

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour

*Enculturation*

Episode Ten: “Love” Transcript

*Music begins: Patsy Cline, “Faded Love”*

*Sliding title: Rhetorical Theory / Bruno Latour*

*Title Slide: Episode Ten: “Love”*

*Block quote:*

If we wish to continue the study of the networks of technoscience, we must straighten up the distorted beliefs and do away with this opposition between rational and irrational ideas. (Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* 185)

*Slow pan over image of chain-linked fence at dusk.*

Narration: Latour spends a fair amount of time discussing and describing clashes and controversies. In many ways, clashes and controversies are at the heart of his thought: the agonism of laboratory life and of science in action. It is of course no surprise, then, that Latour nods to rhetoric here and there: rhetoric itself was and is born of agonism.

*Slow pan over image of blurry chain-linked fence.*

Narration: In this episode of Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour, I want to explore what rhetoric born of agonism’s fire has to offer to Latour and his clashes of controversy.

*Slow pan over image of barbed wire fence post in green field.*

Narration: Specifically, Jim Corder's discussion of clashing narratives in "Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love" both resonates with Latour and names the virtue implicit in Latour's preferred method of thinking through controversy. It is Corder's love that Latour wants to precede and pervade controversy.

*Block quote:*

Still, what has to be explained is why we do not all share the same beliefs. The accusation has shifted from form to content. (Bruno Latour, *Science in Action* 198)

*Slow pan over image of doorway out onto a balcony overlooking a meadow.*

Narration: In *Science in Action* Latour wants to explain differences and controversies in terms of content rather than form. This is a move away from charges of distortion, faulty logic, brain damage, irrationality, and superstition. This is likewise a move away from the dichotomy of knowledge vs. belief (i.e., you *believe*, but I *know*).

*Slow pan over image of doorway out into a garden.*

Narration: Latour wants to prevent the argumentative short-circuit whereby opposing sides are treated asymmetrically: one side is rational and the other irrational, and that this difference explains outcomes such as success and failure. Latour prefers a more symmetrical understanding, at least at the start. Like Corder's discussion of narratives, which produce their own evidence and reason, Latour pictures opposing sides as working within their own logics, which either gain allies or not. Asymmetries are produced rather than discovered.

*Slow pan over image of doorway out into a garden.*

Narration: Formally, opposite positions work the same. They differ only in content. For me, the shift in emphasis from form to content is a preference for love in Corder's sense: of granting reasonableness without giving assent—the loving acceptance of form in the face of disagreeable content. Love is the gift of granting symmetry to those with whom we disagree.

*Block quote:*

What can free us from the apparent hopelessness of steadfast arguments opposing each other? I have to start with a simple answer and hope that I can gradually give it the texture and capacity it needs: we have *to see* each other, *to know* each other, *to be present to* each other, *to embrace* each other. (Jim Corder, "Argument as Emergence" 23)