

Circumnavigation: An Interview with Thomas Rickert

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Thomas Rickert: By the way...

Nathaniel Rivers: What?

Thomas: Why are all your pictures on Facebook now with these salmon red pants?

Nathaniel: There's just two. That's because people like them and it keeps showing up on your feed. It's called being a big deal. Also, they're not salmon, they're just red. They show up salmon.

Thomas: Fair enough. Just curious.

Nathaniel: So, shall we start?

Thomas: Yeah, just a second.

Nathaniel: Okay. No hurry.

Nathaniel (Narration): While Thomas gets ready I'll quickly tell you what we're up to. Traveling to two breweries in St. Louis, Missouri, Thomas and I discussed his book, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being*, recently published by the University of Pittsburg Press as part of their Series in Composition, Literacy and Culture.

This is Thomas Rickert's second book in the series. The first was *Acts of Enjoyment: Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject*.

We chose an audio interview to in some small way attune the interview itself to ambience, the sounds of bars, chatting, outbursts of yelling, peals of laughter and glasses clinking together would shape both the interview itself and its present digital form. We hope you enjoy it.

Nathaniel: We are here at the 4Hands Brewery in fabulous downtown St. Louis.

Thomas: We are indeed.

Nathaniel: I am here with Thomas Rickert. I'm, of course, Nathaniel Rivers.

I guess we should start at the beginning. How can you, or can you describe the genesis of this project and its development over time? I'll point out, for instance, your *JAC* article "In the House of Doing: Rhetoric and the Kairos of Ambience" was published in 2004.

You've been at work at this for a while, it seems.

Thomas: I have been at work at this for a while. But as far as a beginning, that is already fraught with all kinds of interesting ways. You snigger and yet you know.

In terms of the beginning, why don't we just say that certain things coalesced at a particular time in terms of my writing, although all the things I write had their beginnings already in various ways. I'd like to say that the key element, perhaps, was music prior to anything else. That may be why I gravitated towards the term *ambience*.

Brian Eno (1999), most particularly, is somebody who coined that term for a particular kind of music. But Eno certainly wasn't an originator, it had already been ongoing. But he was a great popularizer. He also theorized it in some interesting ways.

Then you have lots of bands who had been delving into it in new ways. I was listening a lot to Sigur Rós at the time. In fact, one could say that, in fact, I think I say this somewhere in the acknowledgements, I wrote that first ambient essay on Sigur Rós and prednisone.

Nathaniel: Nice, yeah. Well, I even mentioned to you, we talked once about one of their album covers that's just the parentheses.

Thomas: Right on.

Nathaniel: Which was...

Thomas: That was the one I was listening to over and over again, because it scratched the prednisone itch in an interesting way.

Nathaniel: Well, that was a good one.

Keeping with the theme of origins, and given that, when did *Acts of Enjoyment* come out? 2007?

Thomas: Correct.

Nathaniel: We've got the *JAC* article in 2004, book comes out in 2007.

Thomas: The acts book.

Nathaniel: Was there then, the *Acts of Enjoyment*?

Thomas: Yes, that book.

Nathaniel: What did you call it?

Thomas: The acts book.

Nathaniel: The acts book? We're coming back to the act. I've got "the act" question.

I'm wondering if there was then any overlap between the first book, *Acts of Enjoyment* and this one. Asking you to speak more about these connections. The reason I ask this is I can imagine that some will see the jump from a psychoanalytical take on cultural studies to something like material rhetorics to be a big leap in terms of moving from one project to the next.

I have two quotes from *Acts of Enjoyment* that I want to draw your attention to in terms that I think maybe speak to this most recent book. You write, "Rhetoric is bound up with the intransigent psychic glue that dis/joins us to each other in an infinity of possible relations, offering everything but the transcendence that would rescind the offer" (2007, p. 29).

A few pages later, you write, “Ultimately, what the Act describes is a particularly potent form of invention, or an unleashing of the eventual within the ongoing, belated process of symbolic integration” (pp. 31-32).

I’m wondering if in light of those quotes and this notion of offering everything but transcendence, this notion of inventing or unleashing the eventual, how those in your mind connect to this notion of ambient rhetorics in light of that project.

Thomas: Only the little questions.

Nathaniel: Only the little questions. We’re in a bar. We have to ask big questions.

Thomas: I think one of the key points of connection lies in affect itself. I find that psychoanalysis might best be described as simply a rhetoric of affects given a particular background theory out of which to place it and give it its trajectories.

If you simply take that theory of affect and start expanding on it or intensifying it, add a material element that maybe at odds with what Žižek understands materialism to be. But even there that’s complex. I don’t necessarily want to get into that now.

But if you do that and if you take seriously an argument such as Diane Davis’s (2010) argument that affect precedes the symbolic, which is an absolutely brilliant argument and, I think, right on. Once you start doing that there’s all kinds of connections. Connections that I haven’t even begun to mine yet that could be mined despite what seems to be more dissonance than resonance.

Nathaniel: Sure. It was a loaded question.

Thomas: Yes.

Nathaniel: In many ways I do think they work well together. But in terms of how they may be immediately present themselves it is an interesting connection.

Thomas: But once again even in terms of the symbolic the Big Other functions in an ambient fashion that transcends any subject—the subject is always swimming around in the symbolic and is never at home in the symbolic and simply finds little things to glue itself to and give it a sense of stability that is of course phantasmatic.

Nathaniel: Across both books there’s a similar treatment of subjectivity in terms of in *Acts of Enjoyment* the way that subjectivity plays in terms of desire and fantasy and those kinds of things and in the way in which subjectivity is in ambience. That’s clearly a tight connection between the two works.

Thomas: Agreed. I do think though that I’ve had a certain shift in that psychoanalysis and Žižek in particular sometimes wants to pin down certain aspects of what it is that makes a subject show up.

One of the things that I get out of [Martin] Heidegger is an opening up. There’s always further disclosures possible. It’s a way not just of getting past the problem of Oedipalism but just jettisoning it altogether. I think in some ways that could be a productive move.

Nathaniel: That of course leads me to my next question, this being a well-structured interview. In the preface you write, and I’m going to quote here so the listeners can hear your prose, which is another fantastic element of the book, it’s a joy to read. You write, and this is in the preface.

Thomas: You are too kind.

Nathaniel: Well, that's been said of me. "On this approach, rhetoric cannot be understood as suasion attempted between discrete or among aggregate subjects embedded in a transitive subject-driven view of rhetorical situations. Rhetoric is not finally a shift in the mental states of subjects but something world-transforming for individuals and groups immersed in vibrant, ecologically attuned environments" (2013, p. xv).

