

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour

Enculturation

Episode One: “Show Your Work” Transcript

Music begins: Boards of Canada, “Smokes Quantity”

Sliding title: Rhetorical Theory / Bruno Latour

Title Slide: Episode One: “Show Your Work”

Block quote:

You have to show the step-by-step translations that allow the person to build the house. You can't say it had a magic potential in advance, because for Bruno [Latour] every step of the translation is very important. (Graham Harmon, *The Prince and the Wolf* 121)

Slow pan over image of construction project.

Narration: Throughout *Reassembling the Social* and *Pandora's Hope* (across all of his works really), Latour insists that we, if I may borrow a dreaded phrase from *all* of math instruction, show your work.

Sociologists, scientists, engineers and law-makers cannot assume *ahead of time*

Slow pan over image of construction project.

Narration: what the social is, what reality is, what a technology will be and what justice will be. All of these objects and project are in *media res*. They are precisely what we are working on rather than simply uncovering or discovering.

Slow pan over image of construction project.

Narration: They are articulated and are made real through and across the entanglements of humans and nonhumans alike. This requirement to *show our work*, I argue in this episode of Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour, is fundamentally linked to the rhetoric.

Block quote:

Far from being a raw material out of which fewer and fewer features are conserved, [a thing] begins as a barely visible entity and takes on more and more competencies and attributes until it ends up a full-fledged substance. (*Pandora's Hope* 138)

Slow pan over image of construction project.

Narration: With Latour in hand, we can argue that rhetoric is both about this work of articulation (of *making* real) and the showing of this work (perhaps this is the rhetor/rhetorician distinction). Rhetoric, I'd argue, is pretty clear on the first component. Rhetoric frequently promotes itself as the work of identification, of persuasion, of composition, of making.

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Narration: Going back to Isocrates, oratory was what made institutions and what made them work. With the second component, however, we in rhetoric often only account for *some* of the work. We tend to count only the human, the symbolic, the discursive work by which things come into being.

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Narration: When Latour admonishes sociologists and scientists alike to show their work, he likewise encourages rhetoric to account for the nonhuman, the nonsymbolic, and nondiscursive labor of rhetoric, of identification, of persuasion, and of composition. For rhetoric to fully account for what makes things work, rhetoric must account not only for the human but nonhuman as well.

Block quote

For scientific, political, and even moral reasons it is crucial that enquirers do not in advance, and *in place* of the actors, define what sorts of building blocks the social world is made of.
(*Reassembling* 41)