” Transcript

*Music begins: The Beastie Boys, “Ricky’s Theme”*

*Sliding title: Rhetorical Theory / Bruno Latour*

*Title Slide: Episode Nine: “Manual Rhetoric”*

*Block quote:*

Yet, if we dismiss this technical work as rote mechanics, we risk calcifying a distinction between the *production work* of texts (including the operations of buttons, cords, and wires that cut and record texts) and the produced texts themselves. (Jenny Edbauer Rice, “Rhetoric’s Mechanics” 367-68)

*Slow pan of over image of a black, male mechanic at work.*

Narration: Rhetoric’s investment in new media composition (which is far from universal) has drawn our field’s attention to a range of potentially extra-discursive skills. Rhetoric’s simultaneous material turn ratchets-up this interest in the non-discursive. We are invested in both the rhetoric we can achieve through new media and the rhetorical agency of the media themselves.

*Slow pan of over image of a white, male mechanic at work.*

Narration: Using Bruno Latour’s *Science in Action*, where he speaks to the non-discursive components of persuasion, I want to, in this episode of Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour, quickly point to what we can call “manual rhetorics.” In her 2008 *CCC*’s article on rhetoric’s mechanics, Jenny Edbauer Rice speaks of working with our hearts and hands.

*Slow pan of over image of a white, female mechanic at work.*

Narration: Edbauer Rice's argument is that the fully rhetorical endeavor includes the discursive and the nondiscursive alike. Arranging the words and the cables, the images and the circuits. Latour reinforces this argument in his own argument that what keeps things real is their ability to hold everything—human and nonhuman—together.

*Block quote:*

Even the best mechanic will find it difficult to regulate the machine—check the wind, mend the sails, enforce the law—so that all the allies stay content. (Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* 130)

*Slow pan of over image of a Latina mechanic at work.*

Narration: A manual rhetoric can be developed through Latour's emphasis on machines and machinations. Successful Technoscience, for Latour, emerges through negotiations between the technogram and the sociogram. We should not confuse these two as binary opposites but simply different registers. They are not two distinct realms, but different elements of collectives: humans and nonhumans.

*Slow pan of over image of a white, male mechanic at work.*

Narration: For instance, microbes, microscopes, and microchips. A successful scientist or engineer keeps their rhetoric strong and their project alive and thus real by moving between the human and nonhuman securing allies and getting them to act together. Joining Latour and rhetoric scholars such as Edbauer Rice, we can understand this rhetorical work as mechanical, as manual.

*Slow pan of over image of a white, female mechanic at work.*

Narration: The mechanical here is not opposed to the rhetorical (as traditionally understood): the mechanical is the continuation of rhetoric that is discursive and symbolic. The mechanical is the other half. Despite Immanuel Kant's complaints about the machinations of orators, rhetoric is in need of more machinations, not less. And the world at large can be seen as a rhetorical machine.

*Block quote:*

In order to argue, we would now need the manual skills required to handle the scalpels, peel away the guinea pig ileum, interpret the decreasing peaks, and so on. (Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* 67)