I'm going to keep going. Later you argue, and this is just to demonstrate that you come back to this point again and again, "Rhetoric is not exclusively a symbolic art, nor does it issue solely from human being" (p.176).

As I just said, ambient rhetoric is full of such moments. You also write, "Rhetoric from an ambient perspective can no longer be situated solely in human subjective performance" (p. 29).

As with your first book, this book has consequences for understanding of the practice of rhetoric. Some readers might even find these consequences dire. However, you see this notion of human subjective performance as what you say, what you call narrowing.

Can you speak to these consequences for how we are approaching rhetoric, and more specifically, in terms of the doing of rhetoric and maybe by extension, the teaching of rhetoric? Given that I think for several, not several, for lots of people in rhetoric, if it isn't this human subjective performance, then how can it be understood as rhetoric in the first place?

Thomas: Only the easy ones, huh?

Nathaniel: That's just number three, too, by the way. This is two sided.

Thomas: Oh great. Making me work for my beer.

[laughter]

Nathaniel: Yes, banter.

Thomas: Too bad we can't hear the snigger. Well, there's so many things that can be said here and I'm just not even going to be able to even partially address the question. Why don't I just find like one little thing to start with?

Nathaniel: Please.

Thomas: You might go back and look at that...

Nathaniel (Narration): The exchange we're discussing here emerged from the 2003 meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Studies. In 2004, Cheryl Geisler published a report of that meeting in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, issue 34.3. In a 2005 issue, 35.4, Christian Lundberg and Joshua Gunn responded. Geisler, in the same 2005 issue, responded to their response. The exchange won the 2006 Charles Kneupper award from the Rhetoric Society of America.

Thomas: That exchange, I think, puts these issues on the burner. And, I think Lundberg and Gunn are just spot on with their analysis of how there's a certain contingent that wants to cling to a certain notion of agency because they believe that agency is something that you simply have or don't have.

Further, they seem to think that our theories somehow impact whether or not we have agency. Like, if you read [Michel] Foucault and again, I want to mention somebody who's made this argument very clearly, John Muckelbauer (2000).

Yeah, Foucault doesn't supply a theory of agency. So what? That doesn't mean stuff can't get done. I mean, Foucault was a noted activist. Obviously, you don't have to have a "theory of agency" that presupposes an agent who has this possession called agency to get stuff done.

Perhaps the challenge is to jettison the idea that we're simply these isolated monads or subjects that have this capacity just simply inherent in who we are. Start theorizing ourselves as already connected and that the disclosure of our connectedness unleashes potential that actually stems from that ecological interconnectedness.

That should be our starting point. What's at stake there isn't whether or not our theories are going to grant us or just allow us, we have agency. I think it simply gives us a more honest understanding of what it is that we do. In no way, I think, does it prevent us from developing theories of accountability. However, it does challenge many of our extant theories of accountability. But that's a different conversation.

Nathaniel: It is. I don't have a question for that, so we don't have to have that conversation.

Thomas: That isn't what I meant. What I meant was that that hand in hand with the sense that we have to have a theory of agency in order to have a theory of accountability, it's that tight connection between the two. If you get rid of the theory of agency, there's also, well, there's no accountability, either.

That's not necessarily the case. Perhaps it's that our theories of accountability are insufficient, and so we have fresh ground to explore.

Nathaniel: Yeah. I'm wondering, that seems to connect, Marilyn Cooper (2011) has a fairly recent essay in *CCCs* where she engages [Bruno] Latour. That fear that if you don't have that notion of agency, it's impossible to hold anybody responsible or accountable seems to be, I mean, I'd almost describe it as a fear.

Thomas: Agreed.

Nathaniel: There's a genuine worry that we'll no longer be able to hold people accountable if we don't have a certain notion of agency in place. Which is why, the question was sort of phrased in terms of "dire consequences" that people might feel in response to this, your idea of ambience.

Thomas: But once again, I think that places way too much gravitas on our theories.

Nathaniel: Sure.

Thomas: As if, you know, somehow we don't have the proper theory of agency, suddenly we're reduced to being mere functions or tools of, yadda, yadda, yadda.

Nathaniel: And as if even half rate defense attorneys haven't been blaming society for the crimes of their defendants for years.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah. But if you're an attorney and your client's in dire straights, as it were, why not run that up the flagpole and see if the jury salutes?

Nathaniel: Yeah, blame Brian Eno.

Thomas: [laughs] Or blame the judge.

Nathaniel: Airport music made me do it.

Thomas: Blame the court system.

Nathaniel: Sure.

Thomas: Yeah, on the one hand. On the other hand, if the argument works, it works.

Nathaniel: Then that would be what it is.

Thomas: If the glove doesn't fit, you must acquit.

Nathaniel: That says a lot for embodied rhetorics, right?

Thomas: [laughs]

Nathaniel: I'll let you take a sip, whet your whistle. I'll ask one more and then we'll take a break.

This actually builds on where you were going. Getting down with ambience, pause for laughter, you make an important distinction that ambience is not simply the human plus an environment. In two places, you argue, "There is no person who can then be tacked onto the environment" (2013, p. 8).

Then additionally, calling on Heidegger, which we'll get to, you write, "It is neither inside nor outside, as Heidegger says, but 'the way of our being there with one another'" (p. 9). I'm wondering if you could speak more to this idea.

My question, then, is why is this distinction so important for an understanding of ambience and for ambient rhetorics? That ambience is not simply a human plus an environment but a little more nuanced understanding of that relationship.

Thomas: Whether you're talking about materiality of bodies, a body needs a world. A body won't take shape the way it is without being in the world as it is. How can you speak of a human being somehow pre-existing that insertion into the world when the world is already part of what makes a human being a human being?

I think Timothy Ingold (2000) makes a very interesting point in his argument against a lot of evolutionary theorists who point out that early Paleolithic people, if you gave them a haircut and a shave, and put them in a Brooks Brothers suit, they walk down New York City street, no one would bat an eye.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: Well, yes and no. Because what that presupposes is that you just have a genotype that supplies what it means to be a human being. That it's all genetics, so it's genetic fundamentalism, as opposed to being inserted into an environment and developing a way of life. If you really wanted to push that theory on its actual precepts, you couldn't get a Paleolithic person to walk down a New York City street, because they would freak out.

Nathaniel: Yeah, because...

