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## Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a "Code of Cross-Cultural Conduct"

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In the beginning was not the word. In the beginning is  
the hearing.

—Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*

My hearing depends on detailed differences or  
similarities.... And sometimes and in varying degrees,  
I can choose the mode of my conscious listening.

—Alice Rayner, “The Audience”

And once we have a vocabulary for explaining what  
we do when we listen, it is easier to convince others to  
listen the way we do—and to change the way we  
listen ourselves.

—Peter Rabinowitz, “Fictional Music:  
Toward a Theory of Listening”

Reading, writing, speaking, and listening were cornerstones of Western rhetorical studies for more than 2,000 years. But in the 20th century recovery of rhetoric within composition studies, reading and writing reign as the dominant tropes for interpretive invention;<sup>1</sup> speaking places a respectable third; listening runs a poor, poor fourth.

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Indeed, listening has been neglected. That's not to say listening has never been mentioned within 20th-century scholarship. It has. For example, James Phelan and Andrea Lunsford employ listening to explore voices speaking or not speaking within written texts. Phelan posits listening as a means of constructing "some conceptual model for defining and investigating voice in written discourse," particularly narratives (132), and Lunsford offers listening as a means for reclaiming "the voices of women in the history of rhetoric" (6), voices of women long dead who need no longer be silent if only we know how to listen for them.<sup>2</sup> Yet these scholars' focus on voice elides sustained theorizing about listening. Victor Vitanza also employs listening not to discover individual voices but rather to play with/in texts. By pondering Nietzschean, hermeneutic and poststructuralist conversations about listening and the ear, Vitanza promotes listening as a means of questioning the *logos* and exposing its "duplicity"/"triplicity"/"complicity" within language (165–69). But despite the work of these prominent scholars, the dominant trend in our field has been to follow the lead of popular culture and naturalize listening—to assume it is something that everyone does but no one need study. The implication for composition studies is quite simple: listening has almost ceased to be theorized or taught as a rhetorical strategy.

For some time I have been wondering how listening may be recovered so as to inform our field theoretically and pedagogically. In this article, I want to suggest that rhetorical listening may be imagined, generally, as a trope for interpretive invention, one on equal footing with the tropes of reading and writing and speaking. Although rhetorical listening may be employed to hear discursive intersections of any cultural categories (age and class, nationality and history, religion and politics) and any cultural positions (child and parent, patient and doctor, clergy and parishioner, teacher and student) (see Pradl 67–72), my particular interest lies in how it may help us to hear discursive intersections of gender and race/ethnicity<sup>3</sup> (including whiteness) so as to help us to facilitate cross-cultural dialogues about any topic. Thus, I want to suggest that rhetorical listening may be imagined, specifically, as what Jacqueline Jones Royster has called a "code of cross-cultural conduct."<sup>4</sup>

My purpose in offering this definition and this particular focus is not to construct a totalizing definition of listening; such an endeavor is impossible. Rather, my purpose is to invite further conversations on how listening may inform composition studies. To that end, I make the following moves in this article: (1) I briefly trace how rhetorical listening emerged in my thinking; (2) I explore disciplinary and cultural biases that subordinate listening to reading and writing and speaking; (3) I speculate why listening is needed; (4) I offer an extended definition of rhetorical listening as a trope

for interpretive invention; (5) I demonstrate how it may be employed as a code of cross-cultural conduct; and (6) I listen to a student's listening.

### The Emergence of Rhetorical Listening, or How I Started to Hear

My thinking about listening and its potential applications has emerged not just from an abstract, scholarly interest in the intersections of rhetorical theory and feminist theory but from several intertwining threads in my academic and personal lives. Two related threads demonstrate the difficulty of and the need for listening, particularly when intersections of gender and ethnicity intrude on cross-cultural conversations. The first thread emerged when I presented a paper about Mary Daly at a Womanist Spirituality Conference in Columbia, Missouri. An African American woman in the audience told me afterwards that she refuses to read Daly because Daly's critique of women in patriarchy is really just a critique of white women in patriarchy, one that excluded this audience member by *erasing differences* among women, a charge much like the one levelled against Daly by Audre Lorde ("An Open Letter" 70). The second thread emerged when I taught a special topics course called "The Rhetorics of Women's Autobiographies." A young white woman in class said that, although she was extremely moved when reading excerpts from Audre Lorde's cancer journals, she didn't want to read any more of Lorde's writings. When I asked her why, she cited Lorde's last line: "If one Black woman I do not know gains hope and strength from my story, then it has been worth the difficulty of telling" (*A Burst of Light* 295). The student felt that Lorde, by specifying "Black woman," was excluding her by *erasing commonalities* among women.

While I understand each woman's decision and recognize the power differentials of each situation, I find these threads troubling. Not only do they expose each woman's difficulty in imagining simultaneous differences and commonalities, they also resonate as metonymic echoes of larger cultural discourses repeated not just by other students but by people all across our country. What troubles me is that such reactions negate the possibility for cross-cultural dialogue not just about gender and ethnicity but about any subject. Although I certainly respect an individual's right to refrain from dialogue at a particular moment in her or his life, I do not accept our culture's dearth of discursive possibilities either for articulating intersections of gender and ethnicity or for promoting cross-cultural dialogues.

Listening, it seems to me, might serve as one such possibility. But listening is hardly a simple solution; indeed, it raises many questions: Why is it so hard to listen to one another? Why is it so hard to resist a guilt/blame logic when we do listen? Why is it so hard to identify with one another

when we feel excluded? Why is it so hard to focus simultaneously on commonalities and differences among ourselves? And how do the power differentials of our particular standpoints influence our ability to listen? Any definition of listening must account for these questions.

A third thread complicates the first two by exposing an all-too-often missing component in gender/ethnicity discussions and in cross-cultural discussions of any topic. That missing component is whiteness. While writing my book about Anglo-American feminist theories of rhetoric, I was challenged by Susan Jarratt to consider how race informed gender in the texts of Virginia Woolf, Mary Daly, and Adrienne Rich. So I considered two issues: one, the attitude that these women's texts expressed and represented about race/ethnicity and, two, the influence that whiteness played on their texts. Yet when I completed the project, I was left with more question than conclusions. I wondered: What exactly is whiteness? How does it function rhetorically, especially in relation with gender? And for whom is whiteness (in)visible? And personally, I also wondered: How does my life as a white woman affect my actions as a teacher at Marquette University, as a scholar in composition studies, as a mother who shops at Piggly Wiggly in Cedarburg, WI, after work? What lessons am I (un)consciously sending to my students, my readers, my neighbors, my daughter, myself?

A fourth thread provides language—a category—with which to contemplate one specific application of listening: articulating intersections of gender and ethnicity to promote cross-cultural communication. When Jacqueline Jones Royster gave her opening keynote address at the 1997 Feminisms and Rhetorics conference in Corvallis, OR, she challenged us all to construct “codes of cross-cultural conduct,” rhetorical strategies for fostering cross-cultural communication. Royster's challenge resonated with me. Suddenly I saw an opening for my interest in rhetorical theory (the absence of listening) to merge with my interest in feminist theory (the intersections of gender and ethnicity) as a means of doing my own gender/race work, both professionally and personally.<sup>5</sup> By weaving the above threads together, I have created a place from which to ponder listening, or rather what I have come to think of as rhetorical listening.

### **Why Neglect? or How Disciplinary and Cultural Biases Displace Listening**

One disciplinary bias that explains our field's neglect of listening may be found, most obviously, in the work we do: we have appropriated Western rhetorical theories to theorize writing and the teaching of writing. Because we focus primarily on written discourse and because listening is commonly associated with oral discourse, we have been slow to imagine how lis-

tening might inform our discipline. We have more readily paired writing with reading and, to a lesser extent, with speaking. We pair writing with reading because many teachers assume that improving students' reading skills improves their writing skills. And although speaking is not our field's primary province, we also pair it with writing. It haunts our theories and praxis either as an invention strategy (students' talking with peers in review sessions and with teachers in conferences), a proofreading strategy (students' reading papers aloud to check sentence flow), or as an influential metaphor (voice). As a result of these pairings, our field's dominant tropes for interpretive invention have been writing and reading and speaking. I am inviting us to consider rhetorical listening as another effective trope for interpretive invention.

