

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour

*Enculturation*

Episode Six: “Ethos” Transcript

*Music begins: The Flaming Lips, “Yeah Yeah Yeah Song”*

*Sliding title: Rhetorical Theory / Bruno Latour*

*Title Slide: Episode Six: “Ethos”*

*Block quote:*

We use the terms *character* and *ethical proof*[...] to refer to proofs that rely on community assessments of a rhetor’s character or reputation. (Sharon Crowley and Debra Hawhee, *Ancient Rhetoric for Contemporary Students* 163).

*Slow pan over black and white image of crochet in progress.*

Narration: In this video, I want to explore what Latour offers to *ethos*. No surprise, I think Latour has much to offer. Much that is familiar and a little that’s strange.

*Slow pan over color image of supports of Golden Gate Bridge.*

Narration: At its core, *ethos* is the ethical proof: it is the proof most social in it is concern with the rhetor in relations. *Ethos* is this thus how a rhetor connects to an audience or others more generally. In this way, *ethos* is frequently treated as a technique. It is how the rhetor goes about shaping their character or reputation in order to achieve some persuasive end.

*Slow pan over color image of rain-soaked spider’s web.*

Narration: While Latour might not be opposed to such an understanding of *ethos*, his thinking in *Aramis* specifically offers much to our understanding of *ethos*, both strengthening ethos as a proof as well as positioning ethos as fundamental to the rhetorical enterprise more generally.

*Block quote:*

The work of generating interest consists in constructing these long chains of reasons that are irresistible, even though their logical form may be debatable. (Latour, *Aramis* 33)

*Slow pan over color image of a green vine wrapped around a metal spoke.*

Narration: Latour brings two things to *ethos*: the first is his notion of the real, which is a function of alliances and allies. That is, a project or object become more real the more allies it has. The second thing Latour brings to *ethos* is the work of generating interest, and this notion of interest is tightly connected to Latour's interest in associations.

*Slow pan over color image of a coral reef.*

Narration: So not only does Latour focus our attention on *ethos* as the forging of alliances in order increase our reality, he makes this work of *ethos*, now more a verb than a noun, vital to collectives. In other words, collectives are made through associations, which entails actors getting other actors interested in the same things.

*Slow pan over color image of laundry on clotheslines strung between high rise apartment buildings.*

Narration: *Ethos*, or identification, which in Kenneth Burke's version, entails the aligning of interests, isn't simply a proof, a technique of persuasion. *Ethos* is association generated by interest, and it is this generation of interests and forging of alliances that holds collectives together in the first place. *Ethos* is not only way for us to be persuasive; *ethos* is what make us us. *Ethos* forms the world and holds us in it.

*Block quote:*

For a project to materialize, it must at once recruit new allies and at the same time make sure that their recruitment is assured. (Latour, *Aramis* 71)