

## Climategate and Other Controversies

We have seen that films and artworks are a significant path along which climate change activists attempt to arrive at public visibility. These are deliberately articulated attempts to stoke the fires of the social drama and to inject passion into what activists fear is perceived as a dull issue. Yet perhaps the most important and direct route of transition from background noise to the center of the social attention space is through the circuits of “news” production and consumption. A capacity to be newsworthy is of the utmost importance along many dimensions. Simply being selected out for news coverage marks climate change as a significant issue worthy of priority relative to the panoply of problems every society faces. Whether critical or benign, talk about climate change in a “news” forum gives an implicit ranking to this ecological problem, making it visible as a public issue. It is also significant to note that the news reaches a numerically large and socially dispersed audience. Films and artworks appeal to limited social constituencies. As we have seen, even within those constituencies, only a small proportion of people will find the time or energy (or in some cases have the basic social competence?) to thoughtfully engage with such creative products. By contrast, exposure to whatever is in the news is somewhat nonelective and is robotically embedded in daily routines – reading the paper on the train, listening to the radio on the drive to work, checking out CNN, the BBC, or Democracy Now! online during the lunch break, and so forth. In addition, the field of “news” tends to reach over social barriers. To a substantial extent, the same “important” or “newsworthy” events are carried in highbrow and lowbrow formats, on radio, television, print, and the Internet. A final plus to getting into the news is that coverage is cost free. Considered in terms of advertising

dollars, any news attention given over to climate change is an immense potential boon for climate activism.

So the news sounds like a golden opportunity: it is inescapable, free, consumed promiscuously, and confers the status that comes with visibility. That said, climate change’s appearance in this paramount sphere of social drama has often been unfortunate, problematic, or mismanaged. Media and communication scholars have identified a wide variety of reasons for this troubled entry into the public sphere (e.g., Lewis and Boyce 2009; Eide et al. 2010; Lester and Hutchins 2013), but they have tended to miss the scripted, ritualized quality of the process, relying instead on the rubric of static cultural “frames.” If we switch to the analytical lens of cultural performance, we see that when climate change appears within the frames of “scandal,” “outrage,” and “blunder,” it is because basic structural elements of successful social drama – especially the emotional identification of audience with performer – are missing. As a result, most of the stories “with legs” have jumped the track that runs toward a possibility of romantic solidarity. We explore some examples of such dramatic derailing in this chapter, arguing that making it into the news can often be a curse rather than a blessing.

Activists often wish this were not the case and insist that more attention should be given to facts than to moral and personal failings. Why is climate science so unappealing to the news media? There are, in fact, frequent reports of new scientific findings about global temperatures, melt rates, the extent of sea ice, carbon sequestering estimates, and so forth. Often culled from the prestigious journals *Science* and *Nature* and reduced to three or four paragraphs, these rarely survive more than one or two news cycles. Even IPCC assessment reports suffer a similar fate. In part this is because there is generally not much to say once the finding has been reported and aligned with other estimates of the speed of climate change. Scientific advances on climate change make for “bad news” so far as the news desk is concerned. A core component of news is surprise. But for the most part, any new scientific finding will confirm what is already known: climate change is happening – or, if you are a skeptic, scientists “still believe” climate change is happening. Often there is a rider – the change is happening “faster than expected” or “ahead of schedule.” This too is becoming too familiar to be interesting.

Possibly the cultural tide is against science here. In his cross-national comparative study, Gabriel Ignatow (2007, 116) shows that “modern environmentalism was scientific from the start, and early on developed a scientific and universalizing vocabulary.” Put another way,

notwithstanding the enduring power of romanticism, there was also an unreflexive and uncritical belief in the power of the scientific worldview. Times have changed. So-called postmodern environmentalisms place greater emphasis on religious, nationalist, personal, and aesthetic themes than on data and measurement. Faith in reason is less central to decision making today. We can add that more proximate institutional factors also weight the dice: it does not help that stories on basic science are amazingly resistant to emplotment within conventional news genres that emphasize discord and contestation within the context of an "event" (Schudson 2007). Ironically enough given the theoretical approach we take in this book, the most powerful and sustained news events (a strike, a war, an election, a trial) offer an unfolding tableau of characters, performances, struggles, strategies, and outcomes that more easily comport to the expected contours of a social drama than climate change. Each drama moves toward a resolution (a pay rise, an invasion, a victory, a verdict) that is unknown until after history has unfolded. We follow the news to find out what happens next, or in the case of disasters and accidents, in a forensic way to see how what happened came to have happened. As Simon Cottle (2013) points out, natural disasters hold synergies with this template. They are unexpected "events" involving victims, suffering, struggle, triumph, and so forth and are amenable to representation through mediated rituals that give birth to solidaristic and cosmopolitan moments. Not so climate change. By contrast with compelling news items that have formal similarities to a drama or detective story, a conventional scientific finding on climate change does not provide what the literary theorist Roland Barthes (1975) called the "pleasure of the text" – the sense of emotionally engaged and titillating suspense that attends to tracking something toward its denouement. In a science report, there are no developed characters to love or hate, no moral loadings to project – and we never get to the end of it. This is why scientific findings on climate change are boring, at least to most people. It is also why activists try so hard to link stories about climate science to those traumatic, unpredictable events of which Cottle speaks – droughts, wildfires, floods, and so on. Even when a shallow victory is attained, it usually does not amount to an unequivocal step forward.

Norms of public reason sometimes make things worse. As Max and Jules Boykoff (2004; see also Boykoff and Boykoff 2007) have shown, the long-standing practice of giving equal time to skeptical viewpoints and exaggerating disagreement (in part due to journalistic norms of "impartiality") has helped distort public understanding of what the vast

majority of scientists actually think about climate change. Polls still show that Americans believe the issue to be much more hotly contested than it actually is. In the United Kingdom, despite increasingly sophisticated media coverage emphasizing scientific consensus, many people still believed the basic science was up for debate as recently as 2007, when the IPCC reported that the evidence of global warming was "unequivocal" (Butler and Pidgeon 2009). So to report a "scientific controversy" over climate change is to destabilize a core message: climate change is a "fact," not a "theory" that is disputed. This puts climate scientists and activists in a very difficult spot. Without drama, they cannot get the public to care; with it, they risk making climate change seem like just another end-less struggle between special interests – the fallout being a descent into metadrama and a detached spectatorship position for the public as they watch the spokespersons slug it out. Moreover, drama is associated with the manipulation of emotion and the subversion of reason. To reduce risks of symbolic pollution, scientists stick to a dry delivery.

So climate change makes it to the news briefly as science, problematically as drama. In the latter case, the focus switches to events (conferences, conferences), people (activists, politicians, occasionally scientists), motivations (honest, sneaky, civil, incivil), and the relationship between these, not to "findings" about nature itself. There is often a further meta-narration that goes with each such episode. This concerns the controversial event's implications for wider struggles over climate change opinion, its impact on strategy and impression management. This is commentary on the metadrama. For the most part, climate change activism has performed badly in this complex environment, with the news essentially reproducing what Northrop Frye (1976, 97–126) called "themes of descent." These stories involve the status degradation of protagonists and the loss of *pathos*. There is an erosion of the social, with emphasis given over to fatalistic coverage of failed campaigns, futile attempts at cooperation, defective institutions, and problematic judgments. As we outlined in Chapter 3, this pattern corresponds to the Aristotelian mode of tragedy in which humans are feeble or misguided. Even when they have good intentions, fate is stronger than they are. The tragic is a genre that sucks energy and motivation from a social movement (Jacobs and Smith 1997).

This is why an increasing number of environmentalists are calling for more positive news stories. They suggest that a romantic struggle for social justice (Hulme 2009), green energy (Nordhaus and Shellenberger 2007), or local autonomy (McKibben 2010) should be promoted to the

media in place of the tragic model. Here again the struggle will be harder than it first appears. As Garret Hardin's (1968) famous parable of "the commons" illustrates, the cultural logic of tragedy is deeply ingrained in the American environmental imagination. Environmentalists must fight the default conviction that we live in an irredeemably polluted world (Buell 2003; Szasz 2009). Using science to combat this environmental fatalism is both necessary and fraught with difficulty. As the historian Stephen Bocking (2004, 30) notes, "controversies . . . cast a harsh, unflattering light on scientific knowledge. Uncertainty is viewed as inadequacy, interpretation as mere opinion, lack of consensus as evidence that science cannot yet justify any action." Indeed, some of the most effective environmental communicators – Rachel Carson and Lois Gibbs come to mind – have used this vulnerability to their advantage, casting themselves as insurgent critics of the "cult of expertise." Speaking on behalf of ecological common sense and the precautionary principle, they challenged the hegemony of men in white lab coats who assured us that everything was understood and under control. Environmental science, at its most dramatic and compelling, has often fought *against* consensus, not for it. In the case of climate change, it does not help that only a small number of scientists truly understand the computer models on which the entire edifice of contemporary climate knowledge rests. As the historian Paul Edwards (2010) shows, the public perception that models are arcane and "unreal," involving subjectively cherry-picked estimators, has been used effectively to claim that projections of dangerous climate change are not grounded in "hard," empirically verifiable data. Climate scientists are thus easily forced into the same dramatic role as hedge fund managers, political consultants, and advertising executives – elite practitioners of a voodoo-like predictive "black art," thus enemies of "sound science" and transparent common sense.

The hope that "positive" science can provide the basis for a narrative shift in climate news reporting must also endure a further reality check. This lies in internal differentiation within the climate community. Scientists and "science" are not the only source for stories. Activists, government bodies, and others are also caught up in the news cycle. What little space is available for climate news might be taken up by distractions coming out of left field. Newsworthy scientific activity and opinion are replaced by newsworthy events emerging from other sources. In recent years, controversial advertising campaigns stand out as a major competitor. Here the focus is not on science – whether good or bad, optimistic or fatalistic – but rather on matters of taste, civics, and character. The news

genre of the "scandal" takes over, with a normative breach reported and its implications assessed. Information as such becomes irrelevant. *Motivation* is everything.

The long and the short of it in this chapter will be as follows. News values that focus on normative breaches tend to assure that both the "science" story and the "PR campaign" story often result in damage to *ethos* and losing a character war. To understand this deeper rhetorical failure, we must look to the second leg of Aristotle's rhetorical tripod, *pathos*. As Eugene Garver (1994) argues, *ethos* and *pathos* exist in a relationship of close interdependence. Recall Aristotle's admonition in the *Rhetoric* that "it adds much to an orator's influence that his own character should look right and that he should be thought to entertain the right feelings towards his hearers; and also that his hearers themselves should be in the right frame of mind" (2.1.1.378a). In other words, how a speaker is thought to *feel* – both about his subject and about his audience – matters a lot. To win their trust, he must seem, not only reasonable and intelligent, but also made of the right emotional stuff: amiable, generous, empathetic, kind. According to Garver, it is hard to overstate the importance of this emotional attunement in building *ethos*. "The *Rhetoric*," he asserts (Garver 1994, 108), "is about civic emotions." That is to say, it is about the emotions proper to citizens, and thus about the emotional basis of civic life.

For Aristotle, shared emotions are an essential ingredient of deliberative rationality (Garver 1994, 104–38). When reason does not lead to an obvious conclusion, emotion fills the gap. Indeed, as Garver stresses, judging and deliberating are impossible without passion. "*Pathos* is not an accessory to argument, but a part of it" (Garver 1994, 110). Moreover, without practical knowledge of the passions, an orator cannot generate *eunoia*, or goodwill. "The speaker shows himself to be trustworthy . . . when he shares pleasures and pains, and so expectations and evaluations, with his audience. The emotions, then, are part of the art of rhetoric because understanding them provides the speaker with ways of exhibiting *eunoia*, in that they enable him, and deliberators and judges in the audience, to apprehend the relevant particulars for sound ethical decision and *phronesis*" (111). In ancient Greek terms, the emotional faculty that makes *eunoia* possible is *thymos* (also often spelled *thymos*), or "spiritedness," which Garver defines as that which makes us angry toward enemies and welcoming toward friends (113). (A colleague in classics defined it more colorfully as "umph.") *Thymos* is the quintessential political emotion. It was famously criticized by Francis Fukuyama

(1992) as the atavistic or “tribal” desire for recognition, a feeling that emerges from the inflated value that one places on one’s self and one’s group in relation to outsiders. Closely linked to feelings of pride and indignation, for Fukuyama *thymos* “is something like an innate human sense of justice: people believe they have a certain worth, and when other people act as if they are worth less – when they do not *recognize* their worth at its correct value – then they become angry” (165). Following Aristotle in the direction of Durkheim’s late work on collective “effervescence,” we take a more constructive view of *thymos*. It does not degrade deliberative rationality but rather infuses it. Without the emotional glue it provides, social solidarity – and thus civic rationality – fall apart.

That said, within the cultural discourse of democratic civil society, *thymos* must always be carefully contained. Fanatical patriotism and territorial groupthink point to anticivil motives and undemocratic institutions. Especially when the future is fearful and uncertain, the orator must navigate treacherous emotional waters. She must evoke *thymos* without allowing it to overwhelm her performance. Understanding this balancing act is key to our Aristotelian theory of democratic social drama. For Aristotle, emotions do not simply operate in the background by guiding an audience toward particular conclusions. Like character, emotions are objects of knowledge *and* subjects of argument. To persuade an audience, a speaker must not just make her audience experience particular emotions; she must acknowledge the emotions proper to right-thinking, rational, even-keeled people. She must be able to demonstrate why some people can be trusted and why others cannot. Evoking the noble indignation of *thymos*, she must show who belongs at the center and who at the periphery. She must perform citizenship. We might think of this dimension of social drama as “emotional reflexivity.”

Again, Aristotle helps us understand just how this is done. In his famous discussion of emotions in Book 2 of the *Rhetoric*, he (2.4.1381a) argues that people are friendly toward people who are, among other things, just and self-controlled. They are friendly also toward those who are “good-tempered, and those who are not too ready to show us our mistakes, and those who are not cantankerous or quarrelsome” (2.4.1381a). We are also friendly toward “those who do not reproach us with what we have done amiss to them or they have done to help us, for both actions show a tendency to criticize us” (2.4.1381b). Conversely, we feel anger toward those who show contempt for things that we take seriously and toward those who take pleasure in others’ misfortune (2.2.1379b). Slightings, which Aristotle defines as “the actively entertained opinion

of something as obviously of no importance” (2.2.1378b), takes three main forms: contempt, spite, and insolence. “Clearly,” he writes, “the orator will have to speak so as to bring his hearers into a frame of mind that will dispose them to anger, and to represent his adversaries as open to such charges and possessed of such qualities as to make people angry” (2.2.1380a). In other words, to stir up anger toward an enemy, a speaker must depict that enemy as unjustly contemptuous of what her audience holds dear. At the same time, she herself must appear just and level headed. This is what performing the binaries of civil emotion is all about.

This is a tall order in environmental politics, where “the enemy,” as Pogo famously said, turns out to be “us.” How do you mobilize an audience to feel righteous anger toward itself? What kind of *ethos* do you project, and which genre do you use? Attempts to solve this puzzle are extremely risky. Consider an example from the United Kingdom that adopts an ironic stance and uses the conventions of satire to critique “us.” This became newsworthy for the wrong reasons. As Aristotle recognized, taking pleasure in others’ misfortune, especially when those others are “just like us,” is not a recipe for gaining trust.

#### 10:10 and Other Disasters

It is easy to blame the news establishment for not reporting climate change responsibly. Sometimes, however, the fault lies not in the stars but within ourselves. Perhaps the most dramatic example of a failure that did not need to happen was a 10:10 advertisement campaign that ran in the United Kingdom in fall 2010. The 10:10 organization started out in 2009. It seeks to have individuals and collectivities cut their carbon emissions by 10 percent in a year. This is understood to be a more practical and meaningful step than the long-term targets mandated by governments who will not be around long enough to have to make tough decisions. Individuals and organizations around the world have been asked to pledge. By and large, 10:10 has done well. It boasts some significant and high-status sign-ups. These include major corporations and organizations (e.g., Oxford University, Microsoft France), cities (e.g., Paris, Lille, Oslo), and sporting organizations (e.g., the French Tennis Federation, Tottenham Football Team). According to its professional website, more than one hundred thousand pledges had been made by the middle of 2011. With its manageable targets, social networking qualities, and widespread reach, 10:10 looks to be a success story. Still, everyone makes mistakes.

At the end of September 2010, 10:10 launched a major new advertising initiative: "No Pressure." The signs were propitious. The four ads were scripted by leading romantic comedy and satirical writer Richard Curtis (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Notting Hill*, *Blackadder*) and directed by highly regarded advertising expert Dougal Wilson. They featured attention-grabbing guest spots by noted and concerned sports and entertainment stars such as David Ginola and Peter Crouch (soccer), Gillian Anderson (actress, perhaps unfairly still best known for *The X-Files*), and a sound track by the somewhat intellectual rock band Radiohead. The flaw came with misplaced humor. At the end of each ad, the person who is not prepared to pledge to 10:10 is blown up; blood, clothing, and flesh are strewn about. The accompanying squelching sound suggests liquefied body parts falling to the ground. In one ad, a former Tottenham player, the talented David Ginola, learns about 10:10 from teammates at a training ground. They talk about low-energy floodlights, public transport options for fans, and so forth as being important to the club's 10:10 agenda. Ginola replies with disinterest and in a passive-aggressive way: "Whatever. I wouldn't do it. It seems like a distraction from football to me." A player replies cheerfully, "That's just fine, David. You don't have to join in. Just ignore it. No pressure." He then, like Wiley Coyote, presses a red button on a black box with attached wires, and Ginola explodes. Another commercial with Gillian Anderson has her doing a voice-over for a 10:10 commercial in a sound studio. At the end of the recording, the (male) sound engineer asks her what she is prepared to do herself to reduce her carbon footprint. She explains that she thought doing the voice-over was her contribution to the environment. "Right, absolutely, no pressure," replies the sound guy. He hits the red button, and a second later blood splatters all over the glass of the recording booth. Two other versions of the advertisement were made. A middle-aged male figure representing the affable face of contemporary management talks about 10:10 to his team. At the end of the ad, he blows up three employees who are lukewarm about implementing the 10:10 idea in their workplace. The most problematic advert featured two schoolchildren who failed to pledge like the rest of their class. They are blown up in front of their peers by a seemingly benign teacher. The other children look shocked as they are spattered with blood and flesh.