A second disciplinary bias that explains our neglect of listening is that Western rhetorical theories themselves have traditionally slighted listening. Classical theories foreground the rhetor's speaking and writing as means of persuading audiences; these theories are only secondarily concerned with how audiences should listen and hardly at all concerned with what Michelle Ballif calls the desires of particular audience members. Granted, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* assures students who study his rhetorical theory that they will learn not only how to *produce* enthymemes but also how to *analyze* them (I. 12), and in a culture whose texts were primarily oral, such analysis implies listening. But Aristotle's theory never delves into *how* to listen. Moreover, his production/reception linkage is more complicated than his assurance allows. Although most writing teachers and students link production (writing) with reception (reading), they also recognize differences—most students are more comfortable with reading than with writing. And although writing teachers and students may link strategies of production (speaking with writing) and strategies of reception (reading with listening), they ascertain differences here too: speaking is second “nature” for most students, but writing is not; some students learn better by reading information, others by hearing it explained. Yet classical and modern theories of rhetoric rarely delineate or question such production/reception differences.

Although poststructuralist theory calls such differences into question, it inadvertently serves as a third disciplinary bias in our field's neglect of listening. Jacques Derrida's project to deconstruct Western metaphysics reverses Plato's celebration of speaking and suspicion of writing. Consequently, deconstruction champions writing as a trope that more accurately describes how we use language and how language uses us; moreover, it collapses reading into this equation by arguing that writing is reading is writing. But because it denigrates speaking as the trope that fosters a metaphysics of presence, poststructuralist theory in the wake of Derrida finds itself suspicious of speaking and, by association, of listening, even

though Derrida pays tribute to listening as a means of substituting the ethical for the ideal in his essay about Emmanuel Levinas (Derrida 99).

One cultural bias that may partially account for our field's neglect of listening is exposed in the work of Deborah Tannen. Citing personal observation, other researchers' case studies, and her own linguistic theory, Tannen claims that in our culture speaking is gendered as masculine and valued positively in a public forum while listening is gendered as feminine and valued negatively. Tannen further argues that our culture socializes men and women to listen differently: men often listen by challenging speakers to a verbal duel to determine who knows more and who is quicker on his feet; women often listen by smiling, nodding, asking questions and providing encouraging verbal cues (*yes, uh huh, is that right?, hmmm*) (142). In other words, men are socialized to play the listening game via the questions "'Have I won?'" and "'Do you respect me?'" while women are socialized to play it via the questions "'Have I been helpful?'" and "'Do you like me?'" (129). Thus gendered, listening subordinates not only women to men but listening to speaking.

Another cultural bias that may inform our neglect of listening emerges in the writings of Nikki Giovanni, who argues that listening is not only gendered but informed by ethnicity. Specifically, Giovanni argues that listening is not as necessary in our culture for white people as it is for people of color; she also argues that this general trend can be complicated by class differences. To illustrate her point, Giovanni imagines a fictional scenario, a poet's internal dialogue with herself while composing a talk for the 372nd Annual Convention of Black and White Women in America:

I suppose we shouldn't even talk about how the women's movement wouldn't listen to the Black women when we tried to say that the average white woman didn't understand her maid. I mean, [in the movie *An Imitation of Life*] when Lana Turner said to Annie, "I didn't know you belonged to a lodge," Juanita Moore replied, "Well, Miss Laura [sic], you never asked." There was no *women's* movement; there was a white women's movement and Black women never were, nor felt, included. It's all been an *imitation of life* to us, and *the long walk home* won't change that. (85-86)

Giovanni points out that Lana Turner's Lora Meredith wears the blinders that privilege affords privileged people, in this case the blinders that white privilege affords white people. Despite the fact that Annie is privy to the intimate details of Lora's life, Lora has not imagined her maid's life, Annie Johnson's life, beyond the services visibly rendered in their apartment. One question that may be asked of this scenario is: how may Lora change her complicity in the structural and personal racism that haunts all their lives if she cannot see it?

This question exposes a third cultural bias that may have influenced our field's neglect of listening—our culture's privileging of sight, our preference for interpretive tropes that proceed via the eye, what Martin Jay calls *ocularcentrism*.<sup>6</sup> The question that emerges is: what are the limits of *ocularcentrism*? As any camera operator will confirm, the limitation of sight is that when one object is foregrounded, other objects blur, fade into the background, fall outside the field of vision. To carry this metaphor further, I believe that the sight tropes of reading and writing may sometimes perpetuate our difficulty of bringing into focus two differences, such as gender and ethnicity. Adrienne Rich admits the difficulty of such a move, even as she exhorts us to “watch the edges that blur” (“Contradictions” 29):

Sometimes I feel I have seen too long from too many disconnected angles: white, Jewish, anti-Semite, racist, anti-racist, once-married lesbian, middle-class, feminist, exmatriate southerner, split at the root—that I will never bring them whole.

I would have liked, in this essay, to bring together the meanings of anti-Semitism and racism as I have experienced them and as I believe they intersect in the world beyond my life. But I'm not able to do this yet. (“Split at the Root” 122).

This difficulty is exemplified in Lora and Annie's situation: Lora does not understand Annie because the cultural “blindness” of white and class privilege impede Lora's ability to “visualize” Annie's life beyond how it “visibly” intersects with her own. And I believe this difficulty, in one way or another, haunts all our lives. Despite this difficulty, Rich admonishes us to keep trying to understand by bringing blurred intersections together and then acting accordingly: “we can't wait to speak until we are perfectly clear and righteous. There is no purity and, in our lifetime, no end to this process” (123). So for those times when we run into difficulty with blurred intersections, I suggest we switch from a sight trope to an auditory one and see, or rather listen to, where it may lead.

### Why Listening? or What the Ear Has to Offer

Before offering an extended definition of rhetorical listening, I feel compelled to carve out a space for listening. For of all the questions that have haunted this project, one keeps coming back to me from reviewers and audience members: How does listening differ from reading? When I presented a version of this article at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Rhetoric and Composition Lecture Series, a graduate student responded, prefacing her remarks with, “Of course, what you're really talking about is

a kind of reading." No, I tried to explain, I am not. I am talking about interpretive invention, a way of making meaning with/in language, with two different kinds being reading and listening. For if listening is to be revived and revalued in our field, it must occupy its own niche. Rather than be subsumed by reading, it should rank as an equal yet intertwining process of interpretive invention, for sometimes the ear can help us see just as the eye can help us hear.<sup>7</sup> But I am not surprised at the graduate student's response. It is informed not only by the disciplinary and cultural biases previously mentioned but also by what I believe is the organizing principle of these biases: the divided *logos* that Martin Heidegger claims we have inherited in the west, the *logos* that speaks but does not listen.

One need not fully subscribe to Heidegger's philosophical project of *dasein*, or being in the world, to recognize the aptness of his divided *logos* theory. In general, the *logos* is a system of discourse within which a culture reasons and derives its truths. Although the Greeks had different concepts of *logos* (Jarratt 42–61), Heidegger argues that these concepts imply both speaking and listening. He further argues that "this nature of language remains hidden from the Greeks. They have never expressly stressed it, much less raised it to the level of a problem. But their statements operate in this realm" (*What* 202). To explain his claim, Heidegger explores the relationship between the Greek noun *logos* and its verb form *legein*, which in its fullest sense means both "saying" and "laying" (198). The second meaning, "laying," entails laying others' ideas in front of us in order to let these ideas lie before us. This laying-to-let-lie-before-us functions as a preservation of others' ideas (194–215) and, hence, as a site for listening.