Thomas: They would be absolutely incapable of even doing that.

Nathaniel: It's one of the chapters where he's writing about walking versus riding a bicycle.

Thomas: Yes.

Nathaniel: Or walking and riding a bicycle, not writing and riding a bicycle. That we treat walking as a function of biology, and riding a bike as a function of history...

Thomas: Bingo.

Nathaniel: ...and that these are two different narratives that don't intersect.

Thomas: Bingo. Whereas, and he does the thought experiment, if you have children who are actually born in space, and are reared there, after a few generations you will see a huge change in our body morphism.

Nathaniel: Yes.

Thomas: I mean, you have no gravity to shape the body, you're going to look different.

Nathaniel: The scene in *Wall-E*, where they're told that you and your passengers might have experienced some slight bone loss.

Thomas: [laughs]

Nathaniel: That always makes me think of Ingold, where you've got the images of the people getting progressively...and the bones get smaller and smaller.

Thomas: That's right. But to give certain evolutionist theories their due, their argument is perfectly logical. If you believe that the genotype is the expression of human phenotype, and you abstract the environment from your sense of the most basic forms of expression, then that's your logical outcome.

Nathaniel: Yeah, and it also, to tie back and this notion of ambience, genes are a force. The human being...

Thomas: One doesn't want to ignore genes, yes, that's correct.

Nathaniel: ...in an environment, wouldn't become just anything for instance.

Thomas: That's correct.

Nathaniel: I had something else there as a follow-up, but I don't know. I will take a break.

Thomas: Well actually, we were going to talk about the psychical maybe, right?

Nathaniel: The what?

Thomas: The social, or psychical.

Nathaniel: Oh.

Thomas: Newborns start looking at faces almost instantly upon being born, and they've already heard their parents' voices.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: Their mothers, their fathers, and other people that may be around. There's a sense in which even in the womb a child is already being socialized even prior to being born.

Nathaniel: Yeah, well this is the...

Thomas: At some level.

Nathaniel: Part of the argument in...is it Greenspan and Shanker (2004), *The First Idea*?

Thomas: Yeah.

Nathaniel: Where they map on language developments in infants to language development in general, and the ways in which it looks like a switch has been flipped, but there's actually been this recurrent functional emotional signaling, is that what they call it?

Thomas: That's right.

Nathaniel: That process develops into language...

Thomas: Yes.

Nathaniel: ...which looks like it comes from nowhere, but is actually the result of this interaction.

Thomas: All kinds of interactions that build upon each other in some sort of emergent sense.

Nathaniel: As opposed to simply a gene that got...

Thomas: Well, we got the language gene.

Nathaniel: Yes, there was a rare genetic mutation, and then all of the sudden human beings could talk.

Thomas: Although no good scientist really believes that you can just simply have a language gene.

Nathaniel: Sure, sure. Right, it helps to have... Steven Pinker (1997) gets close, right?

Thomas: Eh.

Nathaniel: You give him a once for in the book too, right? There's a paragraph or two?

Thomas: Pinker's disrespect of music I find to be [pause] problematic.

Nathaniel: Sure, well he also thinks the reason we're offended by the word "shit," is because poop has germs and it, which I'm willing to buy, but you know.

Thomas: Right, and that just opens up all whole can of worms that I'm not prepared to get into, except to say that in the new book...

Nathaniel: He's making dramatic hand gestures, for those of you following along at home.

Thomas: In the new book, I am going to delve into some of these issues, including the attempt to demonstrate that morals, amongst other things, are not external to rhetoric, i.e. rhetoric isn't something that we place in the service of morals, but it's already inherent to what rhetoric is.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: Meaning then, that for Pinker to say...make a claim such as that poop has germs in it, therefore it's revolting, already purges language of something that's inherent to it, such as certain notions of purity.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: It's not a matter of germs solely.

Nathaniel: Yeah. Now you got me thinking about [Kenneth] Burke (1937), and his discussion of why he doesn't like CH words, because it makes him feel like he's choking when he has to say them...

Thomas: [laughs]

Nathaniel: ...which he thinks is traceable to some childhood trauma.

Thomas: Yeah, yeah. If you want to go Burke, maybe a better example would be his sense that social hierarchies are fundamentally rhetorical already, they're not exterior to rhetoric, but interior to rhetoric, meaning rhetoric is already hierarchal.

Nathaniel: Yeah. This would be something like the term, the word, "order," already suggests disorder, so the whole notion of order and disorder is already bound up in language, as opposed to external to it.

Thomas: Yeah, right. This of course opens up yet another issue about, "What do we mean by rhetoric?" and of course we can talk about different levels or gradations of rhetoric...

Nathaniel: Or intensities of it?

Thomas: ...or intensities, yes thank you.

Nathaniel: Take a break?

Thomas: Take a break...

Nathaniel: OK.

Thomas: ...driver eight.

[music playing: Morphine, "Cure for Pain"]

Nathaniel (Narration): While we take a quick break here, I'd like to thank 4Hands Brewing Company for hosting us this evening when we did the interview, 4Hands can be found at 4, the number four, 4handsbrewery.com. It is located in downtown St. Louis, Missouri. They have many fine beers, and we would invite you to check them out. Thank you.

[music playing: Morphine, "Cure for Pain"]

Nathaniel: It was a drug.

Thomas: Well, I consider music a drug anyway, so there you go.

Nathaniel: That's very Gorgias of you.

Thomas: Thank you.

End Part One

Begin Part Two

[music playing: Wilco, "Magazine Called Sunset (Alternate Version)"]

Nathaniel: Yeah, so that was a great conversation we were having.

Thomas: Oh, there's a microphone on now.

Nathaniel: Those are some great points that you made.

Thomas: [laughs] Too bad you aren't here, people.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: Maybe you'll pick it up from the ether. [laughs]

Nathaniel: But anyway...no, but to go back to the relativism stuff, part of the reason that I like [Bruno] Latour and a lot of this related whatever is that that was something that was hard. That's something that's hard to defend about the strong defense, [Richard] Lanham's (1993) version of it. His kind of social constructivism is really hard to defend, even by the most ardent sophist.

Thomas: Right, but even there, although Lanham doesn't really delve into this, a judge is guided by rules, and precepts, and prior case histories, so again, it's not relativist, although...

Nathaniel: No, and we wouldn't accuse him of that, because...

Thomas: ...it's very discursive and social.

Nathaniel: That's the problem. It's discursive, it's social, so how do you account for other things?

