Listening with Intent: Negotiating Rhetorical Listening in Climate Change Debate

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> …understanding means listening to discourses not for intent but with intent--with the intent to understand not just the claims but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well. --Krista Ratcliffe

When we convened the "Capitalism, Climate, and Public Discourse: The Limits and Possibilities of Rhetorical Intervention" symposium in the spring of 2016, I went in with one goal in mind: I wanted to learn how to talk about climate change in a way that fosters discussion and encourages listening. My experience with talking about climate change had been largely a list of, on the one hand, unsuccessful skirmishes with climate deniers and, on the other, self-congratulatory discussions that puzzled over the mere existence of climate deniers. Both kinds of conversation are generally unproductive and epitomize Swiss physician Paul Tournier's critique of the ways in which Western culture deemphasizes listening: "Listen to all the conversations of our world between nations as well as those between couples. They are for the most part dialogues of the deaf" (qtd. in Purdy 4). Because we have inherited a tradition that has highlighted conversation as agonistic struggle, listening is often portrayed as an "enslavement to the imperial impulse of the speaker" (Purdy 24) or as an "acceptance of an invasive message" (Fiumara 23). In the case of discourse on climate change, participants on all sides of the issue react to dialogue as though it is a discursive combat zone, which often replaces listening with suspicion and openness with dogma.

After reading Naomi Klein's This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate and several reviews of her book, I wondered how the symposium would foster alternate ways of talking about climate

change generally and Klein's book more specifically because of the polarizing nature of Klein's book (see Jason Ludden's review of This Changes Everything in this special issue for a sustained discussion of the book). The distinctly interdisciplinary nature of the symposium was both its opportunity and challenge, and this tension is highlighted in this special issue of Works and Days. The diverse voices contained in this issue demonstrate the appeal to transdisciplinarity, an approach to research that focuses on how different investigations of shared topics can foster dialogue by positioning themselves within "a kind of radical, obsessive openness" (Hawhee 4). This kind of openness is enacted when critics refuse to shut down lines of inquiry, resist easy or convenient conclusions, and cultivate a willingness to see the world through the eyes of another. Heidegger identifies this process as legein, a "way of life capable of letting-lie-together-before" or a refusal to position the ideas of another as subordinate to our own (qtd. in Fiumara 4-5). As our readers will no doubt see, the contributors to this volume emphasize this openness as they listen to Klein's book and the broader, ongoing discourse on climate change.

For the contributors to this section, the "solution" to climate change rests, in part, on each of the participant's willingness to lay aside easy identifications and arguments, as well as listening for intent, not with it. Philosophy scholar Gemma Corradi Fiumara, identifies this as a process that must begin with changing our motivations for why we listen, especially to the earth itself. As she has observed:

> Our fashionable language, for example, already resounds with worrisome expressions such as 'ozone layer,' 'greenhouse effect,' 'acid rain'—all sad news coming across from nature. And yet, it is difficult to perceive that we hear this news because these things begin to affect us and that in fact we hear nothing until the damage inflicted by our deaf logic only concerns the planet we inhabit. There must be some problem with listening if we only hear from earth when it is so seriously endangered that we cannot help paying heed. (6)

To listen to nature and to conversations about climate change requires a willingness to cultivate in each one of us Krista Ratcliffe's notion of rhetorical listening and a rejection of easy listening. Easy listening is the kind of listening utilized when interlocutors share values, experiences, or approaches to topics. In these kinds of situation, staying open to the ideas of another is often achieved without much difficulty

because the listener and speaker agree on argumentative premises and values or may even be prepared to discuss an issue at the same level of stasis. Listening becomes more complicated when "standing under" (rather than under-standing) someone else's arguments because it requires of listeners a willingness to allow someone's ideas to "wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics" (Ratcliffe 28). As Ratcliffe rightly observes, this process often produces discomfort for the listener, making it a less attractive approach to difficult conversations (Ratcliffe 28). What this means, in other words, is that we must learn to listen without a canned response in mind and learn to cultivate the capacity for sheltering the ideas of another—to see the logic that has given birth to the idea, the perspective of its holder, and the experiences that have fortified it.