Reviewing the advertisements on YouTube, one can sense the comedic structure trying to get out. There is the shared visual catch of the box with the red button. There is an element of surrealism and disproportion rather as in a Monty Python sketch, as well as the gross humor of

South Park. Very importantly, those cool toward 10:10 are portrayed, not in a stereotyped way as evil, but simply as weak willed and apathetic. From an Aristotelian point of view, this is a smart move, as the potential audience for conversion retains *thymos*. Furthermore, there is an element of absurdity and self-parody in the contrast between the sociable atmosphere of each scene and the violent act that ends it. This is a light reminder, not a lecture. Still, the makers of 10:10 would have been well advised to remember Aristotle's remarks:

Your language will be *appropriate* if it expresses emotion and character, and if it corresponds to its subject. "Correspondence to subject" means that we must neither speak casually about weighty matters, nor solemnly about trivial ones. . . . This aptness of language is one thing that makes people believe in the truth of your story. (*Rhetoric*, 3.7.1408a)

Climate change is a serious business. Trying to make it something else was not a good idea. On the day of the launch, the *Guardian Online* seemingly bragged when it spoke of its exclusive scoop from its "friends at 10:10" (Carrington 2010). It acknowledged that the videos were "edgy." It quoted 10:10 founder Franny Armstrong quipping that "doing nothing about climate change is a common affliction," that such people were "threatening everybody's existence on this planet" before suggesting that "maybe a little amputating would be a good place to start." No doubt she thought she was being humorous. Within a few hours of this announcement, the video had been taken down from the *Guardian*, 10:10, and YouTube websites (it can still be found posted by other users, generally climate skeptics), and 10:10 was issuing apologies. What had been interpreted as "funny" by 10:10 and the producers of the short films (one imagines due to some sort of writing room groupthink) was being seen in a very different way by many members of the public. In a 6:00 p.m. update posted below the "scoop" article we find a statement from 10:10. Franny Armstrong explains here, "We wanted to find a way to bring this issue back to the headlines while making people laugh." In other words, a risky strategy had been chosen to get into the attention space. She said that many had indeed found the videos funny, but "unfortunately some didn't." Now she wished to "sincerely apologize to anybody we have offended." Climate change was in the headlines for the wrong reason. In attempting not to offend the apathetic "we" that was its target it had ended up offending many. The protagonists who were punished in the ads seemed undeserving, and *pathos* was lost. Who now would want to be like these self-important, self-satisfied, out-of-touch creative types

from Notting Hill and Moseley? Now we had a social drama, and so themes of morality, culpability, and character came into play that made No Pressure newsworthy.

Reading through posts under the article at the *Guardian*, it is hard to see initially where the problem lies. There are some positives. For example, in contrast to weak interest in climate change art, we documented in the previous chapter, by October 3, there had been 884 responses by *Guardian* readers. Some wrote that they found the film funny or even hysterical. Others were concerned in an instrumental vein that it would be interpreted the wrong way: it seemed authoritarian, to patronize skeptics, and would in the end help sustain their prejudiced views about environmentalists as ecoterrorists. Some saw the film as embarrassing and as a propaganda "own-goal." Only a minority, although a substantial one, identified what was to emerge as the major problem for the wider community: the film was offensive and chilling. It featured decent people (including women and children) in everyday situations being suddenly blown up in frighteningly real detail.

Fears of an own-goal were well placed. Sponsoring corporations and charities rushed to distance themselves from the product. As we have already noted, the video was pulled only to pop up again on sites associated with climate and ecoskepticism as smoking-gun evidence of evil intent. Interest continued. A column on the debacle by the conservative *Daily Telegraph's* provocative climate skeptic James Delingpole (2010) was much referred to in the general media and Internet chatter. On top of this, it received an amazing 1,541 posted comments direct from the public. According to Delingpole, the environmentalist video "revealed the snarling, wicked, homicidal misanthropy beneath its cloak of gentle, bunny-hugging righteousness." His readers – confirming the fears of *Guardian* bloggers – eagerly agreed in posts below his provocative op-ed. The video seemed to be advocating extreme violence: "They make videos advocating blowing up our children for not believing in their scam and they accuse us of unfounded paranoia. Unbelievablybelievable!" (Cartwheel). We might expect this sort of response from the *Telegraph's* famously older, male, and conservative readers. It is notable, however, that over at the profession-oriented *Marketing Week*, bloggers also tapped the eerie resonance with real-world terrorism. "Yeah, really funny. Blowing up people that don't agree with your politically motivated ideas. I guess I've been missing the 'dark humor' of the Taliban and Al Qaida all this time" (Lance). Or perhaps thoughts of Nazism were triggered: "It is pure fascism. Just replace the dissenters with Jews, gypsies and the

disabled to understand the real message" (Kenny). More simply, the problem could be stepping beyond the bounds of decency: "It's as simple as this: you produced a film that showed 2 young children being blown up" (Parolalista).

Because climate activists were unwilling to step forward to defend the videos (perhaps believing in the maxim "least said soonest mended"), climate skeptics had control of the space of opinion to present their version of events. For example, in the United States, the Fox News (2010) television channel ran a feature on the "violent climate change video." After mentioning with indignation that 10:10 did not want to come onto Fox to defend the video, the daytime anchor Megyn Kelly performed visible outrage as she turned to climate skeptic Marc Morano of Climatetopot.com. "The global warming fear promoters are in desperation right now," he tells her, noting the failure of President Obama, the United Nations, and others to carry the torch. "Their idea to get attention was to blow up schoolchildren in as gory and disgusting a manner as possible," he continued. The anchor asks a leading question: would this video perhaps inspire some deranged individual to commit acts of violence in the name of climate change? Morano, as one might expect, endorses this fear (Fox News 2010). Climate activists were equally unhappy at 10:10. Bill McKibben of 350.org lashed out: "It's the kind of stupidity that hurts our side, reinforcing in people's minds a series of preconceived notions, not to mention off the wall" (quoted in Kaufman 2010). After a couple of days, it was clear that more damage control was needed. The initial apology by Franny Armstrong (mentioned earlier) was problematic as a public performance. It appeared to be blaming those who did not find the video funny for not finding it so. In addition, it had a flip, "whatever" feel to it. "We live and learn," Armstrong had said. The writer Richard Curtis had himself offered an explanation rather than an apology in a statement. Rather than "simply drift into disaster," it was worth the risk of "trying to write something unexpected" (McVeigh 2010). A further attempt at damage control came on October 4. Yet even this apology by 10:10 UK Director Eugenie Harvey was problematic. It seemed like a memo that was directed not toward the general public but rather to the internal solidaristic needs of the 10:10 community: employees, stakeholders, and sponsors. The backlash against the campaign, it said, had been a damaging distraction, and improved processes would be put in place within the organization to prevent this sort of mistake from happening again (Harvey 2010). We are uncomfortably reminded of the much-criticized

pseudo-apology of cyclist Lance Armstrong in an interview with Oprah Winfrey. Rather than expressing humble regret to his fans and the general public for years of arrogant deception about drug cheating, and also for bullying his accusers (what everybody actually wanted to hear), he often chose to focus on offering contexts and explanations for past actions. He admitted to various harmful deeds but seemed to find it difficult actually to use the word 'sorry' (see Kador 2013). Here was a man who had not truly learned his lesson: it was evident that he just didn't get it.

A comparative case suggests that shock videos will always have a hard time once they become caught up in the news cycle. They tend to be seen as emotionally manipulative and hectoring, or as appealing to irrational fears or to the subconscious rather than critical thought. Consider the case of Plane Stupid. This organization campaigns against air travel on environmental grounds. Short-haul flights associated with low-cost airlines come in for special critique given that functional alternatives (bus, train) exist (or might come to exist with a little political will) and that such aviation crowds the skies. Their controversial November 2009 advert featured a deserted business district with skyscrapers. It might be 5:00 A.M. There is the sound of a whining jet engine. Blobs appear falling from the sky. These become recognizable as polar bears. They thud and bounce off the buildings and eventually splat on the pavement. A voice-over explains that each short-haul flight generates four hundred kilograms of carbon, which is the weight of a polar bear.

Although it gained news attention, as with the 10:10 campaign, all the attention was about the merits of the advertising campaign and the motivations of the people who produced it. In short, *the social drama of climate change was newsworthy; climate change was not*. Worse, the step to metadramatic analysis was made. This involved making sense of the ad campaign by foregrounding the larger battle over climate change as a context for the interpretation of this one item. This is another example of "derailing" that we also saw in the case of responses to climate change art. Evaluation took place, but largely with regard to the following sorts of issues. Was the campaign effective? Was it in good taste? Did the ad make sense? Would shock tactics work? What did this reveal about the desperation of the anti-global warming activists? In this case the answer to the questions was generally no, no, no, no, and yes, they are getting desperate. For what it is worth, the ad was also widely interpreted in negative ways as "ridiculous," as "plain stupid," or as "propaganda" because it manipulated emotions through sentimentality (e.g., see Gillespie 2009 and

subsequent posted comments). Like 10:10's No Pressure, the campaign became a news event but did not lead to much by way of productive discussion on the issue of short-haul air travel. Instead, a distracting set of commentaries on persuasion and good taste took over.

Even before Plane Stupid's falling bears, this discursive pattern had been visible with the response to the so-called drowning puppy video produced by the United Kingdom's Department of Energy and Climate Change. Here a father is reading a bedtime story to his young daughter that turns out to be about climate change. The story turns dark as it cuts to watercolor illustrations from the children's book: a puppy seemingly drowns, a kitten is marooned on a kitchen table, and a rabbit cries in the desert. The ad had been aimed at adults, allegedly prompted by a survey showing that most people felt that climate change would not impact on them personally. Presumably the intent was to generate some guilt about intergenerational impacts. Still protests immediately eventuated to the watchdog advertising standards authority claiming that the advert was terrifying children and that this was a totalitarian attempt at brainwashing innocents (Revoir 2009).

What is the story here? It would seem that advertising campaigns can indeed leverage climate change into the news pages, web pages, and broadcasts. These provide the increased visibility and free publicity that climate change activism so desperately seeks. Yet the circumstances under which this takes place are suboptimal. The story is essentially a drama of deviance, not of policy, nor climate science, nor planetary survival. The reported consensus is that organizations and individuals committed to climate change have made a mistake, gone too far, exposed their problematic inner thoughts, violated acceptable social norms. Commentary identifies and accounts for this deviance. Climate change and the policy needed to deal with this challenge are no longer the talking point. Rather, as our theory has predicted in this book from the start, it is the background against which a compelling and more human drama plays out.

#### Climategate: Trust, Tribalism, and Anticivil Science

The 10:10 disaster was indeed an own-goal. It was also an instructive one. Like Plane Stupid and the Drowning Puppy, it illustrates the rhetorical risks involved in making "us" a problem as well as an audience. It got into the news, but for all the wrong reasons. Questions were asked

about motivations and rationality of environmental activists, about their civility and their basic social competence. Questions were not asked about climate policy. Still the damage was limited. Once the videos were pulled and a mistake clumsily admitted, the furor rapidly died out. Far more problematic as an enduring news event was the Climategate scandal. This went to the heart of the matter by suggesting that the science of climate change was itself bogus. Like 10.10, Climategate hinged on questions of emotion and character. At the end of the day, it was not the science itself that created a crisis of trust but the perceived motivations of climate scientists.<sup>1</sup>

The figure of the scientist is one with peculiar iconic power in contemporary culture. At the far end of the scale, as Roland Barthes (1972) shows, are mythologized figures like Albert Einstein. Vastly superior to us in intellect, they have God-like capacities to understand the mysteries of the universe and the consequent right to pronounce on existential and moral issues. Although few scientists can hold this aura of intense sanctity, most can lay claim to a more diffuse consecration. Like priests and doctors, research scientists are ethical beings who float a little above the contamination of everyday life. They gain prestige and authority from their representation as ascetic and disinterested truth seekers. Those working in academic settings are deemed to have turned down large salaries and worldly gains in the search for knowledge. They are monklike figures whose social authority comes from their unworldly study of the world, their capacity to speak truth to power. A reminder of the leverage this subject position can give came in the wake of the 2003 War in Iraq. The British prime minister Tony Blair had made a case for war based on a published dossier of intelligence concerning Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction. Leaks to the media from the Ministry of Defense scientist Dr. David Kelly caused the accuracy of the dossier to be questioned. Dr. Kelly's name was itself leaked (seemingly in revenge), and he was later found dead. News reports of this tragic event represented Kelly as a man who was compelled to tell the truth owing to a sacred

<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, those who study the social dimensions of climate change have taken great interest in Climategate. For an exhaustive journalistic account, see Fred Pearce's (2010) *The Climate Files*; for surveys of the academic literature, see Grundmann (2012a, 2012b). Although a number of scholars have focused on the critical dimensions of character and credibility (e.g., Grundmann 2012b; Jasanoff 2010; Wynne 2010), they have looked at the event in the narrow context of scientific practice and communication. They have missed how climate skeptics used Climategate to change the broader trajectory of the social drama by renarrating climate change.

sense of duty. He had been pressured toward suicide by insidious political forces and by exposure to impurities of the mundane, partisan world. In this case the identity of "scientist" was relentlessly applied to Kelly as a badge that testified to his honorable nature. He was a quiet man who wished only to serve his country. Standing by facts was in his very nature. By contrast, the politicians and spin doctors of Blair's government were seen as a secretive camarilla. They had manipulated data and had hung scientist Kelly out to dry by feeding his identity to the press (see Smith 2005, 191). For climate activists the saintly qualities of such a free-floating, truth-speaking, socially detached "scientist" subject position are a great potential resource in that they make space for this kind of binary discourse that would separate truth from politics. Somehow it has never quite stuck, and Climategate was to remove the card from the deck.

The origin of Climategate lies in the still mysterious hacking of e-mail files, documents, and a source code in November 2009 at the Climate Research Unit (CRU) at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom. Extracts soon appeared on the Internet, where climate skeptics claimed they had found smoking-gun evidence of scientific fraud at one of the leading global centers for climate change research. The East Anglia scientists seemed to be talking about how to massage their data, cover anomalies, silence critics, and explain away embarrassing evidence that contradicted their theories. Certain quotes from the e-mails became sound bites for skeptics globally, such as the celebrity-politician Sarah Palin, and Senator Jim Inhofe in the United States. "The fact is that we can't account for the lack of warming at the moment and it is a travesty that we can't," wrote one scientist. Another e-mail spoke of a "trick" needed to "hide" a decline in temperatures. Several e-mails showed that the scientists were unwilling to share their data with climate-skeptic researchers who had made Freedom of Information Act requests. The e-mails mentioned boycotting a refereed journal that had published climate-skeptical research, trying to "contain" the outlying impact of the medieval warm period, deleting certain e-mails before a Freedom of Information Act request made them available, and being tempted to "beat the crap" out of the skeptic Pat Michaels.

Subsequent independent inquiries showed that reasonable explanations could be found for most of these backstage comments. For example, the "trick" was about a narrow technical issue to do with the statistical alignment and effective presentation of data rather than an outright deceit. There were no smoking guns that demonstrated concerted scientific fraud on an unprecedented scale, nor the hiding of data, although



the e-mails did show the scientists being “rude or dismissive,” according to Factcheck.org (Henig 2009). Indeed, no less than six independent commissions were established in the United Kingdom and United States to investigate the affair, all of which concluded that the scientists had not committed fraud or scientific misconduct – although one, invoking the Mertonian ethos, identified “a consistent pattern of failing to display the proper degree of openness.”<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, certain words had been used and the damage was done. Climate skeptics easily steered the media and the public toward biased, sensationalistic coverage of the hacking scandal, exploiting “old” media’s increasing reliance on outlets like the Drudge Report (Cox 2013). Whereas 10:10 gives the impression of climate activists who are either out of touch with the mainstream, desperate for attention, or expressing violent neoterrorist fantasies, here a different set of negative images came into view. Backstage communication, when made public, gives the sense of a cabal. This in turn allows the discourse of civil society to mobilize established tropes about conspiracy. Like President Nixon and his so-called plumbers at the time of Watergate, the climate scientists looked like a secretive, paranoid, and mean-spirited group engaging in deviant activities for their own advantage. Moreover, it appeared that the hard data that were supposed to document the irrefutable reality of climate change looked somewhat soft in crucial places. Data analytic choices that were invisible in published research were moved to the front of the stage once public scrutiny demanded accountability. The grand narrative of climate change seemed to be determining how climate sequences were reconstructed from raw data – rather than the reverse. In a telling choice of words, the centrist skeptic Roger Pielke (2009) described “the trick” not as fraud but as scientists “stage managing their presentation of climate science for the greatest possible effect.” The mainstream scientific community organized to try to combat the damage. Public statements from the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Meteorological Society, and other scientific bodies attested to the reality of climate change and the validity of the scientific knowledge base. At the same time, the researchers and scientists at the center of the scandal – Phil Jones, Keith Briffa, and Michael Mann – were portrayed by their supporters as scientific martyrs.

If 10:10 and Plane Stupid illustrate bad offense, Climategate shows us what bad defense looks like. For weeks after the hacking, climate

scientists and environmentalists seemed helpless against the critical onslaught. Although the story never became a major scandal in the United States, it fed a wave of deepening skepticism about climate change. Surveys by Anthony Leiserowitz and his colleagues found that 29 percent of Americans were aware of the story, and 25 percent claimed to have followed it in the news. Within this quarter of the population, 47 percent said the story had made them somewhat or much more certain that “global warming is not happening,” and 53 percent said it had caused them to have somewhat less (24 percent) or much less (29 percent) trust in climate scientists. “Thus, in total, approximately 6 weeks after the story first broke, nearly 13% of American adults said that the event made them more certain that global warming is not happening, and reduced their trust in climate scientists” (Maibach et al. 2012, 290). Given the dismally small number of Americans who pay attention to science reporting, this number seems quite significant, especially when we consider that subsequent surveys showed that self-identified Tea Party members – that is, the people most likely to turn out to vote, to discuss the issue on talk radio or in the comments section of newspaper websites – were far more likely than other groups to know about the fiasco, alongside weathercasters and TV news directors (Maibach et al. 2012). Even so, survey data cannot show the real cultural impact of a story such as this. It is not simply that Climategate made conservative Americans even more skeptical about climate science. It became part of the social drama, a scene or episode that “everyone knows.” All sides, skeptics and true believers, must now include it in their narration of global warming.

On its surface, Climategate was all about data integrity. But it was really a character war. It was a struggle to define the *ethos* of a handful of climatologists who became in effect metonymic proxies for the IPCC, climate science, and global environmentalism more generally. If we examine how these scientists and their accusers were depicted in what Jacobs and Townsley (2011) call “the space of opinion” during the weeks and months following the e-mails’ publication, we see two narratives vying for dominance.<sup>3</sup> The first of these itself appeared in two versions, one for

<sup>3</sup> Jacobs and Townsley (2011, 13) define the space of opinion as “that part of the public communicative infrastructure in which the elites of our huge, complex societies debate matters of common concern.” Born of journalism but not confined to it, the space of opinion exists at the overlapping border of several cultural fields: media, think tanks and advocacy groups, and academia. Yet its original and still-archetypal home is the newspaper opinion page, which is what we focus on here. Although editorials, op-eds, and letters to the editor form one small piece of today’s complex opinion space, they still

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.eccc-review.org/>.

right-wing audiences and another for centrists. In conservative and especially evangelical circles, the scientists were depicted as "high priests" of a millennial cult and apostles of a Green World Order. In the mainstream press, they were depicted as a greedy and tribalistic faction of scientific thugs, more gangsters than fanatics. These tropes of cultishness and criminality often shaded into each other. Defenders, meanwhile, attempted to derail the skeptics' melodrama with a low-mimetic tale of academic backbiting and professional rivalry. *Scientists are only human*, they said, *but the science is still inassailable*. Yet this story seemed to fall on deaf ears. Only when they began to turn the tables on the skeptics by portraying them as the Grand Inquisitors of climate science did they gain rhetorical traction.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. To first understand how the American skeptical community made its characterizations stick, we need a more detailed accounting of the semiotic codes in its arsenal. Two tropes did the most work: cultishness and corruption. Let's start with cultishness first.