Thomas: I don't think it's...I think it's easy to augment Lanham on this.

Nathaniel: Indeed, you can change just a couple of letters to strong, huh?

Thomas: There you go. There you go.

Nathaniel: No, and that's why I like it too...

Thomas: I think the deeper question is to start rethinking strong and weak defense in a way that gets us a step past where Lanham was able to go...

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: ...which was quite far, Lanham's essay was fantastic.

Nathaniel: No. Well, and with the Latour, it's rather easy.

Thomas: Agreed.

Nathaniel: When he says social, you substitute what Latour would say about that, and you're almost already there.

Thomas: Or, again you can go back to [Donna] Haraway, and...

Nathaniel: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: ...it's just a different kind of God trick. It's the reverse God trick, but if a person who believes in absolute truth finds some objective clinical out there, a relativist finds some sort of infinitely slippery subject that could simply believe anything, and of course that's an unsituated subject.

Nathaniel: Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: It's as false as the reverse.

Nathaniel: Yeah. No, that's why it's...that's why all this work is interesting. It's an attempt to not have that conversation.

Thomas: To say that the subject is fluid, to say that the subject is ecological is not to say it's infinitely malleable...

Nathaniel: [laughs] No.

Thomas: ...or friction free, in fact the opposite.

Nathaniel: No, that's...this is what I found, the Maturana and Varela (1992), their notion of...Is it, "reciprocal perturbation"?

Thomas: Something like that.

Nathaniel: That's not absolutism, but it's certainly not relativism.

Thomas: Bingo. It's ecological.

Nathaniel: Yes, we've talked about this before, I don't know why I said that, except an ethos move...

Thomas: Look at me, I'm repeating myself...

Nathaniel: Yes, I'm repeating myself...

Thomas: ...let me cite myself.

Nathaniel: ...and I've talked to him before.

Thomas: [laughs]

Nathaniel: Could you quickly parse the difference between ambience and ecology? Because you mentioned they're not quite the same, that they're related...

Thomas: They're related.

Nathaniel: ...but they're not interchangeable.

Thomas: Right, I think they pick out slightly different things. Ecology, I think, picks out a certain kind of relational circulation, or circulatory relations, that may be emergent. They may be nonlinear, but nevertheless, certain kinds of relationality and circulation amongst all the elements making up the ecology, or the outwards. Ambience includes...can include ecology but also picks out forms of disclosure, or attention, or perception and includes those in our sense of what's going on in a situation, or what a situation is...

Nathaniel: Yeah. No, I ask this as someone who tries to get quite a bit of mileage out of Jenny Rice's work on ecology (Edbauer, 2005).

Thomas: A lot of mileage is to be gotten because that's a very smart essay.

Nathaniel: I guess in another parsing out that I've actually recently tried to put these three in relation, the relationship between ecology, ambience, and network. Because these all seem to be circulating, seem to attract the same kinds of arguments, but again, even in the *JAC* article, you draw out the difference between networks and ambience (Rickert, 2004).

Thomas: I think the network, while it's the most popular term going right now, is resonant in part because we have the Internet.

It just resonates extremely well with the notion of digitally that's wedded to the Internet. However, the Internet itself, I think, is in the mode of transcending itself into something more ambient. We've got smart houses, we've got wireless, we've got all kinds of things that start getting us beyond the immediacy of the node, and lines that connect those nodes. There's too much of a contact, and direct connection of the undergirding to the concept of the network...

Nathaniel: Well, there's a notion that the whole...

Thomas: ...that gives it a certain limit.

Nathaniel: Yeah, well the notion that the whole network is contingent on the nodes already being there, and ambience, seems to...

Thomas: You don't need a node.

Nathaniel: Yes.

Thomas: Nodes are awaiting further disclosure in a situation, yes.

Nathaniel: There's a way in which...and I think he even described it as [Mark] Taylor (2003) leaves in place, a kind of nodular subjectivity.

Thomas: Yes.

Nathaniel: It's still sort of there, holding on to the notion of a node being connected to a network.

Thomas: Right, in spite, I think, of some of his efforts to move beyond that, but I think his metaphors catch up with him, amongst other things.

Nathaniel: Yeah, it's weird, when you put the microphone on it gets more formal, doesn't it?

Thomas: Yes. But you can also say it forces us to have more game.

Nathaniel: Sure. [laughs]

Thomas: Which is just part of the fun.

Nathaniel: It focuses our attention, right?

Thomas: That's right.

Nathaniel: What are you trying next?

Thomas: That is the question.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: Why don't we pause?

Nathaniel: OK.

[music playing: The Bird and the Bee, "Phil"]

Nathaniel: Clearly [Martin] Heidegger is a significant source both for you, but probably for the current turn or return to the material, so projects such as new materialism, feminist materialism, speculative realism, and object-oriented approaches. Given that your project speaks to these developments, but does so through and in rhetoric, what do you think rhetoric specifically has to offer that these other approaches do not?

I'm thinking specifically...or not specifically, but Byron Hawk's (2010) most recent RSA talk where he made an argument along the lines of, if object-oriented ontology is going to have any kind of future, it's going to have to become an object-oriented rhetoric, as well as your own critiques of [Graham] Harman.

This sort of object-oriented, new materialist, what does rhetoric—in addition to just finding it interesting—what does rhetoric do with that stuff that, for instance, someone from the philosophical perspective doesn't?

Thomas: One of my favorite quotes from Nietzsche, and this is a paraphrase, possibly a bad one, but catches the gist of it, "Every great intellectual advance rediscovers the sophists."

Nathaniel: I know it well. I'm thinking about getting it as a tattoo.

Thomas: [laughs] I think that applies because sooner or later you have to deal with, I think, the terrain that Diane Davis (2010) has opened up in her book, and I think it's a landmark argument. It basically

says, you have to deal with affect. Affectability, and that is written into...well, she makes the argument it's written into, not just the structure of the social, but what gives rise to the social in the first place. It's the conditions of possibility for having a social. But you could extend that further, and I think must.

In some ways, I think Diane is already headed there, and you have to say, I think at some level the world itself cradles, and works through, forms of affectability. Now, these forms of affectability have different modalities, and different bearings, and different trajectories. They don't all mean the same thing. Persuasion is a particular form of it, but I don't think you can limit rhetoric to that.

Nathaniel: Yeah. I guess pushing on that further then, I guess to ask the question again, even though I think...which is not to say that you haven't begun to answer it. What do you think an explicitly rhetorical approach, so the way in which you talk about materiality and ambience in terms of rhetoric differs from someone approaching objects or materiality from a philosophical perspective? Harman's investment in metaphysics, as opposed to relations, or something like that.