But because we have inherited a divided *logos*, we inhabit a culture where "saying" has assumed dominance and "laying" (and, thus, listening) has been displaced. Thus separated from a consideration of otherness, "saying" quickly becomes masterly expression; writing, a means of masterly expression; and reading, a means of mastering-the-masterly-expression. And all three quickly subsume listening. But listening is not totally erased, just displaced...and almost always diminished from its potential as *legein*. Sometimes it is acknowledged because it cannot be physically ignored, as in the fields of psychology, theology, and communications. Sometimes it is assumed to be a natural process that we need not study, as in composition studies. Sometimes it is mistaken for silence, as in patriarchal histories of women and non-dominant ethnic groups. And sometimes it goes by another name: reading, as when we read for tone, rhythm, voice, silence and a plethora of other elements associated with a h(ear)ring metaphor.<sup>8</sup>

In *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening*, Gemma Corradi Fiumara calls for both a reinterpretation of our *logos* to expose its divided

nature and a restoration of a fuller *logos* based on the Greek action *legein* (11–17). Such reinterpretations and restorations would result in a philosophy of listening, which would offer us other codes for conducting ourselves in the world. For as Fiumara suggests, a philosophy of listening “is an attempt to retrieve the functions of listening which may allow for truer forms of dialogue” (13). That is, in a divided *logos* (one that speaks but does not listen), we commonly employ dialogue as Hegelian dialectic wherein the posited thesis subsumes the acceptable aspects of the antithesis with the unacceptable excess being exiled from the dominant logic. In an undivided *logos* (one that speaks and listens), we would employ dialogue as a dialectic-that-questions-dialectic, enabling a metonymic coexistence of ideas (Fiumara 15, 17).

Thus, I would like to echo Fiumara’s call for listening by issuing a similar one in composition studies. For just as all texts can be read, so too can all texts be listened to. As a trope for interpretive invention, rhetorical listening differs from reading in that it proceeds via different body organs, different disciplinary and cultural assumptions, and different figures of speech. And as Fiumara suggests, listening maps out an entirely different space in which to relate to discourse: we may become “apprentices of listening rather than masters of discourse” (57). For when listening within an undivided *logos*, we do not read simply for what we can agree with or challenge, as is the habit of academic reading (in its multiple guises). Instead, we choose to listen also for the exiled excess and contemplate its relation to our culture and our selves. Such listening does not presume a naive, relativistic empathy, such as “I’m OK, You’re OK,” but rather an ethical responsibility to argue for what we deem fair and just while simultaneously questioning that which we deem fair and just. Such listening, I argue, may help us invent, interpret, and ultimately judge differently in that perhaps we can *hear* things we cannot *see*. In this more inclusive *logos* lies a potential for personal and social justice.

Hence, rhetorical listening as a trope for interpretive invention has the potential to function productively as a code of cross-cultural conduct. Perhaps through listening we can avail ourselves with more possibilities for inventing arguments that bring differences together, for hearing differences as harmony or even as discordant notes (in which case, at least, differences are discernible). Admittedly, we cannot hear everything at once (the din would no doubt madden us), yet we can listen to the harmony and/or discordant notes, knowing that more than meets the eye lies before us.

Obviously I am not arguing that we abandon reading, writing, and speaking. I am, however, suggesting that we recognize their limits and rethink them within an undivided *logos*, one that includes listening.

### Rhetorical Listening as a Trope for Interpretive Invention, or How to “Break the Back of Words”

An example of rhetorical listening emerges in Marge Piercy’s poem, “The Book of Ruth and Naomi.” Even though Ruth and Naomi are born into different ethnic groups (Ruth is Moabite; Naomi, Judean),<sup>9</sup> they forge a relationship that, for centuries, has represented an ideal friendship between women. Piercy attributes the success of their relationship, in part, to each woman’s desire to whisper:

Show me a woman who does not dream  
a double, heart’s twin, a sister  
of the mind in whose ear she can whisper. (277)

Yet this desire to whisper is predicated on the already existing possibility of another woman, one whose ear may hear the whisper, one who *listens*...and understands. Yet despite the fact that listening is a necessary component of these women’s relationship, listening is backgrounded in this poem, in its Biblical source, in much of our cultural consciousness and, as I have already argued, in composition studies.

To foreground listening in our field, I offer rhetorical listening as a trope for interpretive invention, one that emerges from a space within the *logos* where listeners may employ their agency—which Stanford drama theorist Alice Rayner defines as both “capacity” and willingness (7)—to situate themselves openly in relation to all kinds of discourse, whether written, oral, or imagistic. The rhetorical listening that I am promoting is a performance that occurs when listeners invoke both their capacity and their willingness (1) to promote an *understanding* of self and other that informs our culture’s politics and ethics, (2) to proceed from within a *responsibility* logic, not from within a defensive guilt/blame one, (3) to locate identification in discursive spaces of both *commonalities* and *differences*, and (4) to accentuate commonalities and differences not only in *claims* but in *cultural logics* within which those claims function. As such, rhetorical listening enables us to hear textual strategies associated with a h(ear)ing metaphor, such as voice and silence; relatedly but more encompassingly, it enables us to hear what Toni Morrison calls “the sound that [breaks] the back of words” (*Beloved* 261), thus enabling us to question the *logos* as we know it. What follows is an explanation of the above definition, an explanation indebted to Phelan and Lunsford, to Vitanza and Heidegger, and to Rayner and Morrison.

By employing *understanding* as an end of rhetorical listening, I recognize that I am invoking a troubled term. *Understanding* has a complicated history in narrative studies and in philosophical studies in that it is often coupled with authorial intent.<sup>10</sup> And as many scholars caution, this coupling

often gives birth to a naive idealism. For example, Julia Kristeva claims that because Westerners “are entitled only to the ear of the virginal body [of Mary]. . . ., there arises a possible tendency to eroticize [and, hence, idealize] hearing, voice or even understanding” (173). And Steven Mailloux claims that coupling understanding and intent often circles “back to all the problems of textual realism and readerly idealism and ignores the specific rhetorical contexts of power-knowledge” (148). By posing understanding as an end of rhetorical listening, I am not proposing that we idealize understanding or authorial intent: my purpose is neither to promote a “textual realism” wherein a text is perceived as a repository of *the* truth nor to celebrate a naive “readerly idealism” wherein the contexts of speaker/writers are simplified and the contexts of reader/listeners erased. Rather, my purpose is to wed Giovanni’s real to Piercy’s ideal, to collapse the real/ideal dichotomy into a third ground where rhetorical negotiation is exposed as always already existing and where rhetorical listening is posited as one means of that negotiation.

Granted, such a purpose resonates with remnants of idealism. But I like to consider them strategic. Just as Gayatri Spivak justifies subalterns’ employing a “strategic essentialism” in their critique of post-colonial oppression (205), and just as Amy Schuman justifies ethnographers’ employing a “strategic Romanticism” when constructing and analyzing the subjects of their studies, I am advocating a strategic idealism when listening with the intent to understand. Strategic idealism implies a conscious identification among people that is based on a desire for an intersubjective receptivity, not mastery, and on a simultaneous recognition of similarities and differences, not merely one or the other. The idealism is strategic in that we should recognize the difficulty and dangers inherent in such a project . . . and proceed knowingly.

As I employ it, then, *understanding* means more than simply listening *for* a speaker/writer’s intent. It also means more than simply listening *for* our own self-interested intent, which may range from appropriation (employing a text for one’s own ends), to Burkean identification (smoothing over differences), to agreement (only affirming one’s own view of reality). Instead, *understanding* means listening to discourse not *for* intent but *with* intent—with the intent to understand not just the claims, not just the cultural logics within which the claims function, but the rhetorical negotiations of understanding as well. To clarify this process of understanding, we might best invert the term and define *understanding* as *standing under*—consciously standing under discourses that surround us and others, while consciously acknowledging all our particular and fluid standpoints. Standing under discourses means letting discourses wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics.