Christian conservatives have long portrayed environmentalism as a doomsday cult (Buell 2003, 18-21; Taylor and Globus 2011), and Climategate presented a perfect opportunity to make this portrayal stick. As linguist Brigitte Nerlich (2010) shows, religious metaphors suffused commentary on Climategate in the skeptical blogosphere. They also appeared prominently in the right-wing press. The most outspoken exponent in the United States was the *Washington Times*, which published a steady stream of articles and editorials on Climategate, far more than any other American newspaper.<sup>4</sup> In a series of ferocious editorials, it blasted the "global warming theocracy" and the "doomsaying" of "climate theology's leading high priests" (*Washington Times* 2009a, 2009b, 2009c). These epithets were clearly intended to resonate with an established narrative emanating from the Christian Right, which painted environmentalism (and environmental science) as a neopagan cult bent on world domination. In an interview on Climategate with the *Dallas Morning News*

occupy a privileged position as the place where intellectual elites and experts speak to the public. They are an important (if slightly dusty) stage for the social drama of climate change.

<sup>4</sup> A search of major world publications for the term "Climategate" on LexisNexis got 1,290 hits (August 9, 2012), 701 in the United States. The papers with the greatest number of hits were the *Canadian National Post* (146), the *Australian* (107), and the *Washington Times* (104). Next on the list were the *Financial Times of London* with fifty-four references and the *Guardian* with forty-nine. By contrast, it appeared in the *New York Times* a mere seventeen times.

(2009), Senator Jim Inhofe, the government's most outspoken climate denier, alluded darkly to the United Nation's role in perpetuating the "hoax" of global warming and pointed to "far-left environmentalists" infiltrating America's churches (a reference to the so-called Creation Care movement). "I think what's happening is what we see in Romans 1:25," Inhofe said, "the idea that there would be people who 'changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator.'" For evangelicals, this was a key scriptural reference, often invoked by anti-environmental groups like the Cornwall Alliance to represent the rise of climate science as a sign of the end times (Barkun 2003; Boyer 1992; Kearns 2011; McCammack 2007). In this apocalyptic discourse, Climategate was more than just a conspiracy to defraud the public; it was part of a plot to destroy the world.

This explicitly scriptural narrative had less traction outside Christian Right circles, but other religious tropes circulated widely. More secular conservatives used them in a deeply ironic mode, painting climate scientists, not as demonic Others, but as members of a laughably paranoid, fanatical subculture – more as objects of scorn than of fear. The beauty of this discourse has always been its ability to unite conservative Protestants and secular libertarians by fusing the legacies of anti-Catholic and anti-communist rhetoric. Responding to Climategate ("the greatest scandal in modern science"), *Washington Times* columnist and radio host Jeffrey Kuhner (2009) wrote, "The myth of global warming along with the Environmental Protection Agency have become the hammer and sickle of eco-Marxism – the new green-red alliance that seeks to destroy capitalism and the sovereign nation-state." "Just like the communists before them, radical environmentalists are driven by secular utopianism. They are followers of a pseudo-religion, except salvation is to be found in this world rather than the next. They demonstrate the irrationalism and imperviousness to facts and empirical evidence akin to a cult." Linking the CRU scientists to the Jim Jones of Warmism, Al Gore, Kuhner concludes that the lie of global warming "must be propagated at all costs to maintain the faith in Gaea, the ancient pagan goddess of the Earth."

On both sides of the debate, the trope of tribalism played an equally prominent role. Designating anticivil or, better yet, *pre-civil* behavior, this trope points to an undemocratic, Dionysian excess of *thymos*. Conservative commentators located this excess squarely in the scientific camp. Science-minded environmentalists saw it everywhere and lamented its distorting effect on rational debate. For example, the first chapter of British environmental journalist Fred Pearce's (2010) chronicle of Climategate, *The Climate Files*, is titled – no doubt with intertextual reference to the

Frankie Goes to Hollywood hit of 1984 and its iconic mass-brawl video – “Two Tribes Go to War.” In his account, *Thymos* explains almost everything. “As I read the emails in the days after they were made public,” he writes (5), “it became clear to me that sniping over many years between mainstream climate researchers and their critics, many of them running climate-skeptic blogs, had degenerated into a secret and corrupting conflict.” This conflict, Pearce continues, was “a battle for ownership of data” and “to open up the closed world of scientific peer review to challenge by outsiders.” It was thus a “battle for the soul of science.” For Pearce, this battle takes the form of ironic tragedy. It is “dark” and there are “few heroes”; it is a tale of how “tea-room tittle-tattle” became “the preferred mode of communication among some respected scientists” (11). “The bunker mentality – of climate scientists faced with the mob trying to take over their labs – is brutally exposed in the emails,” he writes (13). “But so too is the opportunism of the outsiders, and the confusion caused in the labs by their efforts to question what was going on.” In the story Pearce tells, both sides begin with reasonable motives – one to ensure quality control in the scientific literature, the other to make the scientific debate more open and democratic. But anger and paranoia polluted these motives, making sane deliberation impossible. Tribalism trumped deliberative rationality. *Thymos*, whose dangerous volatility we noted a few pages ago, ran riot.

Whereas cultishness and tribalism invoked premodern threats, criminality and corruption invoked contemporary dangers. The CRU scientists were frequently accused of “cooking the books,” which, following the financial collapse of 2008, linked them symbolically to corporate greed. Here was yet another clique of brainy elites using fuzzy math to defraud the public. According to this narrative, their motives were simple: greed and prestige. “Global warming alarmism has become a gravy train for scientists, bureaucrats and corporations who profit from the billions of taxpayer dollars spent researching and fighting climate change,” wrote H. Sterling Burnett (2010, A11), a senior fellow with the National Center for Policy Analysis, a conservative think tank. Often this line of argument merged with the religious. Writing on the *Wall Street Journal* opinion page, Bret Stephens (2009) explained that if one “follows the money,” an entire “ecosystem” of universities, research institutes, and advocacy groups emerges, feeding at the government trough. “All of them have been on the receiving end of climate change–related funding,” Stephens concludes, “so all of them must believe in the reality (and catastrophic imminence) of global warming just as a priest must believe in the existence of God” – or as a made man must believe in *cosa nostra*. As the Lowell

Sun (2009) put it, following a well-established line of attack, the CRU scientists were guilty of a “mafia-like suppression of dissent, suppression of evidence and methods.”

Climategate allowed skeptics to act as high-minded defenders of scientific objectivity. Believers, conversely, were forced to play the cynical realist. This was not a winning position. Their attempts to deflate the crisis by divorcing unsavory scientists from unassailable science rang hollow. Once again, they doubled down on *logos* and ignored *ethos*. By arguing that “everyone knows” that science is a nasty political game, they appeared to cede the moral high ground to their opponents. Writing on the *Wall Street Journal* opinion page, Pat Michaels (2009) likened the CRU’s behavior to “filtering what goes in the Bible” – that is, the peer-reviewed scientific literature. In the *Detroit News* (2009), editor Nolan Finley clucked, “Research skeptical of climate change is denounced as quackery. But science should never be ‘settled,’ as the global warming industry has declared this matter to be. Nor should it be cause driven, massaged to align with popular movements. It should be cold, impassive and willing to prove itself against dissenting theories. It should welcome new evidence, even if it alters its assumptions.” Even sympathetic skeptics piled on the moral opprobrium. “Dissent was stifled, facts were suppressed, scrutiny was blocked, and the free flow of information was choked off,” opined Bjorn Lomborg (2009). The “real tragedy,” he continued, was that by toeing the “party line” and “substituting spin for scientific rigor,” the CRU scientists have given skeptics a reason not to care about global warming. “This unsavory glimpse of scientists trying to cook the data could be just the excuse too many people are waiting for to tune it all out,” Lomborg warned.

When the *New York Times* (2009) finally weighed in with its editorial page on December 6, it dismissed the controversy as mere “noise.” The scientists might have been “mean-spirited” and “intemperate,” but that did not change “the underlying scientific facts about climate change.” According to the *Washington Post* (2011), the scientists were simply “catty.” The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (2009) argued that many great scientists have behaved badly, noting that Isaac Newton “badly overreacted to critics and dabbled in alchemy.” Sounding an almost desperately deflationary note, Peter Frumhoff (2009), director of science and policy at the Union of Concerned Scientists and a lead author of the IPCC’s Fourth Assessment Report, said in a statement, “What the e-mails show are simply scientists at work, grappling with key issues, and displaying the full range of emotions and motivations characteristic of any urgent endeavor.” In a late-arriving op-ed denouncing America’s conservative

"thought police," Paul Krugman (2011) tried a more aggressive line of defense: "Nothing in the correspondence suggested any kind of scientific impropriety; at most, we learned – I know this will shock you – that scientists are human beings, who occasionally say snide things about people they dislike." Centrist media outlets were less knowing and more alarmed. A *USA Today* (2009) editorial wrote of a "disturbing level of pettiness, groupthink and willingness to disguise inconvenient data among leading climate scientists." For this paper, as for many others, the lesson of Climategate was that science needs more "transparency." As the *San Jose Mercury News* (2009) argued, "scientists by nature are not great communicators. They prefer to conduct their business in private, partly to avoid embarrassment to colleagues whose theories and projects are discredited. But frank, clear communication is crucial when public policy and precious funding is [sic] at stake." Against a near-constant barrage of references to "Mike's Nature Trick" and Ben Santer's desire to "beat the crap" out of Pat Michaels, it is no wonder that this insipid, school-marmish message failed to make a dent. That left-of-center publications like the *New York Times* generally dismissed the scandal only reinforced the Right's belief in a massive cover-up. In the *Ottawa Citizen*, Canadian columnist David Warren (2009) accused the so-called mainstream media of "maintaining the silence of Iago on the revelations."

Climategate finally seemed to sputter out in spring 2010. Attempts to capitalize on the lingering storm of skeptical outrage, however, conservative politicians went after the scientists. In April 2010, Virginia attorney general Ken Cuccinelli demanded that the University of Virginia hand over a wide range of records relating to grant applications by Mann, a former faculty member. Cuccinelli said he was looking for evidence of fraud. The ACLU and the American Association of University Professors rushed to Mann's defense, and the university successfully fought Cuccinelli in court. Soon it was clear that Cuccinelli's move had backfired. Howard Becker (1967) writes of a "hierarchy of credibility" that favors the institutionally powerful over the less powerful. In this case, however, a different principle was at play: faith in the attorney general seemed to be trumped by the signs of "professor" and "scientist." An editorial in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (2010) declared, "Among laymen, the debate over global warming has ceased to be about the science. It is now a team-sport contest involving the politics of personal destruction, in which points are scored by proxy. What a shame that Cuccinelli – whose engineering background should make him more, rather than less, appreciative of scientific rigor – should participate in the sordid game."

The *Roanoke Times* (2010) called Cuccinelli "the commonwealth's inquisitor general," comparing him to Galileo's Catholic persecutors. Virginia Sierra Club director Glen Besa (2010) wondered in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* if Cuccinelli was funded by "Big Oil and the other polluters that have bankrolled a decades-long disinformation campaign meant to protect their profits by confusing the public enough to stop progress toward a clean energy future." The *Washington Post* (2010) castigated the attorney general's "witch hunt," arguing that "science progresses when researchers can propose ideas freely, differ in their methods and argue about the interpretations of their results." The journal *Nature* (2010) weighed in, calling Cuccinelli's campaign an "ideologically motivated inquisition that harasses and intimidates climate scientists." Even some skeptics felt compelled to condemn him. After keeping up the skeptical drumbeat in the early days of Climategate, *Richmond Times-Dispatch* columnist A. Barton Hinkle (2010) ended up defending Mann against what he depicted as Cuccinelli's McArthyite crusade. Echoing the words of Pastor Martin Niemöller, the title for his column said it all: "First They Came for the Climatologists . . ."

Cuccinelli ended up losing his legal battle and inadvertently allowed Mann and his supporters to seize the moral high ground. This was largely a local victory, however. Whereas Mann and the CRU have become permanent players in the social drama of climate change, Cuccinelli plays a bit part at best. Still, one has to wonder how all this would have played out had environmentalists not waited for his subpoena to link Climategate with McCarthy, Salem, and the Inquisition. Rather than pollute the identities of their adversaries, they stuck to their rationalist guns. Was this a missed opportunity to turn the tables on skeptics? According to a March 2012 study by the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, most Americans trust climate scientists (73 percent) more than other kinds of scientists (65 percent) as sources of information on global warming. But among those the study calls "dismissive," the opposite is true: only 29 percent trust climate scientists and 39 percent trust other kinds of scientists. The only group with lower levels of trust are fossil fuel companies (Leiserowitz et al. 2013).

#### Trust, Romance, and Environmental Melodrama

Environmentalists have every right to be outraged by the way science was distorted in the wake of Climategate. Although it is true that the CRU was an important generator of climate data, anyone with even the

most basic understanding of climate science would have understood that misdeeds by a handful of prominent scientists could not fatally damage the consensus achieved by thousands of researchers working in dozens of fields, corroborating, criticizing, and reproducing each other's results in numerous ways. As the historian of science Paul Edwards (2010, 429) puts it, "there are too many models, there are too many controls on the data, too much scrutiny of every possibility, and there is too much integrity in the IPCC process" for groupthink, systematic errors, or scientific elitism to form the basis of agreement. Indeed, as Edwards notes at the end of his book (439), some scientists think we may *never* have more accurate projections than we have now, because future warming will permanently skew the historical baseline.

But to many, if not most, Americans, none of this matters. Reading through the spate of post-Climategate commentary from both the Right and Left, it is remarkable how rarely the actual details of the controversy are debated. Much like the science itself, the scientists' e-mails seem to have interested a small minority of inside players. What mattered to everyone else was character. *What kind of people are these scientists, their defenders and their critics? What makes them tick?* As Aristotelian theory predicts, this was and still is the central question wherever climate change becomes a social drama.

It is important to recognize that skeptics did not just sully the character of climate scientists. They forced a genre shift. Acting as a chorus, bloggers, political pundits, and journalists performed a virtuosic feat: they turned the romance of the IPCC (heroic scientists from around the world battling ignorance and greed in a jamboree of public-spirited truth finding) into what Frye called "irony." This is a mode in which the audience feels it is "looking down on a scene of bondage, frustration, or absurdity" (Frye 1957, 34). More specifically, they turned it into an ironic melodrama. "In melodrama two themes are important," writes Frye (47), "the triumph of moral virtue over villainy, and the consequent idealizing of the moral views assumed to be held by the audience." In its most lurid incarnations (think CSI-type crime shows with serial-killer pedophiles), melodrama induces what Frye calls "the pure self-righteousness of the lynching mob" (47). Mainstream narrations of Climategate moved in a slightly different direction, closer to ironic comedy. Climate science was renarrated as a morally repugnant game played by treacherous ideologues. Far from repudiating science, the chorus cast itself as the true defender of the scientific *ethos*. It thus put the audience in the position of knowing better than the scientists of guarding "sound science" against its debasers. "Cultivated people go to a melodrama to hiss the villain with

an air of condescension," Frye (47) writes: "they are making a point of the fact that they cannot take his villainy seriously." By scapegoating the CRU researchers, skeptics staged just such a melodrama, one sufficiently layered to attract an ideologically diverse audience. Credibility was lost.

By portraying climate scientists as venal and absurd, skeptics mapped the discursive binaries of civil society onto scientific terrain. Through a ritual of "inverse stigmatization" (Alexander 2006a, 232), they marked the science of global warming as "anticivil science." As Alexander and Smith (1993) demonstrate, for at least two centuries, anticivil or counterdemocratic actors have been represented as hysterical or deranged; in their behavior toward other community members they are secretive, suspicious, self-interested, deceitful, calculating, and conspiratorial, and they build institutions that are arbitrary, hierarchical, and exclusive. The goal of any contestant in a democratic social drama is to place the audience on the side of civility, to make them feel like defenders of the democratic code. Where low-mimetic dramas shade into ironic melodramas, this shared sense of moral solidarity can become frighteningly intense. Yet in complex, pluralistic societies, pushing this shift from solidarity to scapegoating can easily backfire. Moral crusades can quickly become Inquisitions. In the discourse of democratic civil society, crusaders are acceptable; inquisitors are not.

In the case of Climategate, skeptics successfully portrayed climate science (and environmental science in general) as "tribal," "corrupt," and even "cultish." In America, these characterizations resonated with longstanding anxieties about the ideological dangers of environmentalism, anxieties most often articulated in religious terms. But when the skeptics appeared to go beyond moral condemnation by persecuting individual scientists, they encountered resistance from the political center. The result, we suggest, was to reinforce the romantic narrative among environmentalists. For them, Climategate proved that science was "under assault" by a McCarthyite cabal of free-market capitalists and religious fundamentalists. This hardening and polarizing of positions may be an inevitable consequence of the melodramatic frame (Schwarze 2006).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Schwarze (2006, 239–240) persuasively argues that melodrama's ubiquity in environmental politics "stems from its capacity to provide a coherent, synthetic response to several of the persistent rhetorical obstacles facing environmental advocates. It can transform ambiguous and unrecognized environmental conditions into public problems; it can call attention to how distorted notions of the public interest conceal environmental degradation; and, it can overcome public indifference to environmental problems by amplifying their moral and emotional dimensions." Whereas Schwarze emphasizes the utility of melodrama for environmental activists, we would argue that it can be just as useful for their opponents.

Culturally attuned observers understood that Climategate was all about trust (e.g., Hulme and Ravez 2009). They also understood that climate science and activism as a whole suffer from a deficit of trust, and that this deficit – more than ignorance, fear, or denial – is what prevents Americans from agreeing that global warming is real and dangerous. What they have yet to explain fully is *how* this deficit has been generated and maintained. In this chapter, we have shown that battles over trust turn on genre choices and the projection of character. Moreover, we have shown that both genre and character depend on the projection of *feeling*. Flawed advertising campaigns were unable to generate a sense of *thymos* in their audiences. They hectored them and seemed to treat them with contempt. They were evidence that climate activists were out-of-touch zealots who preyed on emotions and were prepared to ignore norms of civil decency. Climategate was a complex genre war that hinged on how the emotional dispositions of its antagonists were perceived. By casting climate scientists as the skulking villains of an environmental melodrama, skeptics and their supporters convened a hissing, sanctimonious public that could feel good about itself as it clamored on behalf of “real science.” *Ethos* was lost. Scientists and their defenders fought back with a low-mimetic nonstory consisting of disconnected, itchy-bitsy justifications for each individual infraction. This checking-off-of-boxes response did nothing to restore trust. Only when they cast the scientists as the embattled protagonists of a romantic struggle against paranoid inquisitors were they able to stem the bleeding.