Thomas: That's tough to say, because I think Harman himself, in terms of his project, is still evolving. I don't think he's settled necessarily on anything.

Nathaniel: Yeah, sure.

Thomas: I'm hesitant to make any claims about that. Even within philosophy, philosophers rediscover the sophists in their own way. Look at [Jean-François] Lyotard. We can look at him as a latter-day sophist in many ways. Same time, philosophy can bring its own rigor to the table, and we don't want to forget this...

Nathaniel: Yes, which is certainly something Harmon does.

Thomas: I think it's too easy in other words to single out these two strands. There's a philosophy strand, there's a rhetoric strand, and to pretend that we've a full understanding of what these two things are...I think that is precisely one of the questions that should be put back on the table, "What are they?"

Nathaniel: Oh? Yeah, yeah.

Thomas: "How would we differ and change them?" I think it's an ongoing question, rather than a settled issue that we can simply adjudicate here and now.

Nathaniel: Sure, yeah. Particularly because it seems like this is a moment of a lot of overlap between the two.

Thomas: Absolutely.

Nathaniel: Which, as you say, should be an opportunity to revisit the distinction, as opposed to reify it.

Thomas: Yeah, I mean, go back and look at Plato. Plato, held to be the first philosopher of writing at least, and yet if philosophy is going to differentiate itself not only from rhetoric, but from myth, across certain principles and beliefs, why is it that Plato is stuffed to the gills with myth? I mean, these questions are far from settled.

Nathaniel: Good. I only have two questions left, which we're going to take up at the next place, because they're about consequence. They're concluding kinds of questions.

Thomas: Sure.

Nathaniel: You've got two things left in your tasting thing.

Thomas: You want to just chat?

Nathaniel: Yeah. Do I turn this off then?

Thomas: Up to you.

Nathaniel: Yeah, turn it off.

[music playing: Cat Power, "Lived in Bars"]

Nathaniel: Here I am. It's already going. I wanted to get some prep stuff, do a little radio lab thing where there's some outtakes...

Thomas: Yeah, yeah, yeah, a little banter, a little banter.

Nathaniel: Yeah, some good banter.

[music playing: Cat Power, "Lived in Bars"]

[silence]

End Part Two

Begin Part Three

[background noise]

Nathaniel: Move your taster. What?

Thomas: This is good.

Nathaniel: Which one what is that?

Thomas: Red.

Nathaniel: The red, yeah. That was the first 4Hands I ever had. It was love at first taste.

Thomas: Oh yeah, I can see why.

Nathaniel (Narration): After enjoying the ambience at 4Hands Brewery, as well as their beer, Thomas and I ventured across town, or rather, to the outskirts of town, to the Schlafly Bottleworks in Maplewood, Missouri, where we enjoyed the more beer and finished off the interview.

[music playing: Morphine: "Lilah (Instrumental)"]

Nathaniel: I'm not too worried about the sound in here. OK, so we're moving towards the end. We're now here at Schlafly Bottleworks in Maplewood, Missouri, just outside of St. Louis. We've already placed our order, and we are sitting outside.

Thomas: We are.

Nathaniel: Just a change of ambience.

Thomas: It is.

Nathaniel: There's some nice lights up in here.

Thomas: There are.

Nathaniel: It's a wooden structure. Let's get back to it, shall we?

Thomas: Shall we.

Nathaniel: Let's do this. I guess moving back to this notion of consequences for rhetoric, although in a more positive light in terms of production. So you argue, I'm going to quote again as I'm wont to do, "Persuasion needs to be *intensified*, it needs to be pushed past the borders that rhetoric and philosophy have set for persuasion" (2013, p. 161).

If the consequences we discussed earlier invite us to move away from narrow understandings of rhetoric, in what ways does intensification expand rhetoric? I'm thinking here the phrase you used, borrowing from Heidegger, where you discussed the, "relation of all relations" (p. 189). What does and intensified rhetoric, or intensified persuasion look like, or what does that entail?

Thomas: On the one hand, it entails that we look at not simply what is immediately disclosed to us, what we take as present because through our methodologies of knowledge production, we take that for our explanation for how things work, how things transpire, from what has transpired, et cetera, et cetera.

In terms of Heidegger, you could say this is simply a permutation of the concealed/unconcealed dichotomy, that what we wrest from concealment never explains all that is. Now, to take us back to some specifics I was trying to work through there, the relation of all relations points to what undergirds language.

Language as it circulates is present to us, and yet, why would we take what is present to us in the circulation of language to be all that is, or that matters, to the conditions of possibility for what language is, or what language does. Language is always born in a situation. That situation is always worldly, and so language is always already...that famous phrase...

Nathaniel: [laughs] Sure...

Thomas: ...such a cliché.

Nathaniel: ...but it works.

Thomas: ...wedded to the world primordially. It emerges from, and within, and helps shape that world. This is no linguistic idealism, it speaks to an ecological relation whose relationality we are just now beginning to see as a problem, and whose specificities we're trying to get more precision on. In other

words, relationality shouldn't itself be considered this sort of generic term for specifying some sort of connectivity. There must be many forms of connectivity, many forms of relationality.

What are they? If relationality is never neutral, if it's always motivated in some way, if it always, in other words, affects us, if it always takes its bearing from an affectability, that means rhetoricity is already inherent there too. I think one of the first people to see this was [Kenneth] Burke, but I think we can also build on what he initiated, and some people have already started.

Nathaniel: How would you build on Burke? Or how do you in the book? Because you do engage Burke in the chapter on language.

Thomas: Well, Burke as we understand him right now is both modernist and postmodernist. He himself, I think, shifts positions depending on what arguments he's making, or at what point in his career we're talking about.

Nathaniel: Yes.

Thomas: There is no "one Burke."

Nathaniel: No, he's hard to pin down...

Thomas: Yes, he can be.

Nathaniel: ...and thus write about.

Thomas: This is true. But, nevertheless, when he wants to understand a certain rhetoricity already inherent in the world, despite the fact that he overwhelmingly tends to favor symbolicity, as rhetoricity takes its...takes its what? Takes its bearings, takes its general sense perhaps.

Nathaniel: It's attitude?

Thomas: It's attitude. One would need a text really to get more precision here, I think. But, nevertheless, symbolicity is where the game is at.