Standing under our own discourses means identifying the various discourses embodied in each of us and then listening to hear and imagine how they might affect not only ourselves but others. The question that arises, of course, is the same dilemma that haunts Lora Meredith: How can we know what is so naturalized for us that it is no longer visible to us? As one answer to that question, at least in terms of theater performances, Alice Rayner offers listening. In many ways, her claim echoes Hans-Georg Gadamer's belief that "the primacy of hearing is the basis of the hermeneutical phenomenon" (420): that is, we speak because someone is listening. If we pull Rayner's theory into composition studies, we may argue that those of us listening to our own discourses return our discourses to ourselves somehow unchanged but changed. To exemplify this process, Rayner points to Virginia Woolf, who writes of a longing to hear the echo of her own words. Rayner deems Woolf's desire as

the need for a return (echo) of speech and gesture, a return that occurs in time as openness, not in a static image or closed meaning. The echo is life-giving because while it is rooted in the past, it is not fixed by the past. It returns the voice to the speaker, the same but different. (21).

Because our returning discourses may look the same but resonate differently, we need to cultivate both our eyes and our ears.

Standing under the discourses of others means first acknowledging the existence of these discourses; second, listening for the (un)conscious presences, absences, unknowns; and third, consciously integrating this information into our world-views and decision-making. The question that arises here is: how may we listen for that which we do not intellectually, viscerally, or experientially know? Or as Pocahontas sings to John Smith in that travesty of a Disney movie, how will you "learn things you never knew you never knew?" Again Rayner provides a way of thinking about this issue that may be borrowed for composition, a way of thinking that heeds Heidegger's reminder that in addition to silence, hearing is also a possibility of discursive speech ("Phenomenology" 234). Rayner argues that a theater audience (not as a collective whole but as a collection of individuals) should listen to a performance, perceiving it "not as a referential intention but as a desire to be heard as meaningful or as meaningfully breaking the conventional frames. The emphasis...is on the attempt and effort, not success or failure" (18), at least not as defined by dominant social conventions. This "desire to be heard" echoes not simply as a conscious use of a discourse but also as all the unconscious, socializing functions of a discourse. If we meet this "desire to be heard" with counter-desires—pretending the desire to be heard does not exist, hoping it will

disappear, or waiting for someone else to handle it—we stymie potential dialogue. But by standing under the discourses of others and rhetorically listening to them, we may transpose a desire for mastery into a self-conscious desire for receptivity; this process both invites the desires of others into our consciousness and accords these desires a place in which to be heard (Rayner 18).

Standing under discourses does not guarantee agreement; it should not guarantee idealization; it does, however, offer the possibility of hearing what we cannot see. In this process the unknown becomes not a perpetually purloined letter—"an irretrievable absence or gap which symbols replace and displace, as in the Lacanian formula," but rather and "more simply and more radically a limit to understanding" (Rayner 14). Limits may be moved and re/moved. According to Rayner, the agency for moving and re/moving such limits involves a "capacity" and a willingness (7): listeners possess that capacity and what we must supply is the willingness. This focus on willingness, on conscious action, on listening does not deny the socializing power of discourse on people's unconscious. Rather, it simply articulates the space within which we may interject our own agencies, albeit partial and complicated, into our own socializations.

The goal of understanding is a broader cultural literacy within which we may negotiate our daily attitudes and actions, our politics and our ethics. Rayner provides theater-goers with a definition of one such literacy, a definition that might be applied more generally to composition studies via rhetorical listening:

It is perhaps a borderland more than a boundary between the capacity to hear and the obligation to listen to what one cannot immediately understand or comprehend. And it leads to the *learning* of community...in the exchange of signs.... At the very least, such choice involves a decision to recognize and become self-conscious toward the limitations of [one's] own 'imaginary' version of self and other—a limitation that does not acquiesce to...an unknowable, but takes that unknowable as a pre-condition within which action is still necessary and a confrontation with another inevitable. (18–19)

Even if—and perhaps because—confrontation is inevitable, this literacy has the potential to effect more productive discourses about, and across, differences and commonalities. Acquiring such literacy is both a political and ethical issue for people wielding power and for people lacking it.

Positing political action as another end of rhetorical listening foregrounds the realm where rhetoric intersects ethics. This connection may be easily discerned but not so easily acted upon. That is, we may not always choose or control the discourses that socialize us; neither may we

choose or control our unconscious responses to them. But once we consciously articulate our socializations and choose to respond to them, we become responsible for our words, our attitudes, our actions. And because it is through words, attitudes, and actions that we negotiate our conventional truths as well as our behaviors based upon these truths, Diane Davis argues that:

What is needed now is an *ethics* of decision; to the extent that we may no longer simply be guided by ontological Truth, by light or *logos*, decisions have to be made. And any ethics of decision necessitates first a "hearing"—*double entendre* intended: it necessitates both a listening and a judging.

Rayner agrees, claiming that listening as presence and as judgment presumes "an ethics of relation not simply power over" (21). That difference is the mediation of discourse through the listener, whether other or self-as-other. In this way, the other becomes a *necessary* consideration in the making of meaning for both the speaker/writer and the listener.<sup>11</sup> Thus, rhetorical listening opens up not only possibilities, but responsibilities, for interpretive invention, for making meanings via language via others. Although rhetorical listening does not guarantee that everyone will concur about definitions, intersections, and applications of the political and the ethical, it does guarantee that such considerations will be at the forefront of meaning-making.

By championing a responsibility logic, not a guilt/blame one, rhetorical listening offers us the possibility of getting past the guilt/blame tropes of accusation, denial, and defensiveness—all of which are associated with authorial intent and all of which usually result in a stalemate that preserves the status quo. By championing a responsibility logic, rhetorical listening asks us, first, to judge not simply the person's intent but the historically situated discourses that are (un)consciously swirling around and through the person and, second, to evaluate politically and ethically how these discourses function and how we want to act upon them.

By locating identification in discursive spaces of commonalities *and* differences, rhetorical listening juxtaposes traditional and postmodern rhetorical concerns. Traditional theories of rhetoric celebrate commonality, a metaphoric common ground, a Burkean sharing of substance, as the place of identification and, hence, of persuasion (*Rhetoric* 55). Postmodern theories of discourse question the possibility of substance and common ground and, instead, champion a metonymic juxtaposition of differences as the place of identification (Fuss 3; Butler 93–121). The problem with traditional identification is that differences are often glossed over or erased, left outside the circle of consubstantiality; the problem with postmodern iden-

tification is that commonalities are often perceived as impossible or as impossibly naive. Rhetorical listening interrupts this binary opposition by positing both commonalities and differences as possible metonymic places for rhetorical exchanges. In these places, discourses (not substances) converge and diverge. In these places, dialogue emerges as a dialectical conversation that questions the process of dialectic, a conversation that “seeks not the clarification and rigidification of difference [or commonalities] but rather the murky margins between, those margins of overlap which inaugurate and which limit the very functioning of dialectic” (Williams 218). Within such borderlands, rhetorical listening helps us to analyze such convergences and divergences. This analysis, in turn, helps us to articulate our socialization and also to communicate about—and across—both differences and commonalities.

By focusing on the differences and commonalities within textual claims and their cultural logics, rhetorical listening ties the personal (the claim) to the political (the cultural logic) without totally collapsing differences between the two. Although both claims and cultural logics are rhetorical constructs, our arguments and our analyses of arguments too often focus only on claims: “I’m right.” vs. “No, you’re not.” If we recognize not just the claims but the historically-grounded cultural logics enveloping other people’s claims, we may still disagree with the claims, but we may better understand the personal and cultural assumptions (dare I say, values and beliefs) that guide other people’s logics. And if we also recognize how claims and cultural logics are rhetorically constructed, we may better appreciate the reasoning powers of others even when we disagree with them.

While there are obvious benefits of rhetorical listening, there are also caveats. First, listening with the intent to receive, not master, discourses is not a quick fix or a happy-ever-after solution; rather, it is an on-going process. It will not result in an ideal world in which listening, or rhetorical negotiation, is no longer necessary. Such hopes are not only naive but dangerous. Instead rhetorical listening is another way of helping us continually negotiate our always evolving standpoints, our identities, with the always evolving standpoints of others. It is also another way of helping us recognize that our standpoints are not autonomous points of static stases but rather complex webs of dynamically intermingled cultural structures and subjective agency.