Because the contributors to this special issue are largely engaged in critiquing Klein's book, we are given an opportunity to ask how critique functions as a form of listening. Can it, in other words, engage in the process of rhetorical listening? Can it develop a legein-based approach to disagreement while also sustaining criticism? I invite our readers to listen to the ways in which the contributors to this special issue demonstrate that critique can be a generative and valuable form of listening that does not always devolve into a reductive I'm-right-you're-wrong spitting match, as criticism is often portrayed in popular culture today. Indeed, the contributors to this special issue, as you will no doubt experience, demonstrate the ways in which a willingness to listen to Klein, as well as other stakeholders in climate change dialogue, leads at times to a rejection of Klein's approach and commitments, but not until after sustained listening has taken place.

One way that our contributors demonstrate listening is by their attention to the rhetorical construction of the book. Carl G. Herndl's "The Best is the Enemy of the Good: The Gamble of the Environmental Jeremiad," for example, listens closely to how the generic choice of the jeremiad opens up and shuts down conversation about climate change. Herndl notes that Klein's use of the jeremiad, a "persuasive genre designed to fire the imagination of listeners and motivate them to speech," does little to motivate anyone beside existing sympathizers and, even then, may marginalize some who are already sympathetic. As Herndl notes, the jeremiad invokes overtones of Christian notions of sin, forgiveness, and salvation, which, while pow-

erful and inflammatory, do little to foster action and foreclose the ability to find alternative paths of action. It becomes a question of how Klein attempts to sway her audiences, rather than what she says. Herndl acknowledges, for example, that "I, too, feel the siren call of the jeremiad" and admits throughout his article the persuasiveness of Klein's methodical documentation of climate change.

However, he troubles his own listening by seeking to remain radically open to the implications of Klein's rhetoric. We glimpse this as Herndl asserts, "I am less interested in the accuracy of [Klein's analogy between climate movements and abolitionism] than in how the moral absolute which drove the abolitionist movement determines the logic of Klein's political and rhetorical choices." In stepping back from an easy listening in which he sympathizes with Klein's intent, Herndl illuminates the risk of advocating for climate change activism from a position of "uncompromising and divisive political and rhetorical choices." In other words, Herndl engages in the kind of rhetorical listening for which Krista Ratcliffe argues; this is specifically evident as Herndl attends to the cultural logics, defined by Ratcliffe as "a belief system or a shared way of reasoning within which a claim may function," embedded historically in the jeremiad, as well as Klein's contemporary use of it (Ratcliffe 33). Paying attention to the cultural logic stitched into her project creates enough space to understand why the jeremiad is so tempting, but also so risky, which is the basis for Herndl's critique.

Celeste M. Condit's "Control by All (Us/Scientists): Intersectionality Through Proliferation" likewise engages in complicated, rhetorical listening, though with a different focus than seen previously. Like Herndl, Condit observes how Klein's impassioned argument may be "emotionally attractive for her readership," but Klein's reliance upon binary logics creates "emotional rewards of self-righteousness" that should be resisted in order to enact policies and practices that may help us slow climate change. Condit's rejection of Klein's deeply pathetic overtones is not an attempt to cordon off the vastly emotional experiences we all have with climate change, or to demean such expressions as "the exiled excess" that must be kept out of public discourse (Ratcliffe 25). Rather, Condit points to Klein's narrative approach in order to reveal her repeated use of binary logic. As Condit explains, Klein's attempt to pin climate change on an elite minority's exploitation against "our" interests as the "little guys" is a binary that cannot hold. Condit points out that the elite versus the little guy,

or Goliath against David, binary conveniently ignores the fact that many of Klein's readers are part of the world's elite, whose lives would need to radically transform to enact the kinds of change Klein sees as the solution to climate change.