Climatic science has long claimed that it does not receive enough attention in the media. Perhaps it should remember the saying “be careful what you wish for.”

We have spoken throughout this book of climate change as amenable to fruitful analysis as a drama. Nowhere is this claim more obvious than in the case of climate change conferences. Yet as we show in this chapter, the theatricality of climate conferences is surprisingly multifaceted and marked by a high degree of what Victor Turner called “performative reflexivity” (see Chapter 2). These are no mere dog-and-pony shows. Of course, such meetings have bureaucratic and legislative activities that are to some extent hidden or “backstage,” and policy experts are apt to depict this backstage deal making as “where the action really happens.” Still the drama analogy holds along a surprising number of dimensions. We begin by noting that conventions and conferences have ritual aspects. As Lyn Spillman (2012) shows in her discussion of American business association annual meetings, even the most humdrum get together of concrete engineers or rubber glove makers will have a solidaristic and civic component. This is enacted and reproduced through performative gestures like memorials, award ceremonies, charity auctions, and dinner cruises. She writes that in such events, “many contemporary associations demonstrate camaraderie well above and beyond the pursuit of shared interests” (169). So conferences and congresses are like rituals. And from ritual to drama is but a short step, as Nietzsche – echoing Aristotle’s prior analysis – showed in his interpretation of Greek civilization.

The analogies are manifold. Indeed, strictly considered, they are not even analogies but shared properties. Like staged dramas, conferences take place in a defined location (a city, a convention center) and exist for a predetermined period of time. These are places where people perform to each other to make claims and to demonstrate their good character.

## The Climate Conference as Theatre

The guaranteed presence of the global mass media makes the effort involved in performing well an even better investment. So politicians and activists work hard to tell stories, to display competence and talent, and to relay facts to the onlooking global audience. There are even cultural scripts that allow these performances to be both improvised and understood. For example, one can enact moral indignation, pragmatism, aspiration, or victimhood by turning to the playbook for each of these subject positions and rhetorical stances. It is important to observe that the cast of motivated performers includes both official and invited delegates and others on the fringe of the event who wish to express their views or gain global attention. For this reason, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), protestors, artists, and climate change celebrities can often be found attempting to take a slice of the attention space that the conference will have claimed within the global civil society. Finally we should note the presence of those we call reluctant performers: police and security services, caterers and cleaners, local citizens going about their business, and so forth. These groups most likely wish to remain out of the limelight, but they can find themselves caught up in a dramatic episode or subject to narration as components of a wider story of success or failure.

Clearly the legal agreements and protocols arising from a conference are a major measure of its "success": true enough they are often displayed as landmarks by activists and politicians. Yet this is a narrow and somewhat uninteresting metric from the perspective of cultural sociology. We wish to suggest here that other registers of evaluation can be equally visible and significant in shaping readings of any particular conference. These involve meanings that are both "given" and, more importantly, "given off" by the conference, to invoke Goffman's distinction between direct and indirect, motivated and accidental signification. Like a music competition (McCormick 2009), the most culturally effective climate conference is one with the capacity to transcend its own genre. The best music competitions are no longer "competitions" of isolated individuals but at the end of the day consume their own purpose to become something much more: they become celebrations offering ritual fusion with the transcendent power of music over politics and difference, with the deep time of the musical tradition or the vitality of youth. International conferences are formally understood as instrumental meetings organized around treaty formation and, to a lesser extent, information and opinion exchange. Yet the most effective conferences in terms of cultural power are those redescribed in a meta-narrative as ritual celebrations of human unity, of problem-solving capacity, and of planetary solidarity. This status must

be contingently achieved by participants and then communicated to outsiders through distant spectatorship or critical commentary. Importantly, the transcendent event can carry with it the ritual energies required for sacrificial activity where particularistic interests are burned on the altar of the general good. Alternatively, a conference might be downgraded. A routine event can become a farce or tragedy in which the participants are unable to perform as expected and attain even low-mimetic goals. The conference becomes associated with Victor Turner's phase of "breach" more so than with "resolution." Indeed, it can come to seem like an incessantly recurring breach, a skipping record on the political turntable.

Considered as a social drama, the distant, mediated experience of a conference is as worthy of study as its diplomatic and technocratic outcomes. This is all the more so because any particular event can potentially become a generalized symbol or shorthand that exerts totemic power over distant spans of time and space. We know this can be the case for festivals. Woodstock was not just an event in the 1960s. It became a defining event of the 1960s and so came in time to define what the 1960s themselves were all about (Smith 2012). Woodstock was powerful as a motivating force and collective memory not only for those who were there but also for many of a certain generation and in subsequent generations. It suggested possibility by example—and indeed has been replicated in various contexts. As Adam Rome (2013) shows in his richly detailed history of Earth Week, environmental politics have worked in much the same way. Standard environmental histories of the early 1970s focus on the passage of landmark legislation such as the Clean Water Act (1972). But Rome clearly shows that the street theatre, speeches, marches, and musical performances of Earth Week were not just surface-level responses to underlying shifts in environmental attitudes but in fact helped produce those shifts.

In a similar way, a single heroic climate conference has the potential to bootstrap itself from a localized pragmatic encounter toward becoming a paradigm exemplar that can drive future climate change agendas as a motivator and template. Even by simply becoming a named "event," the climate conference does important cultural work by demonstrating to the world that "something is happening." The stakes are high not simply administratively but also culturally, precisely because each named conference has a remote chance of becoming a powerful symbol for social justice, human cooperation, and collective wisdom. The world is watching.

What are the narrative forms, tropes, and images we might expect to find associated with positive and negative representations of the climate conference ritual encounter?

Liberally interpreted, Aristotle offers some clues. As we noted in Chapter 5, he indicates that spectacle (*Poetics VI*) has some emotional attractions, but these are weak and superficial when contrasted to those of higher forms of art involving language and narrative. An echo of this point was made by Frederic Jameson (1984) in his famous critique of postmodernity. He saw this as involving the waning of affect and the substitution of the insubstantial image for auratic, narrative communication. Taking these theorists as indicators of a prevailing binary normative discourse rather than as analysts of empirical truths, we surmise that the culturally successful conference will be described as involving authentic emotions and genuine communicative activity rather than simply as a media event, or grandstand for the famous – in short as an empty spectacle. The growth of well-intentioned fringe activities around climate change conferences (arts festivals, Eco-villages, protests, and so forth) has in fact been a dangerous trend that amplifies possibilities for an emptying out of ritual energy and the substitution of such impertinent metaphors – “sideshow” and “circus” being perhaps the most common of these. As we showed in our analysis of 10:10, appearing to mock or belittle serious concerns can quickly demote a performer – and her cause – in the eyes of an audience.

The next set of themes relates to human motivation. In a successful conference, we will see reports of gestures of sacrifice and solidarity associated with romance. As Northrop Frye points out, the idea here is that there is a net increase in sociality when we contrast the end with the start of the dramatic sequence. Such narrations emphasize higher motivations for action and the capacity of humans to triumph through concerted acts of the will and through ethical choices. At the level of embodied activity, Durkheimian ritual theory predicts rhythmic entrainment: applause, touching, chanting. There will also be a sense of sustained attention to the major conference themes and dedication to a particular space rather than a diffusion of energy and attention. Although the interaction ritual theory of Randall Collins (2004) sees these as objective features of successful ritual, we note that they are also indicators that can be recognized as such by distant audiences. In a sense they are discourse tokens or items of mediated evidence that can be used to leverage a particular interpretation of a particular dramatic episode.

A failed conference will be associated with tragedy and satire. These modes reflect the futility of human life. In the former case, as we discussed in Chapter 2, noble characters are dragged low by fate, make poor choices, or are caught in lose-lose dilemmas. The result is a dissolution of the social. In a traditional drama, this means death, murder, or fatalism are outcomes of plot movement. Whereas tragic figures might have high motivations, in satire characters are driven by base motivations such as lust and greed. They are inferior to spectators and are dependent on selfish urges and emotions. Rather than being autonomous actors, they are controlled and consumed by passions and biological forces over which they have no control. Within the satire, there is usually an amusing or worrying disjuncture between the high motivations that people profess and the true nature of their actions. As with tragedy, the net result is a deflation of the emotional energies that can lead to cooperative and innovative actions, not only among participants, but also among spectators. Collinsian objective indicators may well be invoked to support this reading. We will find mention of delegates looking for food stands or falling asleep; of talks given to empty sessions and of emotions such as boredom triumphing over more heroic and romantic ones.

These tropes and themes combine to answer the core question that is asked of each conference within the wider social drama of climate change: Was this a step forward or a step back?

### Copenhagen

In Chapter 3 we touched on the 1996 Kyoto Conference. This had fallen short of providing a romantic narrative not simply in the petty and bean-counting details of its treaty but also in its more general media representation. Coverage of Kyoto had focused on selfish national behaviors – especially those of killjoy nonsignatories – and the wearying combination of bureaucratic- and science-speak that suffocated any sense of a festival atmosphere. Visual images often showed delegates asleep at their desks, not smiling or hugging. Still, something had been achieved: the question with which we ended the prior paragraph could be answered – yes, there had been a measured and bureaucratic step forward.

More than a decade later, interim conferences had achieved little. Altogether larger in scale than Kyoto, Copenhagen in 2009 was intended to break through the impasse and push the climate change international cooperation to a new level. Considerable groundwork by so-called



Sherpas took place backstage. These invisible technocrats and diplomats were intended to fix the ladders for treaty formation. At the level of cultural process, lessons had been learned too. The complex meaning-rich possibilities of the climate conference were well recognized by the organizers of the 2009 Copenhagen conference. A raft of fringe events, a series of high-profile speakers, and resources for the global mass media indicate a serious concern, not only with treaty formation, but also with wider communicative and expressive agendas. Unlike exclusive G-8 meetings and Davos-type forums of self-congratulatory plutocrats that had dominated in the 1990s (and received negative narrations of the kind evoked by our word choice in the first part of this sentence), here a platform was provided for the Global South to speak as well as the major players of the polluting economies. What would go on display, it was hoped, would be a celebration of cosmopolitan and ecological solidarity.

Ironically enough, for all this detailed cultural work, no other conference has done so poorly as an item of motivational theatre. One problem seemed to be vulnerability to recoding as spectacle by cynics deploying the negative side of the binary code we sketched out earlier. Fox News (2009), for example, quoted the prominent climate skeptic Myron Ebell as dubbing the event a "circus" and lampooning fringe activities such as Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, with its intent to "explore how thoughts affect matter and how a shift in consciousness can transform current deteriorating conditions" for the environment. Ebell also spearheaded efforts by women activists to eliminate quantitative benchmarks and targets. Radical critics also mobilized this imagery: "the Copenhagen climate talks were a bright green spectacle that ultimately moved global climate policy backwards" wrote Doyle Canning (2010) on the *Left Turn* website. However, analogies to distracting entertainment were less significant in the end than those relating to human discord. These were propagated in a somewhat sordid low-mimetic mode that morphed imperceptibly into the tragic pattern: poor choices were being made, chances were being missed, bad outcomes were eventuating. Commentators remarkably early on wrote that this was an event turning sour.

The sense that themes of disunity would trump those relating to unity began toward the start of the conference with various protests by activists and motivated citizens. On December 12, a huge demonstration saw more than forty thousand people take to the streets of the Danish capital. Reports of what happened, even when attempting to be neutral, flattered nobody. According to the BBC (2009), "bolt cutters and gas masks had been found inside a lorry at the front of the march," and "protesters

threw bricks and smashed windows in the city center, while others set off fireworks." The impression here is of both organized and disorganized violence. Meanwhile, in the same report, the authorities looked repressive as they adopted the package of militaristic policing strategies for crowd control that have diffused globally (see Graham 2011). It was noted that protestors had been forced to sit in lines on the ground with their hands tied before being taken away. The BBC quoted Mel Evans from Climate Justice Action: "They weren't able to have any medical attention, any water, and weren't allowed to have any toilet facilities. People were there in freezing conditions urinating on themselves and being held in lines like, essentially like animals." Television and Internet images showed the corralled ranks of protestors, the police in riot gear, and barking police dogs. The overall impression was of an ugly spectacle featuring a rent-a-mob versus the goon squad. Humans were being systematically degraded. This was not an environment in which pro-social, public-spirited gestures could become visible, never mind contagious. (For a detailed cross-national analysis of media coverage of Copenhagen, see Eide, Kunelius, and Kumpu 2010.)

Over the next few days, further reports emerged from protestors of seemingly undemocratic and unjust policing actions. These in turn reinforced the impression that the climate change conference was anything but universalistic, inclusive, and democratic. Like the global economic conferences at Davos and Seattle, this seemed once again to be an event for an elites or oligarchs, not the people. Protestors spoke of police infiltrators (nearly always identifiable by their clichéd Palestinian-style scarves), of random searches and beatings. It came to light that there was a detention center with wire cages called "Guantanamo Junior" even by the Danish police themselves. Protestors were pepper-sprayed when they attempted to break the cages. In court, details came out of wiretaps on noted activists (van der Zee 2009). Newspapers reported how difficult it was to actually access the conference center, which was surrounded by several layers of security. The overall impression was not of the peaceful and affluent Scandinavian social democracy of liberal mythology but of a secretive conference under siege working with the tools of the police state. Importantly, it was the conference itself that had generated these outcomes: it had motivated the wiretaps, the cages, the aggressive policing, the introduction of security cordons. Not simply another manifestation of preexisting characteristics of Denmark, the conference was like a cancer eating away at the fundamental way of life within that society. It had polluted a nation.

The orchestrated high point of Copenhagen was the arrival of more than one hundred heads of state toward the end of the conference. This was intended to energize the process and to allow high-level decisions to be made quickly. These visits were interpreted differently, and often in a negative light. Direct meetings between key heads of state took place away from the main conference forum. This opened up visions of backroom deals that excluded the minor and vulnerable nations in the auditorium who had been symbolically positioned as the main "victims" and carriers of risk. Such talks were seen as subverting the United Nations's focus on visible diplomacy and devalued the core ritual activity of the front stage conference, which relentlessly stressed equality and solidarity. According to Yvo de Boer, the UN's soon-to-be-disgruntled-and-bypassed climate change diplomat, "rumor and intrigue" took over from any accountable and transparent process. More importantly, few of the heads of state were seen as acting in good faith. They had come to Copenhagen so as to appear to be taking the issue seriously, or simply to appear to be a globally important person by bathing in the reflected glory of other, more truly important people. The *New Scientist*, for example, pointed to the amount of precious time each leader took up with speeches relayed to big screens. It skewered bad science, theatrical and attention-seeking behavior, hypocrisy, and sentimentality in second-tier leaders such as Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, Canada's Stephen Harper, and Australia's Kevin Rudd (Pearce and Brahic 2009). Put another way, these players were debating the event through spectacle and egotism rather than demonstrating *ethos*. Meanwhile, poorer nations stalled events with procedural objections (Walsh 2009). Although arguably valid, these were interpreted as petty and obstructionist. As noted in Chapter 5, a rule of successful improv theatre and conversation alike is that you take what is offered and run with it. Here there were a series of refusals to play. Much as we found with the failing threads in climate change art forums, this is a failure of the chorus that merely diluted *thymos*.

Once it was clear that years of footwork would not result in a new Kyoto, some face saving was required to justify the energy, expense, and visibility of the conference, especially after the apparent involvement of various heads of state in direct negotiations (Dimitrov 2010). All that emerged was a toothless nonbinding accord signed by some, but not all, nations. This was without any specific targets or deadlines. It was mentioned that climate change was a problem and that steps should be taken to deal with it, little more. Journalists reported world leaders leaving before the final plenary session when this tentative and feeble document

was to be voted on. Commentators suggested they had skulked off to avoid humiliation, full of shame. "Copenhagen is a crime scene tonight," an angry Greenpeace official declared, "with the guilty men and women fleeing to the airport" (quoted in McKibben 2012a).

There followed a highly visible blame game that merely fostered the impression that climate change was too tough to handle and that democratic deliberation was impossible. The Danish hosts were blamed for undemocratically excluding many smaller countries from key sessions and for railroading with a draft agreement in an effort to streamline the negotiation process. Emerging economies, especially India and China, were blamed for demanding the same right to pollute as developed nations had before them. Africa was blamed for seeking aid handouts. The United States and developed economies were blamed for having double standards by demanding that others not be allowed to pollute as they had in the past and were still doing at present (see Vidal 2009a, 2009b).

What is important for our purposes is not just that the preceding litany of events happened; nor why; nor whether they really happened the way we have narrated them. What is crucial is that critics and commentators noticed them in just such a way. They were taken up as key indicators of a miserable example of a human failure to cooperate. *Time* magazine, for example, quoted at length a frustrated Saudi Arabian delegate:

I am working without break for 48 hours now. I do not see in the future, a situation where we can adopt a legally binding [agreement]. This is without exception the worst plenary I have ever attended, including the management of the process, the timings, everything. (Walsh 2009)

Media images focused on protestors and on visions of fatigued participants. For example, the *Guardian's* report of December 8, 2009, was full of diplomatic and technical information, but the picture at the top was captioned "A Haitian Delegate Rests before the Second Day Session Begins in Copenhagen" (Vidal 2009a). It showed a woman with her face in her hands and her elbows on a table. She appears to be taking a catnap. The suggestion is not that she is lazy, rather that people are trying hard, but that the process is simply not efficient or inspiring. The willing are burned out and frustrated. A search of Internet photo sites shows the "sleeping delegate" photo is an established genre that has been recognized even by stock photograph agencies. Copenhagen provided some of its masterworks. Another visual genre familiar from global economic meetings was also imported: instead of delegates and speeches, this showed violent protestors clashing with violent police officers. Such

images often appeared at the top of the main feature – even when the following text was mostly about going on within the conference venue.

In a famous essay on the power of images, Stuart Hall (1973) observes that news photographs can be used to ideological effect. For example, in the case of street protests, they can position one party or the other as a violent aggressor. Typically, he says, protestors are seen acting unreasonably toward authority. Contra Hall, what is interesting about the Copenhagen photographs is that neither side looks good. In the manner of artworks depicting close combat in the context of a disintegrating sixteenth-century pike phalanx – we are somewhat reminded here of Holbein's "*Schlechten Krieg*" – there is a melee of compacted, pushing bodies. The product suggests a deindividuated Hobbesian world where might determines right rather than a Habermasian one of egalitarian solidarity and communicative reason (e.g., Associated Press 2009).

Now we are back in the tragic scenario where the protagonist's efforts are futile. In sum, Copenhagen was a missed opportunity not only for binding international agreements but even – in the absence of these – for positive messages to emerge about potential solidarity, community, and political will. At the end of the day, the event transmitted images of discord, not harmony. It seemed to be secretive, hierarchical, and repressive rather than open and democratic. Motivations look shallow, not utopian. The gravitational pull of routine politics had not been overcome.