Second, although listening with the intent to receive, not master, discourses can motivate a particular listener to take political/ethical action, this listener’s desire cannot control how other readers, writers, speakers, and listeners will, in turn, receive her desire, her discourse, her actions. One should certainly not expect a pat on the back either for rhetorical listening or for speaking, reading, or writing based on rhetorical listening.

After all, rhetorical listening is the responsibility of everyone. Expectations to the contrary are not only insulting but reduce rhetorical listening to simple intent.

And third, as Marquette undergraduate Sara Scheunemann articulates: "Listening with the intent to understand opens [us] up...to being challenged, convicted, and hurt by the truth." It may be more another's truth than *the* truth that hurts us; however, this challenge, this conviction, this hurt exposes a space of dissonance. When responding to this dissonance, we should not accuse the person foregrounding it, deny its existence, nor bristle defensively. Such reactions only shut down dialogue and reinforce the status quo. Rather, we should question ourselves—our attitudes and our actions—to determine whether we need to affirm, revise, or reject them. If such questioning makes us more uncomfortable, so be it. In fact, good. Such discomfort simply signifies already existing problems and underscores the need for standing under the discourses of ourselves and others—and listening.

### One Use, or Rhetorical Listening as a Code of Cross-Cultural Conduct

If rhetorical listening functions, generally, as a trope for interpretive invention, it may also be specifically employed in innumerable ways. But, again, I am most interested in its potential as "a code of cross-cultural conduct." Its potential lies in the fact that listening not only signifies respect but also asks listeners to acknowledge, to cultivate, and to negotiate conventions of different discourse communities. As a code of cross-cultural conduct, rhetorical listening may further our understanding of gender and ethnicity intersections in ways that may promote cross-cultural dialogues on any number of topics.

To exemplify why our articulations of gender and ethnicity intersections must include whiteness, let me revisit a thread in my thinking about rhetorical listening. When I mentioned earlier that Susan Jarratt challenged me to consider how race complicated my book project on Anglo-American feminist theories of rhetoric, what I did not tell you was this: Writing about Woolf's, Daly's, and Rich's race/ethnicity claims was fairly easy, but writing about how whiteness hovers around these women's discussions of women, language, and culture was *hard*.

What complicated my musing at that moment was my own standpoint as a white feminist who had an abhorrence of racism and who had considered how racism works in the lives of people of color but who had never really been taught, nor had taken it upon herself to learn, how racism functions in relation to whiteness and/or white people. Jarratt's challenge to acknowledge race in my book project afforded me such an opportunity.

But when I began thinking about whiteness, I found myself echoing the claims of Adrienne Rich ("Split" 122), Ruth Frankenberg ("When We Are Capable" 11), and Becky Thompson ("Time Traveling" 95): Nothing in my education, academic or otherwise, had prepared me to recognize (see) or articulate (say) whiteness in myself or others, and certainly nothing in my education had provided me with strategies for resisting certain versions of my whiteness that may privilege me but not others.

So I decided to find strategies for conceptualizing and articulating whiteness. I reasoned that if I could not *see* the way whiteness worked, perhaps I could *hear* it. Thus, I came to link rhetorical listening with articulating gender and ethnicity concerns, particularly gendered constructions of whiteness. The question that emerged next, of course, was: What should I listen to? Given my thinking about rhetorical listening, the obvious answer was: to the discourses of myself and others. For my purposes, I settled on three types: autoethnography, academic research, and the stories of others.

My interest in listening to autoethnography<sup>12</sup> initially emerged from a fascinating discussion that suddenly erupted a few years ago in my undergraduate rhetorical theory class. In response to Cornel West's *Race Matters*, an exasperated white student told the class, "I don't see what the big deal is. I don't wake up every morning, look in the mirror, and say, 'Hey, I'm a white man.'" I paused for a moment, letting the tension in the room build, and then I asked him, "Do you think that is West's point? That *you* don't have to think about race but *he* does?" What followed was the longest silence and then the most lively debate I have ever encountered in an undergraduate classroom, a debate about gender, race, and ethnicity that still echoes in my ears.

When I listen rhetorically to the textual strategies associated with a h(ear)ing metaphor in this exchange, I hear echoes of multiple voices: I hear the young man's tone of authority and frustration along with an underlying defensiveness (he seemed to think he was expected to keep quiet about such ideas); I hear the cultural voice of a white America that imagines itself racially unmarked; I hear the silence of the classroom, of students not knowing whether and/or how to speak; and I also hear my teacherly tone, questioning yet subsuming the young man's thinking back into West's. Such listening creates a space in which it becomes possible to question the *logos* as it plays out in myself, in the students, and in our culture. For example, would I have modelled a better listening technique if I had asked the class a less slanted question, such as "What happens when we lay this response alongside West's text?" And, how implicated am I in the fact that students felt they had few strategies for talking about gender and ethnicity, particularly whiteness? And, how often do I actually create pedagogical spaces that encourage such discussions? And, how frequently

am I just as dismissive of how my own racial markings complicate my behavior, gendered or otherwise? And, why is white America so vested in being racially unmarked? Without this opportunity for listening, the young man and those who agreed with his ideas would never have been challenged, nor would have those students who whole-heartedly agreed with West, nor would have I.

This young man reminded me of an important lesson: we learn by listening to those who do not agree with us, provided the listening occurs in the context of "genuine conversation" (Copeland), where there is a desire in all parties to move our understanding forward. If the context is not one of genuine conversation, then refusing to listen may be appropriate. The trick is recognizing the differences as well as the possibilities for transforming the latter into the former. As a result of this young man's comments, I now try to see beyond my own reflection by listening to the discourses surrounding me in order to ask myself how being a white woman affects my being in the world. In this way, I try to bring bits of my own embodied sexism and racism to consciousness and become responsible for dealing with them one question at a time.

Though valuable, autoethnography is admittedly limited in perspective. So to explore whiteness further, I decided to listen to academic research. Instead of reading to master the knowledge or to find a point of agreement and/or attack, I listened to studies of whiteness, laying them alongside my own lack of knowing. I wanted to understand how whiteness functions within our contemporary cultural matrix, specifically in the U.S., and how it is inscribed differently within all of us. The following are just a few ideas I uncovered.

Like all cultural categories, whiteness is a trope, a category, a social construct that we employ to name people and practices. Yet a "conditional" relationship exists between white people and white practices in that not everyone can be classified as a white person but everyone can perform white practices, albeit with varying degrees of success (Keating 907). Although whiteness (like all cultural categories) is historically grounded (changing over time and space) and multiple (including lots of subcategories), in the U.S. it has consistently signified "privilege"; as such, it has resisted and denied difference (Frankenberg, *Social* 236–37). While this privilege of whiteness has been translated into great achievements for some, it has also been translated into "dominance," even violence, for others. Functioning as a cultural norm (Hill 1; Dyer 2; Keating 904), whiteness and its privileges are often invisible to white people yet very visible to people of color. Although impossible to understand apart from its intersections with gender, class, sexual orientation, age, etc. (Thompson 94), whiteness is often a missing ground in our cultural conversations even as it appears

in census reports and college application forms. Perhaps AnnLouise Keating says it best: whiteness “—*whatever* it is, and I would argue that at this point no one really knows—” is slippery (916).