The problems with Klein's use of binary multiply beyond the us versus them narrative, and Condit listens closely to how reductive binary logic implicates science and scientists. For Condit, Klein's ambiguous portrayal of science as an agent in climate change exacerbates the flaws in her use of binaries. Although Klein aligns much of science with extractivist logics, Condit quickly points to the fault in this characterization of science by demonstrating some of the ways in which scientists have helped to slow or reverse climate change, such as through innovations in solar and wind energy. Condit identifies that to follow Klein's logic fully would require her and her readership to listen to the implications of her argument. In other words, whether a person is an extractivist or part of grassroots climate resistance, Klein's binary positions both parties as participating in ideographs of control. Rhetorical scholar Michael Calvin McGee defines ideographs as words, terms, and symbols that are "high order abstraction[s] representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal" (15). In Condit's analysis of This Changes Everything, narratives about community resistance to extractivist efforts function as a positive ideograph of control because they are framed as narratives about people taking back control. On the other hand, narratives about big corporations invading and exploiting indigenous lands are offered as negative ideographs of control because they are framed as the forceful removal of natural resources that belong to the public by force.

To escape the easy listening of binary thinking and the stalled change it produces, Condit engages readers in a discussion about the ways in which rhetorics of proliferation may provide us with alternative ways forward. Rhetorics of proliferation necessarily rely upon political commitments to intersectionality, itself a form of listening that is dedicated to openness: "an intersectional view should allow us to look both ways' (or better, 'look many ways')." This kind of listening and openness resonates well with Lynda Walsh's article in the third section of this special issue, which seeks alternative scientific approaches by resisting the western scientific predilection to subordinate local knowledges to "Science." By paying attention to how binaries fail to progress climate change discourse, "Control by All

(Us/Scientists)" forwards a critical analysis of the ways in which Klein attempts to build conscious identifications, an effort that ultimately breaks loose from the center.

Like Condit, the next piece in this special issue critiques the ways in which Klein's rhetoric reinforces, rather than breaks free from, that which she critiques. Rather than ideograms of control, however, Ralph Cintron's article, "Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here: Democracy and Climate Change," critiques the ways in which Klein attempts to separate capitalism and democracy, but as Cintron demonstrates in his article, Klein cannot have one without the other: "each one organizes the other." These two topoi are inextricably connected, in part because they both function as -isms into which we can pour our hopes and dreams for the future. Cintron calls this potentiality. The problem with the ways in which Klein uses potentiality is that it draws upon a thinly conceived idea of the 'resource commons,' or the expansion of public ownership that is controlled by the people rather than by governments or private parties. Cintron critiques the notion of the resource commons by contemplating the ways in which it can lead to the "tragedy of the commons," or the process of over-grazing, which results in too much supply, which ultimately lowers the selling price. Such a conceptualization reinforces the relationship between capitalism and democracy, rather than creating any sort of break between the two. Cintron's article demonstrates an important element of critique as listening—following the ways in which Klein's argument cannot pan out in the end.

To counter Klein's conception of the resource commons, Cintron advocates for a deeper conception of the common—the "unlimited commons." The notion of unlimited commons differs from the resource commons partly because it calls forth a different way of organizing our—people's—relationship with potentiality. Cintron argues that the unlimited commons has the potential to correct the resource commons through a more sustained attention to the ways in which all wealth, great or small, is built upon amassed, inherited value. In this way, the unlimited commons functions as a source of potentiality, but instead of turning potentiality into technological inventions to be leveraged by its owners (whether governmental, private business, or even by the people), it turns potentiality into a form of "economic development that ultimately cannot be owned or possessed through the current paradigm of wealth-making." Cintron's piece adds much to consider when thinking of listening. While his piece is

focused on critique, he also proposes the unlimited commons as a thought experiment and invites readers to read and contribute to the ongoing development of his idea. In this way, Cintron invites listening to the work of critique by also making listening a generative act.

Thus far, much of the critique in this section of our special issue has engaged what Klein says in her book. However, critique can come from not only what is said, but what was silenced. Leah Ceccarelli's "Changing Everything about Science in Public Discourse" deeply engages with Klein's work by pointing to the many ways in which Klein's book "fails to speak to . . . the number of socially-aware scientists oriented toward the public good." Ceccarelli observes that scientists are marginalized in Klein's narrative and argues, much like Condit, that by making "change" about indigenous resistance, Klein shuts out the possibility of leveraging scientists as part of a more radical solution. Ceccarelli sees younger, socially-minded scientists as an opportunity to make change as they "develop a new set of professional norms that can replace the values of the modernist extractivist science that has done so much harm."