## Cancun

Against Copenhagen stands the case of Cancun. Copenhagen was a disaster not only because it failed to produce a meaningful agreement but also because it sent out the wrong signals. This was a bloated, exclusionary, and antidemocratic event that had squandered its historic opportunity. Somehow it left a sour taste. That "somehow" is not a black box. We have shown it has the properties predicted by Aristotle and his followers. It consists of attributing low motivations to actors, relaying narratives of discord suggesting an end to the social and representing the conference as an empty spectacle rather than a meaningful ritual.

Copenhagen was predicted to be a success and ended a failure. A year later, a minor event in Cancun reversed the equation. Held in December 2010, this conference led to an agreement to keep temperature increases to 2 degrees Celsius over preindustrial levels and set emissions goals for all major polluting economies. A fund was set up to support developing nations, especially those that did not cut down forests. This was

a major legal and diplomatic achievement. Equally important was the message that Cancun sent out as an observed ritual. The event was narrated as a triumph of low-key diplomacy. As the *New York Times* put it (Friedman and Chemnick 2010), "hysteria seems to have taken a holiday from the U.N. climate change treaty talks." There was a focus on "small practical steps" and "a positive and pragmatic approach," wrote a commentator in the usually disappointed ecocine *Grist* (Stavins 2011). Sitting beneath this was the narration of what Northrop Frye calls "themes of ascent," suggesting by way of contrast with Copenhagen a human capacity for growth and rationality. Cancun had an "unrelenting positive mood" (*Daily Telegraph* 2010). "Participants showed encouraging signs of learning to navigate through the unproductive squabbling between developed and developing countries that derailed the Copenhagen talks"; "China and the United States set a civil, productive tone, in contrast to the Copenhagen finger-pointing" (Stavins 2011). According to climate ethicist Benito Müller (2011), "a senior diplomat – being British not prone to emotional exaggerations – described the final night of the recent Cancun climate change conference as 'cathartic,' a healing experience for the multilateral climate change process." Whereas Copenhagen had floundered on the old logic that "divided the world into competing economic camps," Cancun had started to "move beyond the old Kyoto divide" that separated the world into warring developed and developing nations.

Importantly, visible embodied signs of ritual energy generated by the participants (Collins 2004) could be cited as evidence to anchor this new vision for distant spectators. Reports are marked by sequences such as the following:

Applause, standing ovations, cheers and even some teary eyes followed each speech, as country after country rose to demand that the Conference of the Parties (COP) accept the final negotiating text as an official decision.... More important than the deal itself was the intangible effects of what happened in Cancun, witnessed by the thunderous applause on the plenary floor. (Jervey 2011)

It's hard to explain how exciting it felt to be in that room.... Applause and even spontaneous cheering are really quite unprecedented. For the first time since the Copenhagen conference one year ago I am genuinely confident that this process can prove to the world that it can be successful. (Stark 2010)

The image here is of collective empowerment through growing solidarity. Notice Stark's interesting last sentence. Consistent with our social drama argument, his point was not that anything was achieved, nor that it would be achieved at some point in the near future, but rather a message had

got out that a future message might get out ("can prove to the world") that change was a possibility. The real triumph of Cancun was in fact a signal of a hypothetical related to communication and mood. Even when the substantive diplomatic and technical achievement is talked down, this solidaristic/optimistic residue can remain. So for the *New York Times*, this was an event where "serious questions remain" about any capability to reduce greenhouse gases. Nevertheless, it spoke of delegates "embracing one another and patting colleagues on the back" and gave most of its attention to the fact that the process was not broken or disrupted as it had been in Copenhagen (Chemnick and Friedman 2010).

It is notable that discussions of Cancun usually positioned it in relation to the events that had gone before. In so doing, it was not understood as an isolated episode but rather as a plot point in the wider narrative or social drama of climate change. In this way, it became recognizable as a potential turning point. Aristotle wrote that the turning point, or what he called the *peripeteia*, was the most emotionally effective moment in a good drama. It is where there is a reversal of fortunes, from good to bad or vice versa. Narratives also indicated the presence of learning. Copenhagen had been a disaster, Cancun showed people had grown up. Much as it had done for Al Gore when he realized his time on earth had a purpose, *anagnorisis* had taken place. Perhaps, in retrospect, Copenhagen had been a necessary evil. Orienting Cancun to this narrative, discussions seeking to anchor *anagnorisis* engaged in relentless binary contrasts.

Copenhagen	Cancun
Undemocratic	Democratic
Secretive	Open
Disorganized	Coordinated
Mean spirited	Public spirited
Exclusionary	Inclusive

The new coding found embodiment in the character of Patricia Espinosa. The Mexican foreign minister was described as chairing the meeting with efficiency and charm. She was dubbed a "goddess" by the Indian minister and was credited by many as single-handedly changing the mood of negotiations. Again a process of learning from the past seemed to be involved. "Most of the credit for the summit's success rests with her [Espinosa] and the Mexican government's inclusive, flexible and open approach: they seemed to have studied the Danes' disastrous conduct of Copenhagen so as to do the precise opposite," wrote a surprisingly enthusiastic commentator in England's usually climate-cynical *Daily Telegraph* (Lean 2010).

While the Danish had been busy "masterminding . . . closed door 'secret text' negotiations" (Jervey 2011), Espinosa was open and approachable. Looking back to public discussions on Copenhagen just after that event, and reading closely, we see the possibility for collective *anagnorisis* foreshadowed. Even before Cancun, Copenhagen had been narrated as a learning moment and a turning point. According to *Time*, for example, the Scandinavian conference had in fact demonstrated that "climate diplomacy has finally come of age." Failure was interpreted as a sign of harsh reality starting to bite – this was a reality check caused by the need to make tough decisions and sacrifices for the first time. There had been a transition toward a "climate realpolitik, which eschews hot air for real action" and signals that "global climate talks have moved beyond symbolic rhetoric" (Walsh 2009). In this formulation Copenhagen is translated into a portent. As they say, the darkest moment comes just before the dawn.

### Durban and Doha

In 1999, the Climate Action Network (CAN), an international alliance of environmental NGOs, began giving its "Fossil of the Day" award to countries that performed badly in climate change negotiations (see Lipschutz and McKendry 2011). The ironic award has since become a routine emblem of international failure. After the Rio +20 meetings in June 2012, which produced yet another toothless declaration, the group threw up its hands in despair and gave the award to all of the governments at the conference. Rather than disrupt the predictably mundane flow of conference time, the award has come simply to reinforce an all-encompassing narrative of stasis, recalcitrance, and corruption. It has also come to highlight a key symbolic opposition in the climate conference meta-narrative: young versus old. As the moral standard-bearers of civil society, young people – most notably young women – have displayed a special capacity to steer this narrative in the direction of romance. Yet we will see that they have also faced special performative challenges.

At the 2011 meetings in Durban, South Africa, one American college student jolted the dominant low-mimetic narrative, if only for a moment. As chief U.S. climate negotiator Todd Stern mounted the podium to address the conference for the first time, Abigail Borah, a twenty-one-year-old biology major at Middlebury College in Vermont, interrupted the proceedings. Dressed primly and professionally in a black skirt and yellow blouse, hair clipped back, Borah announced in a thin, almost childlike voice:

2020 is too late to wait. We need an urgent path to a fair, ambitious and legally binding treaty. You must take responsibility to act now, or you will threaten the lives of the youth and the world's most vulnerable. You must set aside partisan politics and let science dictate decisions. You must pledge ambitious targets to lower emissions, not expectations. 2020 is too late to wait. (Democracy Now 2011)

Mohammad Al-Sabban, the senior economic advisor to Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, who was presiding over the session, attempted to cut Borah off. "No one is listening to you," he said as Stern smiled sheepishly, waiting at the podium for security guards to escort Borah from the hall. But everyone *was* listening. Delegates and observers gave Borah a standing ovation, and news outlets from around the world led their daily reports with her outburst. As National Public Radio's Lynn Neary put it, "U.N. climate talks are, like many negotiations, a blend of dead seriousness and theater. Today, at the talks in Durban, South Africa, an American college student provided the theater" (Harris 2011). *Der Spiegel Online International* ran a story on Borah with the headline "Rebelling against the Climate Change Dinosaurs" (Schwägerl 2011). The influential climate change blog *Think Progress* (Johnson 2011) called Borah a "climate hero," and the left-wing *Daily Kos* (EdMass 2011) praised her for "speaking truth to power" and giving Stern a "shellacking."

After her interruption, Stern called a press conference to rebut the allegation that America was dragging its feet. "I've heard this from everywhere from ministers to press reports, to the very sincere and passionate young woman who was in the hall when I was giving my remarks. I just wanted to be on the record to say that that's just a mistake. It's not true." Yet in the same breath Stern seemed to endorse a European Union plan to adopt a road map for future discussions, something he had only tepidly supported in the past. The media widely reported this "change in tone" as a concession to increasingly frustrated delegates, shamed by Borah to do something substantive (Broder 2011).

At the same conference, another student from an American college, Anjali Appadurai of the College of the Atlantic, made headlines when she gave an indignant and confrontational speech on behalf of youth NGOs. "You've been negotiating all my life," she protested, focusing on the plight of developing nations. Appadurai continued:

There is real ambition in this room, but it's been dismissed as radical, deemed not "politically possible." *Stand with Africa*. Long-term thinking is not radical. What's radical is to completely alter the planet's climate, to betray the future of my generation, and to condemn millions to death by climate change. What's

radical is to write off the fact that change *is* within our reach. 2011 was the year in which the silent majority found their voice, the year when the bottom shook the top. Twenty-eleven was the year when the radical became reality. Common but differentiated and historical responsibility are [*sic*] *not* up for debate. *Respect* the foundational principles of this convention. *Respect* the integral values of humanity. *Respect* the future of your descendants. Mandela said, "It always seems impossible, until it's done." So, distinguished delegates and governments around the world – governments of the developed world: *Deep cuts now. Get it done.* (YouTube 2011)

Appadurai then walked to the front of the stage, dropped her notes, and with the help of other youth activists at the back of the hall, led a "mic check," the call-and-response technique popularized by the Occupy Wall Street protests. "Equity now!" and "Get it done!" they chanted. After her speech, acting COP president Artur Runge-Metzger, chair of the European negotiating team, reminded the audience that Appadurai was speaking for half of the world's population. "And on a purely personal note," he added, "I wonder why we let not speak half of the world's population first in this conference, but only last." Yet by performing the mic check, Appadurai had violated the UN's strict rules regarding demonstrations, and she was subsequently stripped of her conference badge. A year later, she was banned from the UN conference in Doha, then readmitted following a Twitter storm directed at UN climate chief Christiana Figueres. Though lionized by many on the Left (Naomi Klein called her a "hero" on Twitter), the impact of Appadurai's activism was unclear. Had she galvanized civil society by speaking truth to power, or had she simply confirmed that young activists are strident, self-righteous, and easily marginalized? Her *ethos* appeared to remain undecided.

These flare-ups stand in sharp contrast with the best-known instance of youth conference activism. In 1992, twelve-year-old Severn Cullis-Suzuki gave a moving speech on behalf of children at the Earth Summit in Rio. Standing before world leaders in a floral dress and slightly frowzy hair, Cullis-Suzuki, a Canadian, calmly and confidently announced that she had "come five thousand miles to tell you adults you must change your ways." What followed was a rhetorical tour de force – a masterful interweaving of *ethos* and *pathos*. "Coming up here today, I have no hidden agenda," Cullis-Suzuki said. "I am fighting for my future":

Losing my future is not like losing an election, or a few points on the stock market. I am here to speak for all generations to come. I am here to speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet because they have nowhere left to go.

In video of her speech (YouTube 2008), delegates are shown listening raptly, faces pensive. "Here you may be delegates of your government, business people, organizers, reporters, or politicians. But really you are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, and *all of you are someone's child*." Cullis-Suzuki spoke broadly of species going extinct, the hole in the ozone layer, and children starving in the favelas of Rio. She spoke of Western greed and disregard for nature. "You grownups say you love us," she concluded. "But I challenge you, please, make your actions reflect your words." Her speech received a standing ovation. Al Gore shook her hand and said it was the best speech given at the conference (McIlroy 2003). Cullis-Suzuki became an instant environmental celebrity, a gift she has parlayed into a successful career as an activist, author, and television personality.

It turns out that Cullis-Suzuki was well prepared for her performance. Her father, the scientist David Suzuki, is one of Canada's best-known environmental activists and host of a popular CBC Television science show, *The Nature of Things*. But her speech was so powerful precisely because it seemed to come from a place of complete innocence and apolitical purity. According to the *Toronto Star* (Landsberg 1992), "at U.N. headquarters in New York - where they didn't even know at first that she was the daughter of a renowned environmentalist - the name of Severn Suzuki is now being mentioned with something close to awe." The year 1992 was not the end of the story. In 2008, her speech was posted on YouTube by one Kim Seong Lee. It is telling to note that Lee appears to be a typical YouTube user, not a professional environmental organizer with slick marketing skills. The video is buried among Lee's holiday footage (circa five hundred views each) and an amusing song about memory loss by the folk singer Tom Rush (circa twelve hundred views). Lee seems to have lost interest in YouTube with no recent posts after a spurt of initial activity. Who would bother to follow Lee's channel? The version of Severn Suzuki's speech uploaded is of poor quality and has Portuguese subtitles as if pirated from Brazilian TV (YouTube 2008). Who would want to watch that? Lee dubbed it "The Girl Who Silenced the World for 5 Minutes." As of August 2014, it had been viewed 28,103,438 times and received 63,270 comments. These statistics suggest an effective intervention when compared to that of the Ice Bear we reviewed in Chapter 5. It even beats our benchmark of Internet virality, Tillman the skateboard-ing bulldog (2.1 million views). In so doing, it draws our attention to the power of the Internet to keep issues and performances alive in what one of the anonymous reviewers of our manuscript called a "whack-a-mole"

manner. The web transcends routine news cycles and permits sleeper and slow-burn effects to play out. The Cullis-Suzuki case also confirms our more general point in this book that in-person discursive performances involving careful rhetoric and the display of *ethos* are the most potent weapon in the activist arsenal. Slick, high-definition presentation ("spectacle") counts for little. *Ethos* will find a way to rise to the top - even from Kim Seong Lee's abandoned YouTube account.

Young people can be powerful catalysts of civil repair. As Alexander (2006a, 347-58) shows in his analysis of the 1963 "children's crusade" in Birmingham, Alabama, asking children to confront the powers that be can dramatically change the moral balance of social conflict. There, civil rights leaders put children in the streets to be herded off to jail by the police, thus "throw[ing] into sharper relief the irrational, violent repression of southern officials" (353). This marked the crucial turning point in the Birmingham campaign. Media representations of terrified children being blasted with fire hoses, attacked by police dogs, and crammed into overflowing jail cells unleashed an outpouring of civil solidarity from previously disengaged northern observers, thus creating the required interpretative context for regulatory reform. As culturally coded embodiments of goodness and innocence, children are strong generators of collective shame and civil outrage.

Yet this capacity for civil repair is tempered by the great complexity of global environmental politics. For all its straightforward similarities to theatre, the climate conference is in fact an especially fraught and multi-layered dramatic genre. Much of this has to do with the sheer number of actors involved. Among government negotiators, there are "insiders" and "outsiders," "players," "bigshots," "watchers," and "wannabes." There are lobbyists and industry representatives, some powerful, some ignored. There are NGOs and activists, representatives of civil society, some near and some far from the centers of power. Then there are delegations of concerned citizens, agitators, provocateurs. And, of course, there is the media. Within a tightly circumscribed space and time, all are struggling to shape the public narrative, a process that becomes increasingly reflexive with each step in the plot. There are performances, interpretations, counterperformances, and counterinterpretations, and all coming from different places and aimed in different directions - toward the treaty itself, toward other participants and observers, toward the wider public. Although there is only one sanctioned stage, there are multiple satellite stages and even stages within stages - back rooms, lobbies, restaurants, public squares. As *New York Times* journalist Andrew Revkin (2011)

put it describing the Durban meetings, "some voices are quiet and hidden, like those of lobbyists for fossil fuels, wind turbines, nuclear power and other special interests always huddled in back corners in the meetings. Some are impassioned and public, like those of the students who gave voice to youth."

Youth activists represent a critical though highly contingent element of the drama: the prophetic intervention. If they are able to disrupt the conference's flow of mundane, bureaucratic time and elicit a pro-social, collective emotional response, they can help steer the conference in a romantic direction, if only temporarily. These reorienting events provide a sudden opportunity for ritualistically affirming basic moral stakes: the health and well-being of future generations, the need for preserving functional ecosystems, global economic justice. They open the door to climate *communitas*, as Turner might put it. After all, more than any other social or environmental problem, climate change raises questions of intergenerational justice (Gardiner 2011; Sagoff 2011). This is why youthful truth-tellers can play such an important role. They "speak for the future." Just as important, they speak *against* a profligate past. People in their twenties are the first generation to grow up with climate change as a social fact. For many, it is not an "issue" or "problem" but an unchanging, ominous backdrop to everyday life.

Yet youth activists also occupy a precarious position in the civil sphere. If they are perceived as merely "rabble-rousing," "acting out," or "making unreasonable demands," they can be easily excluded. The same goes for other marginalized groups, especially women and indigenous people. As performers, these groups face an exceptionally fickle audience. To activate what we might think of as the "David and Goliath effect," they must present themselves as *more* civilized, *more* reasonable, *more* democratically minded than the powers that be. When they succeed, the payoff can be tremendous. The first Earth Week, for example, was largely youth driven (Rome 2013). More than 20 million Americans participated, an astonishing number by today's standards. The event helped spark the largest wave of environmental regulatory reform in American history. Yet even then students – just like the Woodstock crowds of a year before (Smith 2012) – had to walk the knife's edge of the civil-uncivil binary. Summing up CBS's special coverage of Earth Day, Walter Cronkite said, "The greatest disappointment today was the degree of non-participation across the country, and especially the absence of adults. And the young people that did participate were in a skylark mood which contrasted rudely with the messages of apocalypse" (Earthweek1970.org).

At Copenhagen, we showed this "skylark mood" shaded darkly into the anarchistic carnival of ill-disciplined and even violent protest. Too often, youths are seen as an anticivil force.

However, today there may be a more banal threat to youth climate activism: the cultural codes, expectations, and stereotyping activity of institutionalized civil society itself. As activists, and even the United Nations, grow increasingly desperate to sway intransigent governments, youths offer a convenient cultural tool for leveraging public outrage. Yet when it is apparent that young people are no longer autonomous, when they appear like puppets used by others, when they are read as an ersatz source of kitsch and *pathos* manipulated by powerful actors with anticivil motives, drama can quickly descend the genre scale. A related set of issues can be summed up with terms like *cooptation* and *cliché*. The *ethos* of the speaking young person comes from codings to naturalism and spontaneity. Once this is caged, it becomes fake, phony, and somehow less interesting – much as music genres such as punk are said to have declined once they became "commercial."