When I listen rhetorically to this research, I also hear competing cultural logics: the status quo (which ignores whiteness) and the above critics (which promote whiteness studies). Further, I hear differences among the latter. I hear a tone of adamant authority in Frankenberg, an attempt to legitimize the study of whiteness within academic discourses by arguing that we must foreground this often invisible ground of our cultural discussions.<sup>13</sup> I also hear a more tentative authority in Keating, a care taken with words such as “conditional” and “*whatever* it is” in recognition of both the values and dangers of studying whiteness. For despite the fact that whiteness studies has become a highly touted research area in literary studies, sociology, history, art, film studies, anthropology, etc., even proponents of whiteness studies voice concerns. Some feminist scholars question the study of whiteness, fearing it may be a politically conservative move in that it returns discussions once again to white people, especially white men, (Hill, “Introduction” 4–8), and some ethnicity scholars question such study, fearing as Michael Eric Dyson says, it may be “a sneaky form of narcissism... [that shifts] the focus and maybe even the resources back to white people and their perspectives (qtd. in Talbot 118). Others fear that studying whiteness risks reifying and perpetuating false categories of race (Keating 913). Listening to this research to question the *logos* invites me to consider the (im)possibilities of studying whiteness: it will not solve all discord; indeed, it may incite more. But it may also help us imagine better ways of articulating the political/ethical permutations of gender and ethnicity—and the ways they are rhetorically constructed and negotiated. Listening to this research also makes me aware of the strategic idealism underlying such a claim.

By listening to autoethnography and academic research, I can test one against the other. But this juxtaposition also has its limits. Although both are useful means for understanding how gender and ethnicity merge in our culture, these means should not be used or taught unreflectively, nor should they be the only modes of critical thinking that we pass on to our students. For although autoethnography is becoming more common (just note the number of 1998 CCCC pre-convention workshops on the topic), it risks lapsing into a narcissistic confessional solipsism—and a privileged one at that<sup>14</sup>—unless we tie the personal to the cultural in ways that expose how our experiences speak metonymically for larger cultural issues and unless we make such storytelling a viable option for all academicians, not simply a select few. Moreover, for those of us trained in the academy, scholarly research too often resembles Tannen’s definition of men listening: that

is, let's duel verbally or in writing so that I can prove how much I know and, hence, you'll respect me.<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, we need to listen and offer students the opportunities to listen to the stories of others—all others. This realization echoes bell hooks' claim: "I have gone back to 'confession' not as a need to tell my own story in public or to be narcissistic, but because I now realize that people really learn from the sharing of experience" (Childers and hooks 77). Such learning occurs not only when we listen to the claims in other people's stories but also when we listen to their cultural logics, or rather the competing cultural logics that such stories expose.

To understand how whiteness is inscribed within white bodies,<sup>16</sup> we need to listen to stories such as Lillian Smith's reflections on her childhood in *Killers of the Dream*:

The mother who taught me what I know of tenderness and love and compassion taught me also the bleak rituals of keeping Negroes in their "place." The father who rebuked me for an air of superiority toward schoolmates from the mill and rounded out his rebuke by gravely reminding me that "all men are brothers," trained me in the steel-rigid decorums I must demand of every colored male. They who so gravely taught me to split my body from my mind and both from my "soul," taught me also to split my conscience from my acts and Christianity from southern tradition. (27)

If I listen to the strategies in this text, I hear the contradictory sounds and rhythms in the first sentence: the mellifluous vowels in "tenderness and love and compassion" juxtaposed with the harsh consonants of "bleak rituals of keeping Negroes in their 'place.'" I also discern voices of competing cultural logics: the status quo vs. social activism. By teaching Smith to "split" the inscriptions of gender, class, sex, religion, regional tradition, that are interwoven within her young body, Smith's parents un/consciously perpetuate what Rich calls "white discourse" ("Distance" 182), wherein whiteness is a privileged norm split from other cultural categories in ways that render it invisible, hiding its violence behind parlor manners and polite language. By listening to question the *logos*, I have to ask myself if and how this version of white discourse is still being played out in my own life and culture, masked by middle class manners.

To understand how whiteness is inscribed within non-white bodies but in ways that preclude these bodies from fully participating in the privileges of whiteness, we need to listen to stories like Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's in *Farewell to Manzanar*. In her reflections on her family's life at Manzanar, a World War II Japanese-American internment camp, she remembers a story about her brother:

"[m]y oldest brother, Bill, led a dance band called The Jive Bombers.... He didn't sing *Don't Fence Me In* out of protest, as if trying quietly to mock the authorities. It just happened to be a hit song one year, and they all wanted to be an up-to-date American swing band....

Oh, give me land lots of land  
 Under starry skies above,  
 Don't fence me in.  
 Let me ride through the wide  
 Open country that I love (73–74)

Listening to the textual strategies, I hear Wakatsuki Houston's disclaiming sisterly tone, denying any political intent on her brother's part; I also hear her more savvy writerly tone, using this "nonpolitical" incident to expose the political intent of white America as well its taken-for-granted privileges, like roaming. Though Bill desires to be non-political, his body is politicized, marked simultaneously by his Japanese ancestry and by his desire to be all-American. In the textual moment of Wakatsuki Houston's reflections, I hear competing cultural logics of the Manzanar camp culture and the dominant white culture. From her perspective as a once wrongfully interned American citizen, she hears "Don't Fence Me In" very differently from how most white America heard it at the time of its release or from how most Americans hear it today in Embassy Suite commercials. For her, the role of the masculinized roamer rings falsely from the mouth of Bill, a young American imprisoned solely because his ancestry differed from the cultural norm.<sup>17</sup> So while his desire to be all-American functions as a metonym for the white discourse of his time, the ancestry classifications within that white discourse preclude his full participation in the privileges of whiteness and, hence, the fulfillment of his desire. Indeed, within 1940s white culture, Bill's ethnicity trumps his gender even as his gender privileges him within the Manzanar camp. Listening to this passage in order to question the *logos*, I not only question the fairness and legality of Jeanne's and Bill's situations, but I also have to ask myself, once again, if and how I ever participate in white discourses in ways that might unknowingly erase the desires and material existence of others?

### A Pedagogical Instance, or Listening to a Student's Listening

To illustrate how rhetorical listening plays out pedagogically, let me share an experience I had with a white student named Rachel Weber. For while Rachel was writing her second paper for our women's literature course, she put rhetorical listening into action as a trope for interpretive invention

and as a code of cross-cultural conduct. By listening to her listening, I was able to pull together the threads in my definition. During one class session we read aloud from Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, specifically the first telling of the shed scene where the escaped slave Sethe attempts to kill her children and herself before her former owner Schoolteacher can recapture them all. Narrated from four white men's points of view, this scene perfectly captures how white slaveholders justify slavery: they liken slaves to animals and, consequently, deem beatings not inhumane, merely nonproductive. After our class discussion, Rachel emailed me about a possible paper topic, one that would relate our class discussion to a guest lecture in her political science class, which she had attended earlier in the day.

Hi! Something "strange" just occurred, and I was wondering if I could bounce it off you because the oddity of the situation just intrigues me, and I can't quite see how to put it into perspective, so I'm hoping you can help. (Quite a sentence!) First off, we just finished with class, and for you to understand the story, you have to know that I have Dr. [X's] Corrections class right before yours. (I'm a Poli Sci and Crim major.)

Okay, well today in that class, we had a guest speaker. . . . Now the man was entertaining and informative, and I enjoyed the class and his lecture immensely (one of those people who appear so energized you can't help but wonder how much coffee they drink in a single day—but still, they are fun to listen to as energy is infectious). Now to the point. . . . He started his lecture by asking how many people believed in parole and whether it was a good thing or not. The class was overwhelmingly against it (typical), and the overall opinion was that it was kind of a necessary evil (due to overcrowding, etc.). Well, to give us an example of one main reason parole and institutions like it were a necessity, he told a metaphor. The metaphor was one about a mean dog in the neighborhood who gets into trouble. If you chain the dog up and keep it on a short leash and punish it for its [sic] wrongs, you are only causing the dog to become more angry. He compared this to prisoners who are kept in high security/maximum prisons. He then went on further to say that chaining someone/thing up for a long time and punishing it is only going to allow its hate and anger to grow, and that once the "dog" is let off the leash, it would be a mess to see what the reaction to society and the community would be. Therefore, parole and institutions like it are necessary to reward those who attempt change and reformation, because if you just resort to a strict punishment approach, the "dogs" that are returned to the community will be beyond human reason and will only seek vengeance.