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: I think what we can get when we start delving back into [Martin] Heidegger, and in [Jacques] Derrida to in certain ways, although Derrida presents both advances and problems of his own that I'm not going to get into right now. But in terms of Heidegger and Burke, I think Heidegger sends us back to the world in a different way than Burke, and one that is not as wedded to symbolicity for understanding where rhetoric emerges.

Nathaniel: Yeah, and that then speaks to intensifying it.

Thomas: Exactly.

Nathaniel: Good, well I nailed that one.

[laughter]

Thomas: Well done sir.

[laughter]

Thomas: Perhaps you should speak more closely into the microphone. [laughs]

Nathaniel: I know. That was a spit take ladies and gentlemen. I have one final...

Thomas: Thomas cackles. [laughs]

Nathaniel: I have one final two-part question, and it concerns, and again this is in line with consequences, which is a general pragmatic approach. What does your book do? That's what many of my questions have been getting at. It concerns the political implications of *Ambient Rhetoric*, so part one...

Thomas: Why couldn't you just say what does my book do?

Nathaniel: That's because that's one question, and I needed to pad this...

Thomas: My book leads to my next book. [laughs]

Nathaniel: I need to pad...right, this is...

Thomas: Which was a punt, of course. [laughs]

Nathaniel: Yeah. Let's focus. You conclude your discussion of ambient music, which closes out part one, I believe.

Thomas: Yes.

[music playing: Brian Eno, "2/2"]

Nathaniel: Yes, so you write, "For Eno, ambient music is inherently political, evoking new senses of place and how human beings inhabit it; this includes, more pointedly, a reduced role for human agency reflecting a more distributed, ecological approach to will, action, and consequence" (2013, p. 155). Put rather crudely, how is this political? Or as a critic might ask, how can this be political given the "reduced role" for human agency?

Thomas: Well, the word "reduced" is a loaded term.

Because it assumes that we have a augmented role to begin with. What if that turns out not to be true? What if that turns out to have been fantasmatic all along? Who's asking these questions? Well a number of people have asked these questions in their own particular idiom, Heidegger asked them, [Michel] Foucault asked them, Derrida asked them. I could go on, Burke asked them. I could go on, [Victor] Vintanza asks them.

I could continue with this litany of names, but perhaps I will not. I think the larger point here is that the sense of reducing is problematic already, and that perhaps it should be more a question of simply getting to a different position where we see in what ways we fit into the larger question of, "What is this thing that we participate in? What is this journey called life in the world?" It's an ongoing question. We certainly shall not have solved it.

In a way, that's Heidegger's, perhaps, best insight. Sometimes he forgot it. But the arrogance of human beings to think, well they know, or that they're simply the top of the chain or that they're this or that.

Time erodes every such assertion. It will erode ours, it has eroded all those in the past. It will erode those who come after us with their own assertions. Perhaps we should be more mindful of this continual erosion and make that part of what we know.

I think, at that point, we start coming upon where Eno is headed, that there's a politics there, that politics comes with a certain humility.

Nathaniel: Yes, I'm thinking of the G. K. Chesterton (1908/2013) quote where he talks about, in a true democracy you must have the dead at your table, otherwise democracy just becomes the tyranny of whoever happens to be alive.

Thomas: Or have the biggest bank accounts.

Nathaniel: Sure.

Thomas: Yes, agreed.

Nathaniel: No, but in the sense that if it's open, it remains political in the sense that it's debatable and contingent and rhetorical.

Thomas: The quote that I quoted from Eno is what part of a larger quote where he references some specific bands from the '60s and '70s where the idea was to create a persona that was larger than life, that was very ego driven, to go along with that, the music was to be very loud.

One of the classic examples, as far as I'm concerned, is the Rolling Stones' album, *Let It Bleed*. That, on the inner sleeve in the liner notes, it says in capital letters, "PLAY THIS MUSIC LOUD." Well, there's a mindset that goes with that. Then the mindset says, "We have something to say and we're best heard at loud volumes that drives out everything else."

Eno's aesthetic is almost the exact opposite. It's just to disappear into the environment so that you don't even have to pay attention necessarily to what Eno's produced, perhaps something else becomes more important.

In some ways, one could argue Eno's music is far more, one hesitates to say, "Intellectual," because that's not quite the term that I'm reaching for. It certainly puts one on a path towards a sense that intellectuality doesn't necessarily come from a subject. Intellectuality is itself dispersed and that we can learn from that.

Once again, one immediately sees that, not only does aesthetics springs forth from that but politics can spring from that but it doesn't give you a guide command.

Nathaniel: No, not politically in terms of politic program.

Thomas: Correct. One last point, one can make a connection to Latour's (1991/1993) "Parliament of Things" at this point.

Nathaniel: One should.

Thomas: One should. I'm going to make a rather bold claim and say, Eno got to where Latour wants to be, a couple decades earlier and got further. For Latour's "Parliament of Things," it's the humans who have to bring the things in. For Eno, things are already there. They're part of that the music is, hence they're part of what the politics is.

Nathaniel: Would this be, to get back to an earlier question I asked.

Thomas: Barad, Karen Barad's (2007) marvelous work, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*.

Nathaniel: That's a tome by the way.

Thomas: It is a tome, but she makes this point, as well, in her own idiom but nevertheless she makes it.

Nathaniel: Would this be again, to get at the question of we could make that the claim that perhaps Latour here is more ecological as opposed to ambient which is he's not as attuned to the background that makes the human or nonhuman distinction show up in the first place?

Thomas: Well, I think he's very aware that we're hybrids, but I also think that because he's working out of science some of his insights are modulated by the work he has to do.

I don't think we should read this as a critique of Latour at all. It simply points to how a scientist and a musician both have very legitimate insights into the same issues or interested as reiterations in terms of materiality and ecology. But they approach them differently and have their own levels of insight.

Why should we be surprised to find that a musician can sometimes go further? Why should we be surprised at that? We shouldn't.

Nathaniel: Certainly not.

Thomas: There is a marvelous quote...I'm going to close on this.

Nathaniel: [laughs]

Thomas: I said I was going to close on this earlier, right?

Nathaniel: Right. Sure. Yeah. This was you already made your final point.

Thomas: Just as we have no real beginning we have no real ending. It's the never-ending story.

Nathaniel: It's going to end when the battery runs out. I think that's what's happening here.

Thomas: Or we need new beer.

Nathaniel: Sure.

Thomas: There is a tribute album to Deleuze called "In Memoriam: Gilles Deleuze," or Giles Deleuze, however you pronounce "Gilles."