Listening to the rhetorical tactics of this younger generation of scientists gives Ceccarelli an opportunity to look for alternative ways of engaging in dialogue about climate change. Although Klein's newest book, No is not Enough, explores science activism as it emerged in response to policies of the Trump administration, this discussion is mostly absent in This Changes Everything. Noting this earlier absence, Ceccarelli's article invokes her own most recent book, On the Frontier of Science: An American Rhetoric of Exploration and Exploitation, to articulate the ways in which this new generation of scientists has developed a more flexible ethos that has not been a part of the composition of modernist science/scientists. She sees these citizen-scientists as "new scientific revolutionaries in both senses of that term, leading a revolution in the public sphere and in science as well."

This second section of this special issue concludes with John Ackerman's "Wild Cosmopolitanism for the Pursuit of a Quotidian Indigeneity." While much of this issue's critique thus far has focused on identifying the binary thinking implicit in This Changes Everything and diversifying such thinking, Ackerman adds to this focus on pluralizing by investigating Klein's and her audience's conceptualization of "indigeneity." Ackerman notes the ways in which love of place has produced indigenous resistance to extraction and finds in

biophilia (a love of, or connection to, natural places) opportunities to shift the tables of climate change conversations. For biophilia to be productive in the debates about climate change, it must overcome assumptions surrounding the notion of indigeneity. Ackerman views indigeneity as a foundation on which to build. In popular depictions of climate change, indigenous groups are portrayed as more connected to their home ecologies and as "more honestly resilient;" however, Ackerman points to the problem in emblazoning these communities as our ideal, given that the majority of the world's populations are consolidated into highly populated urban spaces.

This valorization of indigeneity becomes a stumbling block for urban populations and other non-indigenous identities as invested in the fight against extractivism. Ackerman points to wild cosmopolitanism as a way of leveraging indigeneity as "'contaminated diversity' and not purity." In this sense, biophilia and indigeneity are positioned as the "grit of survival" that mixes and diversifies fortitude, and recovery. Representative of Condit's call for proliferation, this layering of different narratives allows more individuals to see and feel a stake in the "sacrifice zones" so often depicted in popular accounts of climate change. It would, as Ackerman so eloquently states, encourage us "not only to march together to thwart economic colonialism and environmental injustice," but also to "begin to comprehend the spatial and textured scales of injustice in our homelands." It could, in other words, create an increased capacity of biophilia regardless of homeland and a quotidian indigeneity that could foster engagement and cooperation against climate deniers and extractivists wherever they are met.

The contributors to this volume demonstrate the need to challenge the practice of easy listening when it comes to polemical topics like climate change and to intentionally provocative texts like This Changes Everything. For our contributors, it could have been convenient to adapt an easy listening with and to Klein, but as you will find in each article in this issue, the contributors demonstrate a methodical, rhetorical listening—a capacity to remain open, even if (or, perhaps, especially when) that openness results in critique.

Using rhetorical listening as a framework for listening into debates about climate change, however, functions much like Burke's notion of the vocabularies people develop to create reflections of reality (59). Rhetorical listening, in other words, selects for certain realities while also deflecting others. While the authors who have contributed

to this section of the special issue can be seen as modeling a thoughtful, legein-filled listening, what remains to be explored is whether or not such a listening is the most effective, most-ethical, or most-productive listening to inflammatory dialogue. Do we have to listen with open hearts to the cultural logics that give space to climate denier's refusal themselves to listen to the entirety of the accepted data on climate change? Should we embrace, even if only temporarily, those world views that place their endless need for consumption over the need for a sustainable stewardship of the lands which we cannot ever really own?

I leave these questions in mind as you begin reading this section of the special issue. If our goal is to make change, real change that can stem the catastrophic effects of climate change, then closer attention to the ways in which listening is both called for and rejected in climate debates offers one avenue for getting there. Accomplishing this is no easy task, particularly when our entire existence is at risk, but, if we are to change everything, then perhaps we can start with the most basic of things—listening.

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