

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour

*Enculturation*

Episode Three: “The Strong Defense” Transcript

*Music begins: Clint Mansell, “Welcome to Lunar Industries”*

*Sliding title: Rhetorical Theory / Bruno Latour*

*Title Slide: Episode Three: “The Strong Defense”*

*Block quote:*

The Strong Defense assumes that truth is determined by *social dramas*, some more formal than others but *all man-made*. Rhetoric in such a world is not ornamental but determinative, essentially creative. (Lanham 156, emphasis added)

*Slow pan over black and white image of crowd.*

Narration: In the “Q’ Question” Richard Lanham gives a name to our discipline’s greatest foe: “the weak defense of rhetoric.” “The Weak Defense,” writes Lanham, “argues that there are two kinds of rhetoric, good and bad. The good kind is used in good causes, the bad kind in bad causes. Our kind is the good kind; the bad kind is used by our opponents.

*Slow pan over black and white image of crowd.*

Narration: This was Plato’s solution, and Isocrates’, and it has been enthusiastically embraced by humanists ever since” (155). The gist of the weak defense is that there remains above, beyond, and outside of rhetoric an arhetorical measuring stick we should use to assess our rhetoric and adjudicate our strife. The weak defense postpones difficult questions about the good

*Slow pan over black and white image of crowd.*

Narration: and the true by placing them beyond our reach. They are just there, so quit asking. And in doing so controls the social. The social answers to something else. The strong defense, in contrast, makes the very things that “control” the social in the weak defense precisely those things which (social) interaction creates, negotiates, and adjudicates.

*Block quote:*

Socrates wants to replace *pistis* with a didacticism that is fit for professors asking students to take exams on things known in advance and rehearsed by training and rote exercises, *but that is not fit for the trembling souls who have to decide what is right and wrong on the spot.* (Latour, *Pandora's Hope* 242)

*Slow pan over color image of large protest.*

Narration: Latour's reading of Plato's *Gorgias* thus offers precisely such a strong if implicit defense of rhetoric. Importantly, Latour formulates what we might recognize as a strong defense of rhetoric by addressing the subject/object binary that strongly correlates to it. The weak defense supposes an objectivity above and beyond the subjectivity of the social or the political strife of humans. The strong defense wants to do something else entirely:

*Slow pan over color image of large protest.*

Narration: it wants to raise the stakes by making the good and the true precisely what is at stake in rhetoric. There is, however, potentially a catch in Lanham. But here again, I think, Latour is helpful.

What exactly does Lanham mean by or count as a “social drama”? A social drama as read in Lanham is a largely if not entirely human affair. This leaves the strong defense open to the charge of being something akin to social constructionism. In Latour, however, the social drama would include humans and nonhumans alike.

*Slow pan over color image of a crowd in front of a bonfire.*

Narration: The human part of the world, for Latour, is not the only part that contains controversy, strife, and feels the need for negotiation. Lanham's strong defense of rhetoric becomes Latour's strange defense

of rhetoric. Whereas Lanham raises the stakes with strong defense by making the good and the true precisely what is at stake in rhetoric, Latour raises the stakes by making the good and the true what is at stake in rhetoric and by radically increasing the number of participants in any rhetorical interaction.

*Block quote:*

If there is one thing that does *not* require an expert, and cannot be taken *out* of the hands of the ten thousand fools, it is deciding what is right and wrong, and what is good and bad. (*Pandora's Hope* 243)