

Circumnavigation: An Interview with Thomas Rickert

Nathaniel A. Rivers

Saint Louis University

Epilogue: Intoxicated Interviews

Listening back over the interview I hear how two aspects of it—the beer and the places at which it is brewed and served—reflect and intensify the work of ambience. I also marked the risk of performing the interview outside, as it were. Such an emplacement might suggest that ambience is simply that which is outside and around us: a context we enter into as already existing subjects or speakers. Ambience, however, is not an outside we are in. As Thomas writes, “There is no person who can then be tacked onto the environment” (2013, p. 8). Ambience, as Thomas deploys it, works against the inside/outside binary itself. The choice of breweries as the locations for the interview thus serves, as I now hear it, two purposes. There is the brewery as that which surrounded us with its noises *and* the brewery as that which was in us with the fruits of its labors: beer. A brewery is a place that disassembles inside/outside understandings in favor of something more interactive and mutually constitutive. That is, the noises of the breweries and the intoxicating effects of alcohol are not elements added onto the interviewer and the interviewee but are rather active components in their constitution as participants in the interview. Furthermore, the conviviality of drinking as social activity loosens up the sober distinctions between “self and other” and “individual and environment”.

How do we make out our own voices against those of others and against the background noise of environments? Where do we as individuals end and where does the environment begin? These questions beg so many of the questions that *Ambient Rhetoric* works to interrogate. We might better ask how noise shows up as noise? How are we already shot through and constituted by our material emplacements?

I must also here admit that that “choice” of breweries was itself already ambient (and historical). Thomas was my dissertation advisor at Purdue University, and we would frequently meet to discuss my research in various bars in the Lafayette/West Lafayette area. Bars are where we have done work before. Furthermore, St. Louis is itself increasingly known for its craft beer scene. At a recent festival, nearly twenty St. Louis area craft breweries peddled their wares in Forest Park for two days. So, when Thomas came to town for the interview, trips to breweries were already the order of the day. The breweries we attended likewise played a role in the ambient specifics of the interview. Both have excellent reputations as locations and as brewers of beer.

Thomas’s book itself formed the ambience that in turned shaped the composition of the interview: his preface treats of wine. Thomas uses the French term *terroir* to set up the subject of his book. *Terroir* designates the consistency of soil type, weather, and cultivation that lend a distinct character to wine. It was thus fitting, it seemed, to keep the interview close to both alcohol and its sources, which play with and mediate the inside/outside distinction that ambient rhetoric works against. Alcohol pours itself into us so that we might pour ourselves into the world of relations around us.

And there are, of course, any number of other *reasons* or participants in the choice of breweries as the locations of this interview, some I could account for and many others I could not. The title of the interview, “Circumnavigation” must then do a bulk of this accounting work, conveying as it does a sense of moving around, of place, of circumstance, and of circumscription.

Thanks for listening.