Introduction to Reports from the ARST Preconference "Articulating Risk"

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On November 19, 2014, the Association for the Rhetoric of Science and Technology held its annual preconference in Chicago, IL, in conjunction with the National Communication Association convention. This year's theme was "Articulating Risk." Since the publication of Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society*, scholars in science, medicine, and technology studies have grappled with issues of risk and its (mis)management in modern society. ARST has made this topic a central concern on more than one occasion. The rhetoric of risk was a theme for the 2011 preconference. That preconference was held in New Orleans. It used that venue as a prompt for discussion of environmental risks, specifically the rhetoric around Hurricane Katrina and the BP Gulf Oil Spill.

The "Articulating Risk" preconference in Chicago considered broadly how risk has been articulated and communicated across multiple and often overlapping settings, some medical, others environmental, still others concerned with national security. The event drew rhetoricians from both Communication Studies and English, and included presentations drawing upon critical-interpretive scholarship from cognate sub-disciplines.

Our four ARST reports begin with a summary of a panel on the role of expertise and data in articulating risk for scientific and lay audiences. **Ashley Rose Kelly** and **Carolyn Miller** address the role of expertise and its ethotic work. **Shannon N. Fanning** and members of the Science and Medical Communications Laboratory (SAMComm), including **Molly M. Kessler, S. Scott Graham,** and **Daniel J. Card,** examine various ways in which data are "calibrated" through visualizations and links to other sources of evidence. The report includes a discussion of the analytic vocabularies used to describe risk and its communication, and a discussion of how issues of trust shape our reaction to experts and to data.

The next report comes from **Lora Arduser, Lucia Dura,** and **Jennifer Malkowski**. They engage the issue of agency in the face of uncertainty and risk. They draw from debates about mandatory health worker vaccination, diabetics' practices of disease management, and the practice of "positive deviance" to promote agency and organizational change. Their examples highlight the possibilities of taking the initiative in situations of biomedical risk, which the authors identify as the basis for increasing the agency of populations who are exposed to the greatest degrees of risk.

The next two panels consider the issue of risk in specific contexts. The third panel of the day examined discourses of environment and disaster to highlight ways in which risk is emphasized, managed, or deflected. In their panel, **William J. White, Philippa Spoel, Lisa Keränen,** and **Rowan Howard-Williams** addressed environmental and national security contexts where risk has prompted public policy responses. The papers and discussions they prompted focused on the changing dynamics of risk discourse and the institutional contexts (market-based, regulatory, etc.) that shape rhetorics of risk even as they are destabilized and potentially transformed by those same rhetorics.

In the final panel of the preconference, **Amy Koerber, Lora Arduser, Jeannie Bennett, Lauren Kolodziejski, Shaunak Sastry,** and **L. Paul Strait** addressed risk and vulnerable, medicalized bodies. The report discusses ways in which fetuses, children, pregnant women and those at risk of developing mental illness have been articulated as "at risk" and as "inherently risky" in different historical periods. The panelists conclude with a discussion of the dangers of simplistic definitions of risk that unduly burden the already vulnerable.

Read together, these reports identify three facets of the rhetorical articulation of risk. First, issues of agency—its creation, implementation, transformation, etc.—appeared across all the panel reports. Second, the reports highlight the broadly ecumenical approach to critical vocabularies that has characterized the rhetoric of science: vocabularies from Aristotelian, critical-cultural, material science-studies, and other traditions can be found here, all focused on the issue of illuminating risk and its articulations. Third, the reports all discuss some research that expands rhetorical methodology by including qualitative social science approaches of ethnography, field observations, and interviews. Readers of the Preconference reports will see the rhetoric of science and technology following Kenneth Burke's dictum to use all there is to use by drawing from the wealth of analytic vocabularies and methodological tools available.