

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour

*Enculturation*

Episode Four: “Composition” Transcript

*Music begins: Modest Mouse, “Perfect Disguise”*

*Sliding title: Rhetorical Theory / Bruno Latour*

*Title Slide: Episode Four: “Composition”*

*Block quote:*

Rhetoric and composition. Damn the conjunction, simultaneously yoke, virgule, hinge: a sign of constraint and restriction, as in what might Rhetoric be were it not leashed to composition?; a mark of breadth and possibility, as in what might composition be without Rhetoric? (Peter Vandenberg, “Conjunction Function Reduction: A Too-Brief History of Rhetoric and Composition”)

*Slow pan over image of a rubber-band ball.*

Narration: For some time now, the slash between rhetoric and composition has been a source of frustration and of scholarship. A special issue of *Enculturation* was devoted to it back in 2003. In brief, the slash can be described as a set of two competing worries. The worry that rhetorical theory is divorced from practice and that the practice of composition is under-theorized.

*Slow pan of over image of binder clips arranged in a circle.*

Narration: That is, composition is seen as too exclusively focused on making, whereas rhetoric is seen as focusing too exclusively on understanding or theorizing human relations. The general worry is one of a disconnect between goals or ends. What does composition want? What does rhetoric want?

*Slow pan of over image of a hot glue gun.*

Narration: In this episode, I want to use Latour's use of the term composition to address the split. As Paul Lynch has argued, "Latour may not be a compositionist in the way we normally understand the term. Yet his expansive notion of composition can help us reimagine the field's work."

*Block quote:*

Even though the word "composition" is a bit too long and windy, what is nice is that it underlines that things have to be put together (Latin *componere*) while retaining their heterogeneity. (Latour, "Compositionist Manifesto" 473-74)

*Slow pan of over image of assorted color paper clips.*

Narration: Latour's use of composition, while expansive, is thoroughly recognizable to rhetoric and composition. Indeed, because of its expansiveness it is equally recognizable across the much discussed slash. Composition will see itself and its work in *composition* and rhetoric will do the same.

*Slow pan of over image of color duct tape rolls.*

Narration: Each pulled into the other by the big tent of Latour's Composition: the work of collecting, of making, of coordinating, arranging, and compromising. Latour's Composition, which is nothing short of a method for saving the world, is what rhetoric *and* composition or composition *and* rhetoric bring to the world everyday.

*Slow pan of over image of a telephone pole covered in staples.*

Narration: To compose and to compromise. To build together. So where the slash remains something other than porous punctuation, let Latour be our guide.

*Block quote:*

The thirst for the Common World is what there is of communism in compositionism, with this small but crucial difference: that it has to be slowly composed instead of being taken for granted and imposed on all. (Latour, "Compositionist Manifesto" 488)