In this context the decision of the UN to hold a competition open to women aged under thirty to speak at the 2014 climate conference in New York was a risky play. It flirted with disenchanting the subject position of 'young woman telling truth' by making a form of cultural power that is "natural" visible as a stylized play and subsequently amenable to social reflexivity and emotional distancing (the sin of disclosure of which we too are guilty in this book). The UN sought the galvanizing effect that Malala Yousafzai – the teenaged Pakistani education activist and shooting victim – has engendered globally. Yet, even neutral commentary seemed discomfited. As the BBC (2014) noted, many entrants were looking less like true representatives of the Global South and more like cosmopolitan climate conference veterans with a well-rehearsed stump speech. Moreover, the decision to restrict the competition to young women appeared sexist, ageist, and arbitrary to some. It needed defending by the UN with reference to the "next generation" and the fact that 70 percent of the world's poor were women. The eventual choice of poet Kathy Jetmil-Kijiner from the Marshall Islands was a seemingly defensive response that shucked the risk of cooptation we have identified but at the same time did not reach for the prize. Pitched as 'the voice of civil society' (and not as 'the voice of youth'), Jetmil-Kijiner was a twenty-six-year-old mother. Her speech, and a following poem written for her baby, played upon and were spoken from the subject position of concerned motherhood. Poised and determined, she appeared neither as an innocent, nor as a puppet,

but rather as a strong-willed person who would fight for what was right. The problem was that, at the end of the day, this looked like an experienced 'activist' speaking, not one of the truly disadvantaged, not a real victim. A disaster was averted, but an opportunity was lost. The speech gained no visibility in the mainstream media even if it reverberated briefly in the eco-left blogosphere.

The UN's decision not to pick a Malala clone is understandable. The failure of an initiative aimed at channeling youth-the-symbol can be humiliating. This is arguably what happened at the 2012 UN climate talks in Doha. There roughly one hundred members of the ten-week-old Arab Youth Climate Movement (AYCM) helped lead what was reported to be the first-ever public demonstration in modern Qatar. It was portrayed by numerous news outlets, especially in the Arab world, as a "watershed moment" for the oil-rich Arab state and a turning point for the Middle East. According to the *Guardian's* John Vidal (2012), however, "this was no impromptu 'Arab spring' uprising, as much as a carefully and expensively orchestrated exercise by western-based NGOs and the Qatari government." Youth activists from sixteen countries were given free flights, put up in the five-star Crown Plaza hotel (normally five hundred dollars per night), asked to gather in the streets at 7:00 A.M., and issued official guidelines on how and what to protest. According to Vidal, the guidelines warned, "Qatar is an Islamic country so we need to be respectful of the culture: men and women should dress modestly... tops should cover the shoulders and upper arms, and skirts or shorts should fall to or below the knee. This march is for environmental issues only." The day before, Qatar had jailed for life the poet Muhammad Ibn al-Dheeb al-Ajami for penning "an Arab-spring-inspired verse that officials claim insults Qatar's emir and encourages the overthrow of the nation's ruling system" (Rebby 2012). Later that week, two AYCM activists unfurled a banner at the conference reading, "Qatar, why host not lead." They were thrown out of the convention and, according to the magazine *Arabian Business*, summarily deported (Reuters 2012).

As was widely reported in the run-up to the meetings, Arab leaders – particularly leaders in the host country, which produces the largest per capita volume of greenhouse gases in the world – were anxious to use the Doha meetings to show the world that they are not, as many believe, climate obstructionists. Yet the end result was, from a dramatic perspective at least, less than convincing. Many had hoped that Qatar and its regional allies would pledge to reduce their emissions. Instead, the host country merely announced the foundation of a new climate research center.

Toward the end of the meetings, Britain's *Daily Telegraph* reported, anger toward Arab nations was rising among many attendees (Gray 2012). A few days after commending Qatar on Al Jazeera (2012), Ali Fakhry of the AYCM told the *Telegraph*, "We are starting to believe that hosting the meeting was green wash and PR" (Gray 2012). In the end, not a single new pledge by a major emitter to cut pollution was gained at Doha. "As thousands of delegates checked out of their air-conditioned hotel rooms in Doha to board their jets for home," reported Reuters, "some asked whether the U.N. system even made matters worse by providing cover for leaders to take no meaningful action" (Lewis and Doyle 2012). Indeed, the bitterness and disappointment that follows each UN conference seems to act as a kind of meaning-surfactant, dispersing symbols and tropes that might have coalesced into unifying patterns. Whether groups like the AYCM can learn to reverse this process remains to be seen.

### Conclusion

Cancun was a rare moment of good news. The institutional odds are stacked against this eventuality. It is said that any publicity is better than none. Perhaps in the world of celebrity, this is the case. But when it comes to a matter like climate change, things are very different. What are needed are stories on the reality of the threat and, most of all, on the capacity of people to face up to the challenge. As we saw in an earlier chapter, this was the narrative that Al Gore propagated. Yet in our prior chapter, we saw that when climate change makes the news, the focus is overwhelmingly on human failure. Efforts to do something about climate change – whether science, politics, or civil society activism – become newsworthy generally when they involve deviance or expose deep social fault lines. The same rules apply for the climate conference. Cancun did well to be noticed. So have one or two speakers who seized the moment. The way these easily overlooked exemplars were narrated and propagated is something that should be closely studied. As Cicero put it, "omnium rerum principia parva sunt."



## Local Dramas

### *The Places of Climate Change*

For a philosopher who wrote brilliantly on the general concept of place (Casey 1997; Curry 1996), Aristotle had amazingly little to say about the fact that every story must happen “somewhere.” The Greek tragedies and comedies that he studied were located in kingdoms, cities, islands, deserts, temples, and so forth. These settings might be expected to influence mood or audience interpretations due to their aesthetic properties or the background myths of place with which they are associated. Exploiting these is a common principle of contemporary staging in theatre, film, and opera. Regrettably Aristotle remains silent. His interest in the relationship of plot and character reigns supreme in the *Poetics*. As in our chapter on climate change art, we ask here whether his focused attention on these variables is analytically or pragmatically sufficient. Might not some attention to the settings of action pay some dividends? Might place have implications for the social drama of climate change with much the same force as character? We begin our chapter by mapping and justifying this theoretical possibility. We end it with some empirical investigations of the ways that settings are imbricated with plot and character in the telling of particular climate change dramas.

In their darker hours, environmentalists often say that apathetic members of affluent societies will only take climate change seriously when it starts to “hit home” – when they and their families and friends start to suffer from unmistakable, localized changes: wells running dry, neighborhoods lost to the sea, crops failing year after year. As long as she sees it as somebody else’s problem, the argument goes, the average member of the middle class will find other issues to worry about. In more optimistic moments, the same environmentalists tell a different version of this story.

Individuals, they say, will band together to fight climate change when they feel they are fighting for home, when concrete, meaningful place – not abstract, global space – becomes the focus of their shared concern. The moral of this story is that “decarbonizing” and “building adaptive capacity” must begin at the local scale. They must begin *here*.

But where exactly *is* here? How local is local enough? What kind of place do people care about most: their neighborhood? their city? their state? their region? their planet? And why should observing climate change firsthand lead to political action in the first place? Despite their commonsense appeal, these stories rest on a number of problematic assumptions about the relationship between place, identity, and social change. Unpacking these assumptions fully would take a much longer book than ours. What interests us here is something few researchers have bothered to explore: the culture structures behind such talk about place. What are the narrative opportunities and challenges that come with drawing attention to the scenery rather than to the actors? How does the stage itself relate to genre and character in the social drama of climate change? Finally, does there seem to be any evidence that “making it local” is more effective as a strategy than some of the others we have reviewed in this book: identifying heroic individuals, demonstrating global unity in conferences, or trying to create powerful aesthetic forms?

In this chapter we begin by agreeing that activists need the concept of place to construct a social memory of climate change. In making this claim we look back to the influential writings of Durkheim’s student Maurice Halbwachs (1992), who stressed society’s need to anchor collective memory in totemic spatial representations – monuments, battlefields, plazas. Keenly aware of the social significance of place, Halbwachs used the term “topography” to describe “the symbolic mapping of places through the narration of group stories” (Till 2005, 135). As materialist scholars of so-called contentious politics have increasingly argued (Leitner, Sheppard, and Sziarto 2008; Martin and Miller 2003; Tilly 2000), this process of topographic narration can serve as a powerful fulcrum for social mobilization. For these scholars, however, place is instrumental; it is just another weapon in the representational arsenal. Yet as the more culturally attuned historian William Sewell (2001, 64) notes, “sometimes the normative meanings and uses of places *are themselves* a significant focus of social movement activity” (Sewell 2001, 64, *our italics*). Sewell points to the desegregation of public spaces by civil rights activists, Take Back the Night marches by feminists, and kiss-ins by gay rights activists. Such activities “sacralize” these spaces as “sites of transcendent

significance," producing a kind of "spatial agency" that helps impel social change (65). These movements aim to remake place as much as they aim to remake society. And they do so, in part, by telling stories and performing dramas *about* good and bad places. In such contexts, place more so than Aristotle's beloved "character" becomes symbolically central as exemplar, totem, and myth engine. For example, during the French Revolution the Bastille was stormed. The identities of those taking over the fortress are forgotten, except to historians. What remains is the conquest of a symbol of evil and a consecrated place that continues to play a role in both the French national narrative and in ritual gatherings of protest (Smith 1999).

In the social drama of climate change, place matters in this dual sense. It is both a tool for shaping public memory and, as something to be saved from ecological catastrophe, a precious end in itself. The ways in which a shifting climate influences historical events (violent conflict over resources, for example) and people's everyday "sense of place" loom large in the script. Yet both the physical and social realities of climate change impose seemingly insurmountable burdens on those who would use these geographic themes to build a historical stage for climate change. Political revolutions provide the clearest contrast. Where is the Tahrir or Tiananmen Square of climate change? For environmentalists, there is no oppressive regime to battle at what Edward Shils (1975) called the "sacred center" of society, only an omnipresent and seemingly omnipotent carbon economy. There are no massacres or mass arrests to commemorate, only natural disasters linked in complex and often tenuous ways to greenhouse gas emissions. There are no democratic reforms to uphold, only a wholesale and almost inconceivably wrenching transformation of everyday life. In their efforts to construct a social memory of climate change — one that moves environmentalism from the margins to the center of the civil sphere — activists must transform mundane places into sacred *lieux de mémoire* (Nora 2001–2010). They must commit traumatic events to social-spatial memory. But what does it mean to remember something that might not have happened, or for that matter something that is happening everywhere, all of the time, but imperceptibly? Spatially and temporally, climate change seems to scramble all the relevant signals. At least this is the orthodoxy.

Yet if the global climate shift considered as a totality really is too vast, abstract, or complex to comprehend (we disagree), what else can be done other than to battle through the difficulties and to try to construct "local dramas"? These are not necessarily "local" in the sense that only

some "local" people will care about or be impacted by them. Rather, these dramas are local in that they situate climate change primarily within a particular *chronotope*, to borrow a concept from Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). By this he means landscapes in space and time — or "space-time wholes" (Entrikin 1991, 139n23) — that structure thought by placing human agents within a defined or concrete environment for action. The meaningful landscape provides a context that makes actions meaningful within it. We stress that the turn from global dangers to local impacts is more than a simple reduction in spatial scale and a shift from the generic to the particular. Cognitive processing and emotional identification are made possible by an iconic process where there is a condensation of misty background representations onto a selection of visible symbols and narratives. In this sense, place and character are remarkably similar. A parallel exists in the way that charities foreground the experiences of specific, named individuals in some publicity campaigns rather than the suffering of thousands. Likewise the six million deaths of the Holocaust are barely comprehensible. The discovery and publication of the diaries of Anne Frank made the tragedy human. She stands at once as the generic and as the particular Holocaust victim. Scaled down in this way the barbarism becomes one that killed six million unique individuals, not the inconceivable horror of mass extermination on a continental scale. But if the chronotopic domains of climate change offer a dramatic resource for activists and a reality that we must study, just how to do so remains unclear. The work of Valerie Gunter and Steve Kroll-Smith (2007) suggests this is a promising path. In their study of environmental controversies they show how place histories, local social capital and knowledge, and situated perceptions of fairness offer mobilization potential for the specifically affected communities. Yet in contrast to the familiar geographically bounded disputes involving local communities and impacts that they study (such as toxic waste dumping, oil spills, industrial development, natural disasters, and ecosystem management), climate change seems to offer unique challenges. To understand just why, we must first lay some further theoretical groundwork.

### Place, Drama, and Social Memory

Place, in its most basic geographic sense, is space made socially meaningful (Tuan 1977, 1996). But it is other things as well. It is a tool for pursuing moral, social, and political projects (Agnew 1987; Harvey 2000, 2009; Sack 1997); a process through which identities and institutions are

formed (Pred 1984); and an idea with a complex cultural history that conditions its operation as both tool and process (Curry 1998, 2002; Entrikin 1991, 1999, 2002). Through symbolic and narrative process, the raw stuff of nature is brought into the cultural world as the carrier of value, myth, affect, and aesthetics. Particularity is born, and along with this human investment in geography becomes possible. These meanings coded into place come to provide imperatives that shape human actions – for example, to conserve or change, to visit or avoid. Precisely because places are coded in such meaningful ways, they might be expected to carry intensified anxieties over the climate change process. By the same token, they might be expected to carry intensified hopes. This is true not only of specific places but of the concept of place itself, which has become a symbolic bulwark not only against the perceived alienation and cultural homogeneity of modern life (Entrikin 1991, 60–83) but also against the imaginary of the paralyzing complexity of global environmental change. In a world where a new market for cheap fat to use in American candy bars and cosmetics (palm oil) can help turn the third largest island in the world (Borneo) from a net carbon sink into a net carbon source in a matter of years (Folke et al. 2011), is it any wonder that farmers' markets make people feel a bit more hopeful about their futures? Even the dimmest awareness of globalization and its environmental consequences can produce intense forms of what the geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) called *topophilia*. For activists, the task is to translate these place-attachments into collective, *thymotic* action. It is to construct a moral geography – that is, to make place morally meaningful in the drama of climate change. Places, much like people, must become exemplary embodiments of good and evil.

Anyone who is familiar with the writings of Bill McKibben, America's most prominent climate activist, knows how strong the moral pull of place can be. McKibben, adapting to the theme of climate change a long tradition in American environmental writing, has built his career around the promise of place-based responses to ecological crisis, from local food systems (McKibben 2008) to decentralized government (McKibben 2010). He and other ecocommunitarians are far from alone in seeing "the local" as our last, best hope. An entire genre of social scientific research has grown up around testing this proposition, not to mention a substantial amount of environmental policy.<sup>1</sup> Although some of these researchers

<sup>1</sup> As mainstream climate change research takes tentative steps toward qualitative cultural analysis, the concept of place has naturally come to the fore (e.g., Agyeman et al. 2009;

have relatively straightforward empirical interests in the localized effects of global change – how climate disruption effects mental and physical health, for example (Cunsolo Willox et al. 2012; Hess et al. 2008) – this focus on the "local" often has a strongly normative flavor. For many scholars and activists alike, place matters not simply because it represents the real but also because it represents the *good*. The clichéd exhortation to "think globally, act locally" has become something of a buried mantra in these academic circles (Devine-Wright 2013). The notion that we must "localize the problem" to "make people act," and that "local action" is somehow morally superior to "global action," and worse, patronizing telescopic philanthropy has become a kind of academic common sense.

Yet missing from most of this research is much sense of the "local" as a complex cultural construction in its own right, one with ambiguous and unpredictable links to democratic politics (Harvey 1996, 2000). Following a long and seemingly indestructible social scientific tradition (Agnew 1989), these researchers treat place as the organic home of "community," hence the natural terrain for social mobilization. This approach fits particularly well with the pragmatic strain of cultural theory, in which place fits neatly alongside nation, gender, and class in the cultural tool kit of a given social group. Unlike these rather slippery and frequently controversial cultural tools, however, place seems to possess a benign, uncontested, obvious, and seemingly uncomplicated materiality, something activists and researchers can grasp in their attempts to make climate change salient and real – firm ground to stand on, literally and metaphorically. It thus seems to offer a route toward a romantic resolution to the crisis of environmental apathy (e.g., Norgaard 2011, 207–209).

It is often difficult to disentangle this faith in "local solutions" from a more deeply rooted fascination with the geographic diversity of human-environment relations. Mike Hulme (2008, 2009, 2010), for example, has argued repeatedly for engaging with "the deeper and more intimate meanings of climate" that arise through our phenomenological embeddedness in place (Hulme 2008, 355). For this camp, cultural analysis

Devine-Wright 2013; Fresque-Baxter and Armitage 2012; Scannell and Gifford 2011; Smith et al. 2012). Environmental economist Neil Adger, lead author for the chapter on human security in the Fifth IPCC Assessment Report, has been one of the most prominent voices calling for closer attention to place as well as for more serious consideration of meaning and identity in climate change research (Adger et al. 2011, 2013). For Adger, focusing on local places corrects the global gaze of mainstream climate science, which "render[s] invisible human-scale patterns and loss" (Adger et al. 2011, 20).

serves to explain the "sense of place" that affects a local community's capacity to adapt to specific climatic changes or to explore the microscale linkages between place-based identities and vernacular climate knowledge (e.g., Geoghegan and Leyson 2012). For Hulme (2008, 9), the point is "repairing our idea of what climate means in different places and to different peoples and at different times." Others have asked more skeptically whether such attachments to place might exist at multiple scales and whether privileging the local might not foreclose possibilities for a more cosmopolitan climate politics (Devine-Wright 2013; Heise 2008; Jasanoff 2010a, 2011). Some of the best journalistic and ethnographic writing on climate change shows that the experience of place shapes people's knowledge about climate change in very complicated and even contradictory ways, even in places like the Arctic and the American Southwest, where the effects of climate change are starkest (DeBuys 2011; Ross 2011; Wohlforth 2005). As the ecocritic Rob Nixon (2011, 242) wisely warns, although emotional attachments to place can be "an invaluable resource for environmental mobilization... such attachments do not possess any inherent politics: they can induce a conservative, bigoted environmental ethic or a progressive, inclusive one."

What many bioregionalists, urbanists, and other place-booster tend to miss is that our experience of place is always symbolically mediated by systematically structured, widely circulating cultural forms and not just proximate, embodied personal experience in everyday life. Place is always narrativized. Moreover, such place myths and meanings are relevant for mobilizing not just local communities (see Gunter and Kroll-Smith 2007) but also distant spectators. They might have some emotional or cognitive investment in far-away places that may be known to them only through shared collective representations. Although it is certainly possible to notice that winters have gotten feebler and feebler in one's neighborhood, people might also be alerted to climate change through stories about other places. In social drama this is how things usually happen – somewhere distant but also known to us through circulating cultural mediations becomes the center of symbolic activity, not our own backyard. A warm winter elsewhere can become meaningful as a story about climate change when filtered through a set of broader cultural narratives about the meaning of winter as these relate to narratives about this or that place – say, the imagery of Robert Frost's New England or Jack London's Alaska. We need not be dependent on our family and community tellings about "the way it used to be" right here.