Nathaniel: I like "Giles" because it's almost certainly wrong.

Thomas: Yes. "Giles" has to be wrong because that's British. That's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Nathaniel: I'm going to edit that out.

Thomas: Yeah. How dare you?

Nathaniel: We all love Joss Whedon here.

Thomas: Yes, we do.

Nathaniel: You were saying.

Thomas: There is a track on that album that says, you have a computer voice similar to the voice of the physicist Stephen Hawking.

Nathaniel: Stephen Hawking.

Thomas: The voice says, “What I see is thinking. What I hear is thinking too.” What I love about this quote is it suggests music thinks.

Nathaniel: It’s very aural.

Thomas: But it is also very material. Why shouldn’t we think materialism thinks too?

Nathaniel: I have one final question. Well, it’s actually part two of this question. Your book does end; this is actually the final chapter of the second part of the book, before the afterword. It’s symmetrical with the Eno chapter, which ends with what we might describe as a political project, the project of sufficiency.

Given that we are here at the end of our brewery tour, which has only included two by the way because we liked where we were at. I’m just about to order my final beer so that I can get Thomas home safely.

Sufficiency seems to be as good a point to end on as any other. I guess, as we conclude this interview if you could talk about what “sufficiency” is as opposed to something like “efficiency.” How did you come to see it as connected to Ambience and to *Ambient Rhetoric* and to see it as a penultimate chapter before an afterword?

Why did it strike you, A, as important to begin with and why put it in that slot as the book is building towards its conclusion that you saw sufficiency as wrapped up in all of this?

Thomas: One of the ways we might understand the political effects with presence right now in our contemporary climate is that this present to us is what burns brightest in terms of what advances our lives or what shows up in the public sphere. These seem to revolve around a certain number of motifs: fear, the need for security, money and the fear of not having enough.

Now, there are political reasons for much of this. You can point to court cases, you can point to a lot of things. But the larger point is what we see as most present is also tethered to efficiency. If money is what is the most direct and efficient and most visible means of getting what you want, why wouldn’t that show up as the most important thing?

However, if we look at money within a larger ecology of self, and if we consider efficiency of self as part of that ecology, we start seeing that efficiency starts running up against its own limits because it starts ignoring the very conditions of its possibility. Just following through on efficiency’s own precepts, I think sooner or later it has to turn into sufficiency.

In other words, I really think that sufficiency is efficiency given a fuller spectrum of disclosive practices. Getting those into the spotlight, making those show up, that’s part of the work of rhetoric, rhetoric that can take place in many forms, including simply practices.

Nathaniel: This would be an intensified rhetoric, would make sufficiency show up.

Thomas: Yes. Bingo.

Nathaniel: Which is part of the argument that you make.

Thomas: Sufficiency is simply efficiency intensified.

Nathaniel: Which is the argument you make about the value of...

Thomas: Rather than blocked.

Nathaniel: Yeah. The value of the metaphor of ambience are the things that it discloses.

Thomas: Perhaps the concept of ambience can illuminate the blockages.

Nathaniel: I see. That's all I have.

Thomas: That's all I have.

Nathaniel: We'll leave it on just in case something else happens. Then we can turn it off when we go to get our next beer.

Thomas: Fair enough.

Nathaniel: Well, thank you for this opportunity.

Thomas: Thank you.

Nathaniel: We're shaking hands. This was a pleasure.

Thomas: That was actually...It was work, but it was worth it. I didn't know half the shit I said.

Nathaniel: You were working. I could see you working.

Thomas: I was working.

Nathaniel: But it was tight, it was concise.

Thomas: I was trying to be. I was working, but in a good way. So were you.

Nathaniel: Well, I had a script. That helped.

Thomas: Yes. You were still working. You gave me cues where I needed them.

Nathaniel: It was fun to put the interview together.

Thomas: That means you were attending, which can be hard.

Nathaniel: No, it was actually, not to tell a sob story, but putting the interview together was difficult.

Thomas: I know.

Nathaniel: What do you pick out? There was a lot in that book that did not get covered in this interview.

Thomas: How could it?

Nathaniel: It couldn't.

Thomas: I know.

Nathaniel: Tensed the ambient version of the...

Thomas: I'm glad you picked out the music. I fear that the music is going to get discounted, or ignored.

Nathaniel: It's the fulcrum, because it's right there at the end of part four...I mean part one as chapter four. But even as I ask the question, the ways in which politics shows up in that chapter, for me, resonates with the way it shows up in the sufficiency chapter.

Thomas: I layer show much music into that book. I layer as much as I possibly can. Well, not as much as I possibly can.

Nathaniel: I still have the "I Don't Like Monday" song stuck in my head months after reading this book.

[“I Don't Like Mondays” by The Boomtown Rats begins to play]

Thomas: That is a chilling song.

Nathaniel: It is. It's also very good.

Thomas: It is a good song.

Nathaniel: It's good. Not many covers. Did I tell you there's a cover?

Thomas: There is?

Nathaniel: I told you about this.

Thomas: I didn't know there was a cover, by who?

Nathaniel: By Tori Amos.

Thomas: Really?

Nathaniel: Yes. I believe its Tori Amos. You'll have to Google it later.

Thomas: Let's play it later when we get back to Casa Rivers.

Nathaniel: Will do. I'm going to layer some of this music into the interview.

Thomas: Oh, cool.

Nathaniel: "Music for Airports" will obviously be playing during the Brian Eno portion. So what are you doing next, now that I got you on the line?

Thomas: [laughs] The pre-history of rhetoric.

Nathaniel: Which makes sense.

Thomas: It's going to have a lot to do with caves.

Nathaniel: Which plays a role in the opening moves of your book, looking at the cave paintings.

Thomas: Bingo. There's a couple things that showed up in the ambient book that haven't let go of me. They've led me on to the third book. It's really a straight outgrowth of dealing with caves and dealing with Empedocles' four fold. They are not the four elements, by the way.

Nathaniel: Oh, they're not?

Thomas: Nope. That's Aristotle's translation, stochi, or whatever, "elements." The word Empedocles uses is "rhizomata."

Nathaniel: Really?

Thomas: Really.

Nathaniel: That's mind blowing.

Thomas: It is. "Roots."