Now if you haven't figured it out already, the reason I'm bringing this up is because it shares a striking similarity with the words that the schoolteacher says to his nephew about breaking Sethe, as well as having a connec-

tion to the idea of people as animals. I'm sure this man that was speaking is a very nice guy, and maybe I'm just jumping onto this because the two classes were juxtaposed right next to each other, allowing for the realization of the similar aspects to occur, but this just seems amazing to me. I was planning to write my paper #2 on something entirely different, but now this just seems to be completely interesting. I suppose it would work into how slaves were treated as prisoners and how prisoners are in turn treated like animals (as slaves were also), but I just find this similarity too shocking to let it go. I'm wondering if you think there is a connection I could make and I guess how you think I could go about this. (The quote was on page 149 in *Beloved* is what I'm referring to.) If there is a weak connection in his metaphor, please just say so. I just am wondering if there is rather a distinctly definite one which ties into the fact that [the guest speaker] is white and that this chapter [in *Beloved*] was the only one written in the white perspective. I see why he used his metaphor, yet at the same time, I find it striking that he compared criminals to dogs and that schoolteacher compares slaves to animals and both are referencing to treatment. Hmmmmm... Well, I just really felt the need to get another person's perspective on this, and you definitely are the person with the most knowledge into what *Beloved* is "saying."

So if you could help, I'd appreciate it. Sorry that this explanation was so long—I didn't intend it to be! (I hope it all is clear too!) Anyways, thank you for thinking it over.

Rachel sent me this email me, she later told me, because she had shared her idea with a good friend and he thought she was crazy, reading more into the situation than was really there. Was she?, she wanted to know. Her friend thought she was accusing the speaker of being a hypocrite. She was not, she assured me. She simply wanted to understand the discourses surrounding her.

Coincidentally, Rachel emailed me a few days before I spoke about rhetorical listening at UW-M. By listening to her listening, I not only heard but began to see possibilities for rhetorical listening. For Rachel, by laying the guest lecture and *Beloved* in front of her and letting them lie there, was attempting to invent topics and arguments for her second essay, hence rhetorical listening as a trope for interpretive invention. And Rachel was proceeding with her project for a number of reasons. First, she wanted to understand the discourses surrounding her so that, when she graduated from college, she could act ethically as an employee within whatever system she found herself. Second, she wanted to avoid a guilt/blame logic. Her intent was not to nail the guest lecturer for hypocrisy; in fact, she went to great lengths in paragraph two to describe the guest speaker positively,

even later calling him a “nice guy” in paragraph three. Her intent was to work within a responsibility logic, wherein she could question his discourse and, albeit limitedly, participate in her own socialization. Third, she was intrigued by the commonalities and differences in the two discourses: both liken people to animals and justify behaviors on the grounds of productivity, yet Schoolteacher perpetuates a belief that some people are animals while the guest lecturer resists this notion. Moreover, Rachel heard commonalities and differences in their cultural logics: both seem haunted by privileges of whiteness and gender even as Schoolteacher reinscribes an inhumane slave economy and the guest lecturer tries to reform the Wisconsin prison economy.

Was Rachel’s listening process as neat and orderly as the previous paragraph makes it appear? Of course not. You can tell that from listening to her email. She notes that something “‘strange’” is haunting her, which she cannot pinpoint for herself. She is hesitant about her ideas so she waits until paragraph two to announce “Now to the point” although she follows that assertion with an ellipsis, which signifies a gap, an absence (of clarity? connection? confidence?). And although Rachel is quite articulate, summarizing the guest lecture and noting its possible connections to *Beloved*, she feels the need for someone else to put it into perspective; she has heard the commonalities and differences, but she cannot see the connections clearly. The two discourses are lying before her, but she cannot connect them for herself in ways that make sense within her concept of the *logos*. Because part of my job as a teacher is to help students conceptualize their thinking processes in relation to larger cultural logics, I analyzed her e-mail for method and experienced the serendipitous pleasure of having my thinking about rhetorical listening clarified, which in turn enabled me to offer her a perspective on her topic.

So what perspective did I offer Rachel? Did I think she was crazy? Obviously not. I think she has a definite talent, not for “reading more into the situation” as her friend had suggested but for listening to the exiled excess in our daily dialectical dialogues, for hearing what Morrison calls “the sound that [breaks] the back of words” (*Beloved* 261). And I think this talent was spurred, in part, by Rachel’s literally hearing the two discourses side by side and then letting them lie before her, echoing in her ears. So I encouraged her to write the paper, even offering her some of my thoughts and readings.

When I read her paper, I found her most interesting writing (at least in terms of my thinking about rhetorical listening and pedagogy) occurring in the final paragraph:

It seems that white “rule-abiding” society could be suffering from fear. They could be worried that both criminals and blacks are inherently no different

than themselves, and with that as fact, how do they make themselves feel superior? If everyone is equal, they are the same, and if whites are the same as blacks and “rule-abiding” citizens are the same as criminals, how can we compare ourselves to an Other? How can we bolster the feeling of superiority over the inferior groups of people who are just a bit behind us evolutionarily, if they are really not inferior or evolutionarily behind? The question is: why do we need to feel superior? What does this say about us? What have we become?

Rachel’s conclusion intrigues me on many levels. One is its pronoun usage. In thinking through this cultural concern, Rachel has trouble with pronoun shifts, not in terms of grammatical agreement but in terms of who-is-what. Her category of “white rule-abiding society” is a *they* to her; yet because she is a white rule-abiding citizen herself, the category is also a *we*. But that implication is not yet articulated in Rachel’s writing, perhaps because she does not see herself as being someone who needs to make others feel inferior. While she can listen to her guest lecturer and Toni Morrison, she seems not yet able to listen to her own text, at least not here, hence the importance of teaching rhetorical listening as a trope for interpretive invention that applies not just to the discourses of others but also to the discourses of one’s self. A second level that intrigues me is her use of questions. She concludes with questions that we, as teachers, might traditionally suggest should occur in her introduction as a frame for her paper, around which her paper would be developed. Although Rachel had initially desired to answer these questions in her paper, she could not, she told me when she handed in the paper, because the questions—especially as they related to whiteness—were so new to her world view, hence the importance of teaching rhetorical listening as a code for cross cultural conduct.

When I first listened to Rachel’s email and paper, I was richly rewarded in that she helped me clarify my thinking about rhetorical listening. When I revisited her texts during the writing of this piece, I was challenged to be a better pedagogue. For what echoes in my ears is her email phrase: “he told a metaphor.” It signifies both her awareness that language functions tropologically and also her assumption that tropes are something that can be told, added on for explanation or decoration. As a teacher, my challenge is to reinforce in students the former idea and disabuse them of the latter. For understanding the tropologizing functions of language, not simply as a manner of style but as the very “nature” of language itself, is one way of understanding how conflicting discourses can lie before us, reverberating with the potential to be negotiated via rhetorical listening. As such, teaching rhetorical listening is one way of tackling the pronoun problem that haunts all our lives: how to see *we* in *they* and *they* in *we*. It is

also a way of emphasizing for students the importance of keeping questions in play, maybe even using them as/in a conclusion.

### So Where Does That Leave Us?

Defining *rhetorical listening* as a trope of interpretive invention not only emphasizes the discursive nature of rhetorical listening but also plays with the etymology of the term *trope* as “a turning.” For rhetorical listening turns hearing (a reception process) into invention (a production process), thus complicating the reception/production opposition and inviting rhetorical listening into the time-honored tradition of rhetorical invention.<sup>18</sup> Second, rhetorical listening turns the realm of hearing into a larger space, one encompassing all discursive forms, not just oral ones. Third, rhetorical listening turns intent back on the listener, focusing on listening with intent, not for it. Fourth, rhetorical listening turns the meaning of the text into something larger than itself, certainly larger than the intent of the speaker/writer, in that rhetorical listening locates a text as part of larger cultural logics. And fifth, rhetorical listening turns rhetoric’s traditional focus on the desires of speaker/writer into a harmonics and/or dissonance of the desires of both the speaker/writer and the listener.