William Cronon (1992), in an influential essay on environmental historiography, gives us some important clues about how those narratives work. Using the example of the Dust Bowl, Cronon distinguishes between two types of environmental narrative: the progressive and declensionist/tragic. Progressive narratives depict the Dust Bowl as a natural disaster overcome by courageous settlers, a character-building episode in the civilizing saga of the Plains. Declensionist narratives depict the Dust Bowl as nature's revenge on a hubristic and shortsighted capitalist society. In both, the place itself mirrors society's ascent and decline. Here Cronon (1354) invokes Kenneth Burke's notion of the "scene-act ratio," according to which "the succession of scenes both *realistically reflects* the course of the action and *symbolizes it*" (Burke 1945, 3). Depictions of place drive the moral trajectory of both narratives. Were the Plains a hostile, desolate place in need of human improvement, or were they a harmonious ecosystem whose fragile balance was destroyed by human greed?<sup>2</sup> Equally important here (though missed by Cronon) is Burke's concept of the "scene-agent ratio," where the "synecdochic relation is between person and place" and which correlates "the quality of the country and the quality of its inhabitants" (Burke 1945, 7–8). In environmental storytelling, place, event, and *ethos* are thus intimately connected. Transformative events like the Dust Bowl make places into historical actors whose characters and fortunes are thoroughly entangled with those of the human actors who shape them. At these moments, geography and history become practically indistinguishable.

This fusion of place and event in public memory is a performative achievement. For activists, the goal is to imbue place with a catalytic "event-ness" (Mast 2006), to fuse places and events into historical turning points and thus redraw the background map of collective representations that guide social action. In so doing, they create an irresistible, visceral sense not only that *this* event could *only* have happened here but that *this* event happened *because* it happened here. As a result, place is experienced

<sup>2</sup> Cronon explains further: "If the tale is of progress, then the closing landscape is a garden; if the tale is of crisis and decline, the closing landscape (whether located in the past or the future) is a wasteland. As an obvious but very important consequence of this narrative requirement, opening landscapes must be different from closing ones to make the plot work. A trackless waste must become a grassland civilization. Or: a fragile ecosystem must become a Dust Bowl. The difference between beginning and end gives us our chance to extract a moral from the rhetorical landscape. Our narratives take changes in the land and situate them in stories whose endings become the lessons we wish to draw from those changes" (1370).

as both arena and agent, as both material context and efficient cause. By staging dramatic clashes between sacred and profane forces, pure and impure actors, movements give historical agency to place itself. Yet unlike places of, say, national or ethnic trauma (Gettysburg, Ground Zero, Auschwitz) or, for that matter, places of national or ethnic triumph, *environmental* places of memory are extraordinarily difficult to construct. An industrial villain is usually needed to propel an antipastoral narrative of "Eden betrayed" (Buell 1998, 647) – Union Carbide at Bhopal, Hooker Chemical at Love Canal, Exxon in Prince William Sound. Such morally and physically polluted places play the leading role in most environmental dramas. Yet as Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger (2004) famously pointed out, climate change does not fit the "pollution paradigm." Who are the villains? Who are the victims? What is the crime? None of this is clear (Jamieson 2011). Attempts to dramatize place through melodrama are thus easily detailed.

As Entrikin notes, natural disasters – no matter how calamitous – rarely rise to the level of cultural trauma.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps four million people were killed by the 1931 China Floods, but even in China the historical significance of this event pales in comparison to less devastating, human-caused calamities. Robert Merton noted long ago that social disorganization caused by the actions of morally flawed individuals is far more likely to attract attention and lead to radical policy intervention than that arising from poor systemic coordination. Times are changing, and in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, it is likely that nature will be absolved of some responsibility in the future. Of course, in twenty years, we may all classify such floods as human-caused, "unnatural" disasters. But this etiology is far from universally accepted today. As more and more people accept that greenhouse gas emissions are "loading the climate dice," as James Hansen likes to say, the boundary between natural and unnatural disasters grows more and more fraught. Yet far from putting the question

<sup>3</sup> Echoing Douglas and Wildavsky (1983), Entrikin (2007, 164) draws attention to the "collective moral cartography of good and bad places" that structures modern responses to natural disasters, even when those disasters are "officially" explained in purely scientific terms. Narrating natural disasters not only makes them comprehensible (Erikson 1994); it also "map[s] relations of moral distance between the victims and other social groups" (Entrikin 2007, 164), thus determining the extent of restorative solidarity in both time and space. Put another way, the likelihood of widespread, sustained support for disaster-stricken places depends heavily on how that disaster is publicly narrated. And how that disaster is publicly narrated in turn depends heavily on how that place and its inhabitants are imagined. Levels of concern are never determined simply by spatial or social proximity, but by complex, historically inflected moral geographies.

of causality to rest, science *intensifies* conflict by raising questions of blame. Indeed, as we shall see with Superstorm Sandy, even when scientists are fairly certain that weather extremes are linked to climate change, it is extremely risky for activists and scientific communicators to pin those extremes to human activity, and not only because skeptics are so good at using the rhetoric of scientific uncertainty (they are). It is risky to say that climate change caused a hurricane or a devastating flood or a crippling drought because it sounds like you are blaming victims for their own misfortune – or, perhaps even worse, that you are blaming ordinary people for victimizing distant strangers, simply by participating in the fossil fuel economy. At the visceral register of climate politics, science and theology *sound* the same. Nature becomes a cruel "avenging angel" (Cronon 1996) as it executes a divine judgment for our ecological sins and then inflicts punishment on others selected with a seemingly random, malevolent caprice, as if from the casting of lots. Take Darfur.

### Tragic Places: Themes of Descent

Broadly speaking, stories about climate change and place select from two realms of landscape possibility. One looks at distant others – a village in the Arctic, a camp in the Sahara, a South Pacific atoll. A second genre explores impacts for members of affluent populations in more temperate climates. As we will see, each kind has its own problems. Nevertheless, there are remarkable structural continuities in the kinds of narratives that must be presented. Consistent with the Aristotelian arguments we have been proposing throughout this book, *the chronotope – and by this we mean geographically bounded landscapes and places with their constituent people, ways of life, and ecosystems – must itself be situated within a tragic narrative as a "character."* It is subject to undeserved punishment at the hands of fate; it is the victim of cruel injustice; it must make tough choices, experience turning points, reversals of fortune, or learning and growth. Using themes of descent, climate change is generally depicted as the causal agent propelling the hapless chronotope from order to disorder, and the people within it from solidarity to failed sociability. Hence fragility, pollution, and risk will start to invade or occupy what was previously a domain of safety, purity, and predictability. Only when the agents embedded within the chronotope pull together – when the chronotope "learns" (*anagnorisis*) through some kind of recognition (*peripeteia*) – can a reversal of fortune take place and positive societal outcomes emerge. Because we live in a mass-mediated world, witnessing

this process at a distance and learning through the observation of exemplary settings must also be considered as principal components of the spatial dramas of climate change.

The oft-quoted example of Darfur stands as a representative exhibit here for a wider storytelling pattern (e.g., Parenti 2012). Darfur is frequently said to be the first war "caused" by climate change. It is more cautiously used to leverage claims that widespread conflict will result from emerging resource tensions generated by climate change, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the genocide in Darfur was initially attributed to primordial ethnic tensions, an increasingly popular alternative reading introduced climate change as the prime mover. The writings of Stephan Farris (2007, 2009) on the topic have been quoted by United Nations secretary general Ban Ki Moon (2007) and widely used as a prompt in op-eds on environmental issues. What is particularly interesting – if hardly surprising by now to readers of this book – is the structure of the storytelling. Writing in *Scientific American*, Farris (2008) conjures a "before and after" exemplary narrative. He begins:

Until the rains failed in Darfur, the region's pastoralists lived amicably with the settled farmers. The nomadic herders grazed their camels on the rocky hillsides between fertile plots and fed their animals on the leavings from the harvest.

Here there is a picture of symbiosis and stability, the oft-noted starting point of most environmental tragedies (Buell 1998; Cronon 1996; Merchant 2004). There is social and environmental harmony and even some resonance with biblical images of the desert-dwelling Israelites. It is a prelapsarian Eden that we might want to care about rather than a dusty, sunbaked hellhole we would rather ignore. Enter the themes of descent:

But with the land crippled by a decades-long drought, the region was no longer able to support both. Farmers began to fence off their fields and clashes broke out between sedentary and nomadic tribes . . . the camel-herding Arabs – those most envious of the farmers' land – became Khartoum's staunchest stalwarts. . . . The roots of the drying in Darfur lay in changes to the global climate.

As Farris (2007) explained in the *Atlantic Monthly*, next followed "ethnic cleansing targeting Darfur's blacks, the armed militia men raped women, burned houses, and tortured and killed men of fighting age. Through whole swaths of the region, they left only smoke curling into the sky."

Now we have a classic movement from unity to disunity and from harmony or balance to chaos and then evil. Net sociability decreases (farmers now fence their fields) and negative emotions start to drive human action

(the camel herders have "envy"). Those who had been living a simple, traditional life make an alliance with a corrupt and fractious regime that turns a blind eye to atrocity. A land that had been a paradise of innocents becomes a paradise lost. Farris discussed nine other places in his *Scientific American* article. Online feedback suggests his effort to communicate climate change through local dramas failed. Discussion consisted of the inevitable flame war over the reality of climate change, more specifically whether we were simply experiencing one of the many warmings that the earth has had during human history. There was no discussion of the case studies. This might reflect lack of concern or information about distant places – always a problem with particularizing strategies. But this does not square with the tremendous interest in Darfur in America, especially among evangelical Christians (Eichler-Levine and Hicks 2007). Distance matters, but it can be overcome by care and curiosity.

Darfur remains the most frequently debated example of violent conflict generated by climate change. Broadly speaking, a reduction of rain since the 1980s has stressed arable land. The rain reduction is attributed to changes in the monsoon, these linked in turn to ocean surface temperatures generated by greenhouse gases. Few analysts draw direct causal arrows from climate change to conflict; however, just as few question that environmental degradation played a significant role. It is more a matter of emphasis (Mazo 2010, 85). According to the UN Environmental Programme's (2007, 8) postconflict environmental assessment:

there is a very strong link between land degradation, desertification and conflict in Darfur. Northern Darfur – where exponential population growth and related environmental stress have created the conditions for conflicts to be triggered and sustained by political, tribal or ethnic differences – can be considered a tragic example of the social breakdown that can result from ecological collapse.

Conversely, Darfur expert Alex de Waal (2007) warns against a "simplistic" linking of climate change to the Darfur crisis. "Climate change causes livelihood change," de Waal writes, "which in turn causes disputes. Social institutions can handle these conflicts and settle them in a non-violent manner – it is mismanagement and militarization that cause war and massacre." More recent research by a team of Norwegian researchers (Benjaminsen et al. 2012) found little evidence that climate variability has driven conflict in the Sahel more generally.<sup>4</sup> Journalist Rob Grilly (2007),

<sup>4</sup> For detailed discussions of Darfur and related conflicts, see a recent special issue of the *Journal of Peace Research* (2012) on climate change and armed conflict.

author of a book on Darfur, goes so far as to accuse the UN of using climate change as an excuse for inaction. "It lets the UN off the hook for its failures in Darfur," Crilly writes, "... and pins the blame on the developed world and its carbon emissions. So with the guilt receptors nicely triggered, aid agencies and the UN can embark on a fresh round of fundraising in the West."

There is little new about the ideological contours of this debate. It revolves around a set of very old questions about nature's control over human history (Glacken 1967), not to mention the profound influence of Malthusian thinking on population growth and resource scarcity. Those who blame Darfur on climate change side with a long line of environmental determinists, represented today by authors such as Jared Diamond and Robert D. Kaplan. Those who dismiss such claims side with an equally long tradition of human exceptionalism. What is new about this debate, however, is the moral geography of blame. Faris (2007) puts it this way:

Among the implications arising from the ecological origin of the Darfur crisis, the most significant may be moral. If the region's collapse was in some part caused by the emissions from our factories, power plants, and automobiles, we bear some responsibility for the dying.

There is no question that industrialized nations are responsible for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions and little doubt that poor nations will suffer the most as a result. As the philosopher Dale Jamieson (2011, 45) puts it, "the rich countries of the North do most of the emitting, but the poor countries of the South do most of the dying." Yet drawing direct causal arrows from American SUVs to ethnic cleansing in Sudan stretches ordinary conceptions of moral responsibility to the breaking point. Perhaps more importantly, it sounds like a kind of reverse theodicy: *Darfur suffers because of our sins*. Though the physical linkages may be real, the narrative form flirts with hellfire and damnation. Pat Robertson lurks in the wings.

The case of Darfur used genocide in a remote location as the index of tragic impacts within a particular chronotope. We note that milder claims can be presented in contexts that might be more familiar to affluent Western citizens. For example, the Union of Concerned Scientists (Kling et al. 2003) makes an argument pivoting around the concept of "loss" in a report discussing changes to the Great Lakes region. We know from social psychology experiments on pricing that most people overvalue what they have. Somewhat irrationally, they also fear potential loss more than they hope for an equivalent potential gain. Probably informed by

this research, the brief item by the Union of Concerned Scientists repeats the words "loss" and "losing" nine times – a technique that can be now found in books introducing the techniques of salesmanship ("You don't want to lose out on this deal"). Drawing, as we do, on the work of Yi-Fu Tuan, the report suggests that a warming climate will erode a sense of place that has been embodied in cultural activities and everyday life alike within the chronotope:

Our songs, our art, our literature include winter as a strong element. We like to ice fish; we hunt deer with snow on the ground; we like cross-country skiing during the winter holiday, or to skate and have sleigh rides; we have fun traveling by snowmobile; and we even have dog sledding. For those providing services in support of these activities, the loss of winter (as we know it) has direct economic consequences.

The "social" is here too, albeit in an implicit and nostalgic ice-picket-fences way. Potentially solitary and contemplative activities are framed as collective ones that are part of a shared culture that binds people through locality. By implication, the loss of these winter activities and winter-themed cultural products will involve the attrition of community too. The problem with such little dramas about the "loss" of cherished local attributes is that with a little imagination, people can also see things that they would "gain" from climate change. "Loss" might have more currency than "gain" in the wiring of the human brain, but net receipts can still be somewhat equalized by attending to the other side of the equation.

This is especially the case for colder climates such as in the Great Lakes region. For much of northern Europe, to take another, the shift from a temperate to a Mediterranean climate would offer guaranteed summers and snow-free winters. This would translate into improved lifestyle as most residents would currently define this. There could also be economic benefits. For example, in 2005, the U.K. Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) reported on likely climate change outcomes for agriculture. Of course, more water would need to be stored in future to cover summer drought. Yet the overall picture was reported as quite attractive. According to the Farmer's Guardian (2005), there would be a longer growing season. Crops like grapes, sunflowers, and new potatoes would become possible. The future offered hope of a competitive advantage over Spanish farmers. The report was couched in economic terms, but the sense of England becoming more like Spain or the South of France can also be seen in lifestyle magazines looking at gardening, fishing, and home decor.

Challenging this vision of improving quality of life requires rescripting the drama and locating nonobvious dangers that are cunningly masked by immediate gains. Writing in the *Guardian*, the noted and ubiquitous British environmentalist politician George Monbiot (2009) concedes that a Mediterranean climate would be a wonderful thing for the United Kingdom's chilly seaside resorts. However, he would be unable to rejoice. This would actually be a sign that civilization was on the verge of collapse. As the United Kingdom becomes Mediterranean, other parts of the world would become overheated dust bowls and the global food supply would collapse. He goes on to conjure the apocalyptic scenario we have seen elsewhere in this book:

dozens of other nations will hit the wall; unable to feed their people, without sufficient water supplies, poleaxed by devastating drought just as the global population reaches its peak. The consequences are too horrible to contemplate. They have belonged, until now, to the realm of science fiction. Now they belong to the realm of science.

Monbiot suggests it would be immoral for the United Kingdom to have the romantic upside while others suffer in an apocalyptic Armageddon. What looks like a gain is in fact a net loss for the planet considered as a whole. Monbiot's cosmopolitan geouniversalism is just one possible narrative move here. Another more selfish one is to find local downsides lurking behind that upgrade to a Mediterranean climate. A provider of renewable energy in Cornwall points to freak weather events that would push up house insurance costs and lead to the loss (that word again) of "much loved Cornish plants like daffodils, crocuses and snowdrops," the erosion of beaches, and the emergence of new pests like termites and malarial mosquitoes (Cornwall Switch 2005). Here, as in the case of the Great Lakes region, we see the strategy of talking about beloved things that are gone, but this time accompanied by a discourse of nasty alien threats and invaders. Cornwall Switch did not mention that heating bills would likely go down in a warmer climate or that new gardening opportunities would present themselves. However the BBC's horticultural webpages challenge any complacency on the latter front:

Longer summer and warmer weather might sound like a dream come true, but the effects of climate change are not all good and could have far reaching consequences for our gardens.

It goes on to predict tough times for traditional English features such as lawns, yew hedges and cottage gardens. New Mediterranean species

might sound like attractive replacements, but they would be vulnerable to winter "waterlogging." There would also be a plague of pests such as "jily beetle, rosemary beetle, berberis sawfly, red spider mite and new vine weevil species" (BBC 2013).

Let's be clear: such representations of minor irritations for English gardeners and Great Lakes ice fishermen do little to persuade that radical actions are needed. There are bad consequences, but we can live with them, as they impact only on lifestyle choices and local traditions. New opportunities will replace them. What of the alternative? We have already seen that distant places face challenges. Darfur was too far away and the causal line too muddled to be a convincing call to action. Even places like Arctic Alaska where global climate change appears to be driving rapid socioecological change seem immune to widespread, thymotic sympathy from afar. One option that might work is to tie climate change action more clearly to the opportunity for magnifying and improving existing locality rather than the arrival of external threats and the loss of tradition. For example, the local carbon budget of the English Lake District might be associated with place- and lifestyle-enhancing shifts toward locally sourced Cumbrian beer and food, improved rail connections, and land management. It can also be associated with local autonomy and pride as decisions about policy are devolved to stakeholders (see Willis 2013). Yet such upside outcomes probably seem too trivial to engender radical changes in sensibility. Hence activists have long suggested that a major disaster in a place of undisputed global economic and symbolic centrality might offer the best opportunity to leverage the reality of climate change against a geographic fulcrum. There need to be witnessable negative impacts right at the sacred centers of the developed world. In 2012, Superstorm Sandy was to finally provide this long-awaited opportunity. Would it be enough?