Nathaniel: That seems fitting, though, because it seems to be that *Acts of Enjoyment* was more a culmination of the project of reexamining cultural studies pedagogy. It seems, at least as I read it, that the *Ambient Rhetoric* book is breaking new ground. The idea that your next book would be an outgrowth of that makes a lot of sense, because *Ambient Rhetoric* for me has been very generative. It begins to supply a vocabulary for thinking through a lot of these different threads that I think people are working with.

Thomas: I didn't understand this when I was starting the book. When I wrote the "Ambient" essay I didn't know I had a book, I was just writing an essay. It wasn't until I'd finished the "Acts" book that I realized...Well, I had an opportunity. I had an opportunity to apply to a center for humanities fellowship at Purdue. I was thinking, well, what can I do as a project?

It wasn't until I stewed around and thought that I realized that there were some common denominators in the various essays I had published while I was seeing *Acts of Enjoyment* into print. Things started coalescing from there.

Then I realized I had a book. But many of the chapters I had originally planned when I wrote up the fellowship prospectus never got written, and I started writing different chapters. That's what, became the book. This book is just an outgrowth of that.

Nathaniel: Because it is funny how well those four chapters in part one work within the book...

Thomas: But they weren't planned that way.

Nathaniel: ...But knowing that they were all discrete projects in a wide variety of places.

Thomas: I guess I was just working through a similar problem through different trajectories.

Nathaniel: It's an ambient book construction, which is probably how a lot of books work.

Thomas: Probably.

Nathaniel: Which is, again, one of the arguments you make in the book that ambience is, really, not anything new. It's by virtue of particular technologies and we've become more...

Thomas: You got that very interesting Greek concept *periarchon*.

Nathaniel: Elaborate?

Thomas: It conveys some atmospheric sense that's tethered to the cosmos as if...Which makes sense. You can understand the logos against that background. The logos already convey various modalities of cosmic order, language, argument, reason, but they're all interconnected in some way.

Nathaniel: I'm trying to think. There's an interesting...

Thomas: When they do the Greek version of the Bible, "In the beginning was the word." What's the word they used for "word"? Logos, there's a reason.

[laughter]

Thomas: Which already says there's a logos for their use of logos. There's a reason for that.

Nathaniel: What I actually kept coming to, and I couldn't find a way to, really, work this in thoroughly, is when we were discussing your book in a reading group that I assigned it to. We had this great conversation about the chicken and the egg problem.

Which became this...We know one of these came first, but there's no way to imagine them, the un-resolvability of the chicken and the egg question. This reading group...

Thomas: It's a false question.

Nathaniel: Yeah. It became this way of thinking through this notion of ambience. There's this thing that comes before but, and this is what you write in *Acts of Enjoyment*, it doesn't offer the transcendence that would rescind the offer.

Which is in many ways, if one were to imagine the chicken and the egg question as not a false one, that's what that question desires.

Thomas: [laughs] Yeah.

Nathaniel: Some way out of a prior affectability. That would be the one thing you could point to as that's where they came from.

Anyway, I do this because the chicken and the egg question blows my mind. It's one of those hilarious children's questions that if you think about it long enough, it actually, really does start to hurt.

Thomas: Of course, it does because it depends on a certain logic or undergirding order that allows that question to emerge within that order. It's a paradox. You can't resolve it as long as you're working within those precepts.

Nathaniel: So you're saying it's the egg?

[laughter]

Nathaniel: Am I interpreting you correctly?

Thomas: I don't know.

Nathaniel: Something has to lay the egg.

Thomas: I'll tell you, there's a guy I've been reading whose name escapes me.

Nathaniel: [laughs]

Thomas: I'll email you the guy's names...

[crosstalk]

Nathaniel (Narration): The name is Rupert Sheldrake (2012) and he's the author of *Science Set Free*.

Thomas: ...I can't think of the guy's name. He's a scientist, too. He argues that the notion that the universe is built on fundamental eternal unchanging laws is wrong. He argues that the universe is habitual. He points to some very interesting evidence to back himself up.

Nathaniel: Like a scientist would.

Thomas: Yes. Now, I haven't investigated further to know to what extent he's right or not. But on the surface, some of the evidence looks very intriguing.

For instance, there was a period of time starting in the late 20s and on into the 30s, where it seemed like the speed of light slowed down about 20 kilometers an hour for about 14, 15 years. Then went back to its normal...

Nathaniel: Sure, sped up again.

Thomas: Yeah. He's saying, the speed of light, it's constant, but it's not a constant constant.

[laughter]

Thomas: It fluctuates a bit—not a lot, but a little bit.

Nathaniel: Which as a sophist, you totally enjoyed that answer. It's a constant, but like a constant, constant.

Thomas: He, also, does a lot work with chemistry. You synthesize chemical compounds in particular ways by putting them together and then they synthesize. But sometimes, there's different ways putting the compounds together can go. And they can make this one thing or they can make this other thing.

It seems like, and there's evidence to support this, once you create a new compound in one part of the world, it starts showing up all over the world. In fact, chemists started making up myths about how you were carrying the chemicals in your facial hair and whatnot when you were traveling into other people's labs.

Nathaniel: Which is the cigar smoke example.

Thomas: Right. But this guy's argument is that the universe is habitual. Once you create a new pattern, it spreads. One of his more intriguing examples—and this comes back to your egg question, this is why I thought of it. And again, I have no way of evaluating this as true or not. It's certainly intriguing.

Nathaniel: That's enough.

Thomas: If you go back to the current model of the creation of the universe, which is the big bang theory. In other words, it's an egg theory.

You have an egg or you have the...What's the line, the small, intensely hot dot? Whatever the quote is. That expanded rapidly and that became the universe. As that expanded the laws of the universe, as we understand them, manifested themselves as unchanging and universal.

When it was the infinitesimally, small, intensely hot dot, could you still have the laws of the universe? Which came first...

Nathaniel: Yeah. Right. It's the same....

Thomas: ...the laws or the bang? It's the chicken or the egg. This guy's argument is that if the universe is habitual, you could explain that. If the laws are eternal...

Nathaniel: Thank you.

Thomas: ...and constant, you cannot.

Nathaniel: Wow. That was last call.

Thomas: We're getting another.

Nathaniel: I do know what that means.

[music plays: Ween, "The Fucked Jam"]

Thomas: We're getting another?

Nathaniel: Yes.

Thomas: We're shutting this off?

Nathaniel: Yeah.

Thomas: Bye.

Nathaniel: Good night everybody.

Thomas: Good night.

[background music: Ween, "The Fucked Jam"]

Thomas: Well, we've ended on a bang.

[silence]

Circumnavigation: An Interview with Thomas Rickert

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