In sum, rhetorical listening broadens our possibilities for interpretive invention. When employed as a “code of cross-cultural conduct,” rhetorical listening has the potential to generate more productive discourses about and across both commonalities and differences, whether these discourses be narratives or arguments, whether they be in academic journals or over the dinner table. As such, rhetorical listening responds to the need exemplified by Annie and Lora and promotes the possibility exemplified by Ruth and Naomi...and Rachel.

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### Notes

1. By using the term *interpretive invention*, I hope to demonstrate the necessary intersections between *interpretation*, which is the dominant term for making meaning in philosophical hermeneutics, and *invention*, which is the dominant term for making meaning in rhetorical studies.

2. In his foreword to Lunsford’s *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, James Murphy claims that the au-

thors of the essays “point to new places to look” for rhetorical history, theory, and practice (xi). His claim reflects the dominant trend in our field of employing a sight metaphor. Lunsford’s use of an auditory metaphor, listening, supplements this trend.

3. For a history of *gender* as an analytical category within academic scholarship and for a discussion of whether gender studies

should replace or supplement feminist studies, see Showalter (1–13). Although I use the term *race*, I recognize that it is a highly contested term in that it is a trope for that which does not exist but which has become ideologically “real” in U. S. culture. See Lerner for a history of the term’s usage in the U. S. and for an excellent discussion of current thinking about alternatives to its usage (184–98). Also see Dyson, who defines *race* as follows: “Race is not a card. It is a condition. It is a set of beliefs and behaviors shaped by culture, rooted in history, and fueled by passions that transcend reason” (42).

4. Royster is not alone in calling for “codes of cross-cultural conduct.” Michael Eric Dyson argues that articulating such codes is necessary because “[w]e still don’t know the rules of race” (8). But by “rules of race” Dyson refers not just to codes of cross-cultural conduct but also to “the unwritten codes of conduct within black communities” (8). I agree with Dyson. I would argue further that we need to explore the unwritten codes of gender and ethnicity within other communities as well and that we need to explore the functions of whiteness in every community. For too often the functions of whiteness are invisible in our culture; we rarely think of white as a “color” (as evidenced by the terms *women of color* and *people of color*), and too often the functions of whiteness create a double-bind in certain circles succeeding in school can be perceived as “acting white”).

5. My assumption here is that because sexism and racism are structurally embedded in our culture and, hence, ourselves, they affect us all in our daily lives; consequently, we all have gender and race work to do if we are not unconsciously to replicate old patterns of thinking, being, and doing.

6. Martin Jay provides a definition, history, and critique of “ocularcentrism” in order to argue for a hermeneutic revival of hearing via Wagner, Nietzsche, and Heidegger: “our increasing interest in the truths of interpretation rather than the methods of observation bespeaks a renewed respect for the ear over the eye as the organ of greatest value (57). Other philosophers have set the stage for Jay’s claims. Hegel locates hearing as an ideal, arguing that hearing “does not belong to the sense of action [sens pratiques] but those of contemplation [sens théoriques]; and is, in fact, still more ideal than sight” (qtd. in Derrida 100). And Emmanuel Levinas, an anti-

Hegelian who champions the ethical, not the ideal, also elevates sound over sight: “the glance by itself, contrary to what one may be led to believe, does not respect the other.... This is why Levinas places sound above light” (Derrida 99).

7. I am indebted to Doug Day for calling this idea to my attention.

8. Gordon Pradl pointed out in his review of this article that Louise Rosenblatt introduced a method of reading that closely resembles what I am calling listening in that her method also works to preserve the ideas of others within one’s interpretation.

9. Their cross-cultural listening may be further complicated by the animosity between their cultures. Scholars disagree about the date of the book of *Ruth*, a disagreement that has implications for the degree of animosity existing between the Judeans and the Moabites: As the *New English Bible* notes: Some scholars consider *Ruth* a postexilic literary creation, though perhaps based on an older tale; on this view, it was intended to counteract the harsh decrees of Ezra and Nehemiah against foreign wives (Ezra 10. 1–5; Neh. 13. 23–27). Other scholars, however, date it much earlier, during the reigns of the first kings of Judah, before bitter enmity toward Moab had developed....” (277)

10. For a brief history of the term *understanding* in narrative studies from Brooks and Warren to the mid-1990’s, see Phelan and Rabinowitz (5–11). For an accounting of the relationship between *understanding* and *interpretation* in classical hermeneutics, see Bleicher (11–26) and Bruns (21–138). My use of *standing under* does not reflect the foundational meanings that Kenneth Burke ascribes to John Locke’s use of the Greek term *hypostasis*, which means, “literally, a standing under”: Hence anything set under, such as stand, base, bottom, prop, support, stay; hence metaphorically, that which lies at the bottom of a thing, as the groundwork, subject-matter, argument of a narrative, speech, poem; a starting point, a beginning. And then come the metaphysical meanings...: Subsistence, reality, real being (as applied to mere appearance), nature, essence” (*Grammar* 23). Standing under implies a place, a location, a standpoint for listening.

11. In our current theoretical milieu, *other* is a loaded term. For example, in her feminist critique of Lacanian theory, Elizabeth Grosz describes the *other/Other* as follows: for Lacan,

the "other is the object through whom desire is returned to the subject; the Other is the locus of signification which regulates the movement by which this return is made possible" (80). In other words, "the Other is not a person but a place, the locus of law, language, and the symbolic" (67). As such, it "is understood here in two senses: as a socio-symbolic network regulated according to language-like rules; and as a psychical structure, representative of this social Other, internalized in the form of the unconscious" (117). As I use the term *other*, I am invoking Lacan's small "o" other, specifically as a person other than the listening subject or as the listening subject listening to itself. My goal for listening is an intersubjectivity, not a continued subject/object relationship.

12. For a discussion of how autobiography and ethnography may merge to create a strategy of autoethnography, see Watson, who argues that women may learn to articulate their own stories if they learn to read their bodies as culturally inscribed texts; also see Clough and Deck.

13. For other arguments on why whiteness needs to be articulated in our culture, see Fishkin, Davy, Dyson, Hill, Ignatiev, hooks ("Representations"), and Morrison (*Playing*).

14. For excellent discussions of how authorization and privilege (or lack thereof) function in academic discourse and how their consequences play out, see Roof and Weigman's collection, which explores the question that is also their title: *Who Can Speak?*

15. Marshall Gregory describes scholarly debate as warfare: "So much critical discourse in the humanities—at least since the contemporary culture wars began about twenty years ago—is conducted in a scorched-earth, take-no-prisoners tone that at first irritates, then pains, and eventually numbs everyone's professional nerves, leaving the main combatants (and many of the

rest of us as well) worn out with struggle and wondering if internecine warfare is really what we meant to sign up for when we enthusiastically and jauntily set out for graduate school years ago" (89).

16. What constitutes a "white" body and a "non-white" body changes over time and place as demonstrated in Ignatiev's *How the Irish Became White*.

17. Audre Lorde calls such a cultural norm a "mythical norm" and defines it as "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, and financially secure" ("Age, Race" 116).

18. Karen LeFevre cites four categories of invention: (1) a private apprehension of truth, based on Platonic theory; (2) an internal dialogue of selves, based on Freudian theory; (3) a group of people's collaborative construction of truth, based on George Herbert Mead's theory; and (4) a collective analysis of how cultural codes socialize people's behaviors and attitudes, based on Émile Durkheim's theory (48–50). Like LeFevre's categories of collaborative and collective invention, rhetorical listening is concerned with how people construct meanings as well as with how cultural codes socialize people and how people both employ and change these codes to negotiate with one another. Like classical and neo-classical invention, rhetorical listening asks questions of texts; it also asks questions of the cultural logics within which these texts exist. Like postmodern invention, rhetorical listening searches for the gaps, the omissions, the unknowns, the contradictions, the questions not in order to reconcile them but in order to imagine where they may lead. Like a cultural studies invention, rhetorical listening also locates interpretation within particular moments and places to demonstrate how time and place affect interpretation. And given my particular interest, rhetorical listening may be employed as a feminist invention process to expose how gender intertwines with ethnicity and other cultural categories.

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