

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour

*Enculturation*

Episode Seven: “Kairos” Transcript

*Music begins: Underworld & John Murphy, “Mercury”*

*Sliding title: Rhetorical Theory / Bruno Latour*

*Title Slide: Episode Seven: “Kairos”*

*Block quote:*

Kairos is not a form of externalized mastery [...]: kairos wills us and logos speaks us, but only insofar as we are also taking part in them. (Thomas Rickert, “In the House of Doing” 913)

*Slow pan over image of one gold watch part in a mix of silver watch parts.*

Narration: Is there a way to fashion a *kairos* from Latour? This video machine speaks to me. I found some quotes, made some preliminary connections, and Creative Commons was generous. The time was right, the setting opportune, for a kairos episode of Rhetorical Theory/Bruno Latour, a show about the mixture of an improper and a proper noun.

*Slow pan over image of hour hands arrayed on a piece of cloth.*

Narration: I want to use Latour to argue that kairos is constructed. Far being a simply objective context ala Bitzer or a subjective projection ala Vatz, Latour’s mix of humans and nonhumans in collectives points the way toward an emerging kairos that is neither ready made nor made to order, but which is nevertheless composed.

*Slow pan over image of assorted pocket watch parts.*

Narration: To do so, we need to look at Latour's definition of time, read it through kairos, and see where we end up. And the kairos I am working with here is Thomas Rickert's ambient or participatory understanding of kairos, which lends itself well to Latour's composed notion of time.

*Block quote:*

Time is not a general framework but a provisional result of the connection among entities.

(Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 74)

*Slow pan over image of watch parts in a series of compartments.*

Narration: For Latour, time is an assemblage, which has more or less intensity. As with his take on the social, time is not some hidden background force or element that moves and thus explains us. Time, for Latour, is a composition, an assemblage of humans and nonhumans.

*Slow pan over image of assorted watch parts.*

Narration: In this way, kairos is not simply a deterministic force on rhetors. In as much as it is an equally human and nonhuman affair, however, the rhetor cannot simply stride in and compose opportune moments at will. Opportunity must be negotiated before it knocks. This isn't, you'll notice, the limits of subjectivity in the face of objectivity, but the recalcitrance of other actors composing their own moments.

*Slow pan over image of gold watch gears.*

Narration: Kairos is something we compose, but we never do not do so alone. As Rickert argues, kairos is ambient and participatory. Good timing isn't simply given nor is it simply made: it is complexly composed with others.

*Block quote:*

The connections among beings alone make time. (Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 77)