### Pivots of History? The Traumatic Turning Point

In their tragic guise, hurricane stories – like many climate change stories about place – draw on dystopian narratives. They point to the futility of human action in the face of fate; of mismanagement and of the evils of human nature that are revealed as the social order breaks down. This was the tale of Hurricane Katrina. Yet at the same time, disasters invoke romantic and even utopian themes of renewal and civil solidarity: ordinary people rolling up their shirt-sleeves and getting down to the business of sustainable place-making (e.g., Solnit 2009). In the aftermath of



Superstorm (formerly Hurricane) Sandy, which struck the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area in October 2012, we can see these declensionist and progressive narratives vying for dominance in the public sphere. What made Sandy especially interesting was the overt tension between these two genres in the performative interventions of “carrier groups”: activists, commentators, politicians. Within minutes of the storm’s landfall, a battle ensued to direct the mise-en-scène of this terrifying “Frankenstorm,” a battle that continued in the weeks and months after it transixed the country with images of flattened neighborhoods and flooded subway stations. What kind of chronotope would Sandy create? What kind of emotions would it inspire? Would it change the way Americans think about climate change? If so, how? From the start, these questions were part of the story itself, making Sandy one of the first fully reflexive episodes in the social drama of climate change (e.g., Battistoni 2012; Hertsgaard 2012). With Sandy, Americans watched themselves watching themselves reacting to the disaster, openly asking if this is what it would take to make them come to grips with the problem. Not surprisingly, they did so through the discourse of civil society. What would constitute a civil response to this tragedy? Who would embody that response?

As noted earlier, there are important structural relationships between place, event, and *ethos* in most environmental dramas, captured in part by Burke’s interrelated concepts of the scene-act and scene-agent ratios. Our understanding of these relationships is deepened when we bring in Max Weber’s theory of charisma. As Smith (2000, 102) notes, “a defining strand of Weber’s original formulation is that charisma relates to the sacred qualities of an individual and the sense of mission and duty that defines the relationship between the individual leader and his or her followers.” These leaders are framed within a salvation narrative built around strong binary oppositions between good and evil. Charisma is salvific and involves a project. It emerges in opposition to profane, polluting forces that threaten to overwhelm society (Smith 2000). Climate change would thus seem to offer the perfect milieu for the cultivation of charisma; indeed, “the eco-apocalypse seems made for charismatic persons in Weber’s sense,” writes the German environmental historian (and Weber biographer) Joachim Radkau (2012, 500). Yet as we have seen repeatedly in our case studies, this has not happened. Why not? The aftermath of Sandy provides important clues, especially when we consider attempts by political leaders to narrate the event and the form their narrations took.

Even as the death toll mounted on October 30 and the full extent of the storm’s devastation began to enter public consciousness, environmental activists sought to frame the event not only as a man-made disaster but as an act of aggression. An e-mail sent out by 350.org (2012), penned by McKibben, struck an extremely combative tone, declaring that Sandy’s “real name” should be “Hurricane Chevron” or “Hurricane Exxon.” “Right now, the most important thing we can do is come together as a community and support the relief efforts that are already underway,” McKibben wrote:

But we’re not going to simply mourn our losses. The images coming out of the Atlantic seaboard, and from the refugee camps in Haiti, made us not just sad but angry. . . . These fossil fuel corporations are driving the climate crisis and spending millions to block solutions. Instead of buying climate silence, the fossil fuel industry should be funding climate relief.

McKibben (2012b) repeated these themes in an op-ed for the *New York Daily News* that same day, this time opening with the more politic, “As gutsy New Yorkers begin the task of drying out the city . . .” The attack on “Big Oil” was nothing new. It has been part of a deliberate strategy by climate activists to infuse the problem with anticorporate populism (e.g., Klein 2011). But the conceit of naming storms after corporations seemed contrived: it did not seem to break out of the so-called echo chamber of the environmentalist blogosphere. What did seem to break out was an increasing openness to nonscientific framings of the crisis, to explicitly moralistic pictures of evil forces, charismatic leaders, and victimized citizens. In the climate change blogosphere, a parallel debate about causation emerged between skeptics and true believers, alongside a more complex debate about risk perception and public opinion. *Grist’s* arch-climate hawk David Roberts battled with the *New York Times’s* arch-realist Andrew Revkin over the meaning of Sandy. Revkin (2012), standing for “sound science,” warned against pointing the finger at climate change. Roberts (2012), sounding as if he had experienced a sudden conversion to Mary Douglas-style Cultural Theory (see Chapter 2), wrote:

Most of the public doesn’t have a clue about climate science and never will, any more than they understand health science or biological evolution. . . . What the public wants and needs is a sense of what climate change *means*, how it fits into their worldview, what values and feelings to associate with it. . . . A storm like Sandy provides an opportunity for those who understand climate change to help construct that context. It provides a set of experiences – a set of images, sounds, smells, feelings, experiences – that can inscribe climate change with the cultural

resonance it lacks. That's what persuades and motivates people: not the clinical language of science, but experiences and emotions and associations.

On his blog, Al Gore (2012) did his best to frame Sandy as just such an emotional turning point, or what we would call a *chronotopic anagnorisis*. Recalling the unprecedented flooding in his hometown, Nashville, two years earlier, he wrote that "Hurricane Sandy may prove to be a similar event: a time when the climate crisis – which is often sequestered to the far reaches of our everyday awareness became a reality." Shifting from the folksy to the prophetic mode we identified in Chapter 4, he continued, "Hurricane Sandy is a disturbing sign of things to come. We must heed this warning and act quickly to solve the climate crisis. Dirty energy makes dirty weather." Like McKibben, Gore sought to name an enemy, a source of both symbolic and physical pollution: "dirty energy." Unlike McKibben, however, he defined that enemy in a diffuse, impersonal way, drawing more on the language of disease and defilement than of greed and exploitation. Speaking at a campaign rally for Barack Obama, Bill Clinton was more pointed when he reminded the audience that Mitt Romney, in a presidential debate, had "ridiculed the president for his efforts to fight global warming in economically beneficial ways."

None of these leaders could speak "for New York," however. That was for Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Governor Andrew Cuomo. With consummate rhetorical skill, Cuomo in particular seized on Sandy to frame climate change in a new and potentially transformative way. At a press conference on October 29, the day of the storm, Cuomo told the cameras:

I'm hopeful that not only will we rebuild this city and metropolitan area but use this as an opportunity to build it back smarter. There have been a series of extreme weather events. That is not a political statement; that is a factual statement. Anyone who says there is not a change in weather patterns is denying reality. (Vielkind 2012a)

The next day, Cuomo was interviewed by ABC's Diane Sawyer at the site of the World Trade Center memorial, spectacular images of which were appearing everywhere showing it being deluged by storm surge. Sawyer asked Cuomo about Al Gore's statement and whether Sandy represented "the future of New York." Gravely, Cuomo said Gore was right, adding, "It's undeniable but that we have a higher frequency of these extreme weather situations, and we're going to have to deal with it." Then came the critical symbolic move toward the sacred place of collective

memory: Cuomo compared Sandy to September 11, calling the memorial a twofold "monument to New York resilience."

Over the coming days and weeks, this narrative of pragmatic solidarity would be tested by reports of social disintegration, government neglect, and near-riots at gas stations (reports that triggered long-standing fears about postdisaster urban chaos, often revolving around race; Nye 2010). But Cuomo had tapped a rich symbolic vein at what seemed to be a liminal moment. In the coming days, President Obama would tour the wreckage with the Republican governor of New Jersey, Chris Christie, and speculation was rampant that this show of bipartisan cooperation would swing the election in Obama's favor. Christie praised Obama effusively for his response to the disaster, infuriating his own political party. Bloomberg, a moderate republican, endorsed Obama, citing the president's willingness to confront climate change as the deciding factor. These politicians may have also been emboldened by the New York media, which was unequivocal about blaming climate change. The magazine *Bloomberg Business Week* (2012) ran a cover with a photograph of a lone figure wading down a flooded street in Lower Manhattan under a headline in giant black letters against a red background: "It's Global Warming, Stupid." Polls showed that two-thirds of New Yorkers made the same connection (Siena Research Institute 2012). At a press conference on October 31, Cuomo used the term "climate change" for the first time and introduced a new sound bite, one that would become the core of his framing of Sandy: "the new normal." "It's a longer conversation," Cuomo said, "but I think part of learning from this is the recognition that climate change is a reality, extreme weather is a reality, it is a reality that we are vulnerable. . . . There's only so long you can say, 'this is once in a lifetime and it's not going to happen again'" (Vielkind 2012b).

In a short amount of time, Cuomo became the primary carrier of an increasingly dominant script, one built around three primary claims. First, New Yorkers are tough-minded realists who know a problem when they see it. Those who deny the existence of climate change are simply "playing politics," or worse. Second, Sandy, like 9/11, was a body blow to the city, but like a champion prizefighter, the city will rise up stronger than before. Third, there are practical solutions to the problem: build better infrastructure, plan smarter, reduce emissions. But running beneath these themes was a constant undercurrent of meta-commentary – *will this be enough to make us take climate change seriously?* When asked, for example, by the left-wing commentator Rachel Maddow why

Sandy seemed to be a "wake-up call" for many Americans, Cuomo said:

I think the reason you felt the receptivity on the [part of the] audience is sometimes you have a thought or a feeling that's percolating, but not actualized. And I think people have been sensing there is something going on with the weather and forget the politics of it – they just know from their own life experience something is going on. I said right in the midst of [the storm]: This is climate change. And it's not a political concept; it's a practical concept. It's not debatable and not ideological or philosophical; it is reality-based. Changing weather patterns create real, practical issues for the world. Let's build an awareness, a consensus, and let's educate and mobilize the body politic around it. When do politicians succeed in bringing change? When the people are ready. (Maddow 2013)

Through a series of carefully staged performances, Cuomo aligned his audience ("the people") with the sacred-civil side of a series of core symbolic binaries: rational/irrational, practical/political, realistic/foolish. To this he added believer/skeptic. He did not need to name Exxon or Mitt Romney or anyone else. The Uncivil Other was simply out there in America, "playing politics" and threatening our future.

Cuomo derived ethical authority not just by uniting his audience against reality deniers but also by aligning them with images of the civil center. Although a self-identified liberal democrat, Cuomo was careful to distance himself from environmental "extremists" as well as "deniers." In a November 15 editorial in the *New York Daily News* – titled "We Will Lead on Climate Change" and accompanied by the now de rigueur apocalyptic photograph of Breezy Point, Queens, a neighborhood annihilated by fires during the storm – Cuomo condensed this script into an easily transposable formula:

Extreme weather is the new normal. In the past two years, we have had two storms, each with the odds of a 100-year occurrence. Debating why does not lead to solutions – it leads to gridlock. The denial and deliberation from extremists on both sides about the causes of climate change are distracting us from addressing its inarguable effects. Recent events demand that we get serious once and for all. We need to act, not simply react (Cuomo 2012).

A list of practical solutions follows, laced with key signifiers of pro-social progress: "rebuild," "reduce energy consumption" (not by decarbonizing but by "changing building codes"), "relocate infrastructure," "diversify transit options," help "first responders," "strengthen communications systems." The cumulative message of these proposals is clear: we can take control of this terrifying situation by rolling up our sleeves and working together.

Finally, Cuomo drew on a deep well of place-specific myths to inspire hope. We can do this, he said, because of *who* we are and *where* we live. In his editorial, Cuomo concludes:

New York has a natural advantage in this seemingly daunting task. We begin with an extraordinary enterprising spirit, unparalleled resiliency and a long history of engineering the impossible.

We are the state that built the Erie Canal, opening up commerce to the West. We built a subway system so extensive that its 800 miles of track could run from New York all the way to Chicago.

Time and again, we pushed boundaries and broke records. We have been tested before, and we have always risen to the challenge. We will not allow the national paralysis over climate change to stop us from pursuing the necessary path for the future.

As the national sacralization of firemen and other first responders after September 11 showed, it is not just New Yorkers who respond to these mythic tropes of innovation and resilience. But for New Yorkers most of all, their emotional pull is powerful. Aristotle believed that "without membership in a *polis*, one cannot have a properly developed *thymos*" (Garver 1994, 113). He also believed that *thymos* was unevenly distributed. Just as Greece occupied the climatic and thus civilizational center of the world (or so the ancients believed), Greeks possessed the perfect balance of spiritedness and reason and thus were most the most capable of governing themselves and others (Garver 1994). Cuomo – who speaks with a broad Queens accent and plays up his image as a shrewd urbanite – understood perfectly that appealing to New York's *thymos*, its sense of itself as the center of the world, would open the door to themes of ascent. He deploys the scene-act and scene-agent ratios with aplomb, shifting genre from tragedy to low mimesis and onward toward romance.

"One of the things that comedy and romance as a whole are about, clearly, is the unending, irrational, absurd persistence of the human impulse to struggle, survive, and where possible escape," writes Frye (1976, 136). By wrapping the idea of environmental resilience in the mantle of New York mythology – a mythology he could convincingly personify – Cuomo appeared to have nudged the drama toward climate change *communitas*. Whether he and others can continue to do so remains to be seen.

## Conclusion

In an important sense, Cuomo and those in his carrier group seem to have tentatively confirmed the hypothesis that local, place-based dramas can be effective in changing sensibilities and priorities. Yet they also

showed that not just any place will do. For a drama to be successful, action and *ethos* must be aligned with the correct geographical narratives. Character and action must suit the stage. In Arizona or Oklahoma, a different genius loci would need to be conjured – perhaps one that activates the progressive mythos of frontiersmanship and conquest that Cronon and other environmental historians have so long decried.

Had Sandy missed Manhattan, would it have been discussed as a “wake-up call” or “turning point” in quite the same way? Would it have been imbued with quite the same “event-ness”? We doubt it. New York has special meanings as a center of finance, as a melting pot, as a symbol of America, and as the so-called capital of the world. Yet at the same time, its place-myth was constraining even as it enabled climate change activism. This was a city of can-do, no-nonsense people. Cuomo’s position suggested there could be pragmatic fixes that would toughen up New York. By tinkering with building codes and seawalls, the worst of the damage could be mitigated in the future. Sensible local decisions would lead to target hardening. Meanwhile newscasts documented the community spirit of individuals helping each other rebuild their lives. Things seemed to be getting back to normal very quickly. Unlike Katrina, Sandy had produced a romantic narrative that quickly tended toward the low mimetic. The kind of fundamental genre shift that might have led to radical new carbon policies and political will to make sacrifices to lifestyle and endorse global treaties could not emerge. By the end of 2012, the tendencies implicit in the early rhetorical response to Sandy began, like charisma in Weber’s account, to be routinized and institutionalized. A conference entitled “Rebuilding a Resilient New Jersey,” held on December 7, featured speakers outlining the “new normal” and “opportunities for state and regional action to enhance resilience.” This event was about digging in at a local level and solving problems locally, not changing carbon lifestyles or global solidarity (New Jersey Future 2012). Likewise, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, in association with other high-profile institutions such as New York University’s Institute for Public Knowledge, launched its Rebuild by Design (2013) competition. Looking through the contestants, we find the idea of “resilience” taking center stage, this assisted by thesaurus buddies such as “resist,” “mitigation,” “protect,” and “adapt.” The competition entries seem attractive and environmentally sensitive, but they remain nevertheless local, defensive responses to the “new normal” that is now deemed inevitable.

What would it take to break this pattern of circling wagons and make such local drama more universal and more ambitious? Clues can be found in the history of environmentalism. The most famous place-narrative in American environmental literature (after *Walden*) is Rachel Carson’s ([1962] 2002) “Fable for Tomorrow,” the opening chapter of *Silent Spring*. In it, Carson tells of how “a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings” is afflicted by an “evil spell” that leaves a silent trail of death in its wake. “No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world,” Carson wrote. “The people had done it themselves” (3). But as *Silent Spring* went on to demonstrate as it converted middle-class suburbanites to the cause of environmentalism, people did *not* blame themselves, nor did Carson. They blamed the chemical companies, the scientists, and the government regulators who had released this “strange blight” into American domestic space. Without this moral geography, Carson’s fable would have failed. Similar narrative strategies have proven transformative in bottom-up struggles for environmental justice. Take the Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel laureate Wangari Maathai, whose Greenbelt Movement used tree planting to enact a moral confrontation between Kenya’s rural poor and its urban kleptocracy. This “theater of the tree,” as ecocritic Rob Nixon (2011, 136–137) correctly terms it, “staged a showdown between the forces of incremental violence [i.e., deforestation] and the forces of incremental peace; in so doing [it] gave a symbolic and dramatic shape to public discontent over the official culture of plunder.” By simultaneously “naming the agents of destruction” (136) and articulating a hopeful, thymotic vision of sustainable place-making, Maathai wrote just the kind of chronotopic script that we believe climate change has lacked.

Of course, climate change is a fundamentally different kind of problem. As Ulrich Beck (1992, 33) argued in *Risk Society*, “everyone is cause and effect, and thus *non-cause*,” and this brutal fact produces a pervasive condition of “general complicity” matched by a “general lack of responsibility.” Because global ecological risks like climate change are produced by “the system,” Beck noted, we can abdicate responsibility and continue to act “physically, without acting morally or politically” (33). This is what Kari Norgaard (2011) calls “the absurdity of the double life.” For environmental rhetoric to succeed, we suggest, this absurdity must be overcome by civil discourse channeled through ethical, charismatic authority. There must be heroes and heroines (like Carson and Maathai)

to defend civil society against dangerous enemies – even if that enemy is in fact itself.

As Cuomo demonstrated after Sandy, would-be leaders must mobilize utopian narratives of social progress and renewal, and they must do so by invoking places, real or imagined, that inspire both hope and pride. Blame alone does not construct ethical authority.

## Conclusion

### *The Show Must Go On*

It may be said that every individual man and all men in common aim at a certain end which determines what they choose and what they avoid. This end, to sum it up briefly, is happiness.

– Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1.5.1360b4–6

To argue on the basis of reason alone is a character flaw, a failure of *ethos*, and therefore a failure to persuade.

– Eugene Garver (1994, 183)

Can climate change make us happy? The question might seem glib, but we ask it in earnest. Happiness, for Aristotle, was the goal of all deliberation. Without showing that he cared first and foremost about the happiness of his audience, a speaker was sunk. Deliberation over climate change is no different. And climate science cannot tell us how to be happy.

Others have made the same point, but they have tended to conceive of happiness in restrictive ways: ethical, psychological, economic.<sup>1</sup> We conceive of happiness in more inclusive sociological terms. It is about more than feelings of security or the promise of prosperity. In the Aristotelian tradition, happiness (*eudemonia*) is not simply pleasure or contentment but “is something like flourishing human living, a kind of living that is

<sup>1</sup> Mike Hulme, for example, argues for reframing climate change in postmillennialist terms such as “Jubilee” – “an opportunity to create new potency behind movements for social and environmental justice” (2009, 354). Others, most prominently Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger (2007), have tried to reframe climate change as a catalyst for economic growth and technological innovation. We can even see evidence of this emphasis on happiness in seemingly sterile policy debates about “cap-and-trade” versus “cap-and-dividend” – a scheme for funneling proceeds from emissions permits directly to consumers (e.g., Skocpol 2012).