

ARST NCA Preconference 2015

Symposium on Agency in Honor of Carolyn R. Miller

Wednesday, November 18, 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.

Brasilia 3, Rio All-Suite Las Vegas Hotel and Casino

“[I]f agency is an attribution, our ideological concerns have been misplaced. We should be concerned less about empowering subaltern subjects and more about enabling and encouraging attributions of agency *to* them by those with whom they interact—and accepting such attributions *from* them. We should examine the attributions we ourselves are willing to make and work to improve the attributions that (other) empowered groups are willing to make.”

–Miller, “What Can Automation Tell Us About Agency?” (*RSQ*, 2007, p. 153)

Schedule

8:00-8:45	Challenges to Traditional Definitions of Agency
8:45-9:30	Acts of Rhetorical Agency: Redrawing Boundaries in Technoscientific Hybrid Forums
9:30-10:15	Scientific Rhetoric: Individual Agency in the Public and Private Sphere
10:15-10:30	Coffee break
10:30-11:15	Agency and Risk
11:15-12:00	Automation and Agency
12:00-12:45	Rhetorical Agency, Health, and their Affective Relations
12:45-2	Lunch
2:00-3:30	Working groups discuss special <i>topoi</i> relating to agency in science communication (biopolitics, automation, public sphere, risk), answer following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What are some critical controversies relating to this <i>topos</i>?• What are the critical rhetorical and technical terms associated with this <i>topos</i>?• What is the core literature treating this <i>topos</i>?• What scholarly questions must be addressed in the next five years to yield a just and effective discourse on this <i>topos</i> and in controversies centered on it?
3:30-3:45	Break
3:45-4:15	Groups summarize findings
4:15-4:45	Carolyn Miller’s commentary, symposium wrap-up

Panel Abstracts

Panels are presented in the order they appear in the morning schedule above.

Challenges to Traditional Definitions of Agency

Distributed Agency and Disembedded Expertise in an Age of Applied Genetics

Zoltan Majdik, North Dakota State University

The last decade’s developments in the science and marketing of genetics present a paradox to agency, both in its ontology and its praxis. Our genome is who we are, yet any knowledge or use derived from it must come from what Giddens

called disembodied social institutions: technocratic or economic nodes with agentic interests wholly disconnected from ours. I use this systems view of genetic practice to make three related arguments. One is that to talk about agency in genetics is, deep down, to talk about a kind of distributed agency, namely, an agency distributed across the sometimes overlapping, sometimes divergent interests of individuals and institutions. Second is that such agency challenges traditional ideas about expertise as something that resides in one place (a person, a certified group, etc.). Instead, expertise in genetics — or any other domain where agency is similarly distributed — always is an expertise mediated through some form of deliberative exchange, in which reasons behind norms of practice regularly should be maintained and challenged. Third is a critical argument: that such a distributed system of agency makes it possible for particular agentic nodes to skew perceptions of legitimate agency in ways that overemphasize some types of agency over others. To make these arguments, I collect and analyze public comments about genetics, derived from the government’s regulatory database. The analysis maps how, in the context of making decisions based on genetic information, people with no technical background in genetics see their perceived sense of expertise, and thus their perceived agency.

Faking agency: Public science and the problem of kairos In “What can automation tell us about agency?”

Sara Beth Parks, Iowa State University

In “What can automation tell us about agency?” Miller posits agency as the kinetic energy of rhetorical performance. She compares the speaking situation, which “foreground[s] the agent, the performing subject as the seat of rhetorical origin, seizing the kairos (capacity) to instigate change (effect)” (146), to the writing situation, which “obscure[s] performance, kairos, and audience.” (146) Yet, she urges us to think of both as a performance. Thinking of rhetoric as a performance allows us to understand how successful agency works as a kinetic energy, situated in context, and balanced between rhetor and audience. But what about unsuccessful performances, such as instances of deficit model rhetoric in public science? The deficit model of science communication is roundly condemned as unpersuasive and even alienating. Yet no easy model has risen to take its place. Even still, scientists and funded science communicators are being explicitly urged, even required, by the NSF to act in public, to speak to (at) the public, and to quantify these forays in ways that meet pre-set assumptions and broader impacts metrics. In this presentation I will argue that deficit model, 1-way “messaging” is what results when kairos is ignored and persuasive kinetic energy doesn’t happen. I also warn that the reluctant rhetor may purposefully avoid kairos and fake agency to justify easy, if unpersuasive, deficit model messaging.

Humans, Dolphins, and Other People: How Animal Rhetorics Expose the Fallacy of Human Exceptionalism

Alex Parrish, James Madison University

According to legend, the formal study of rhetoric was begun by a crow (Corax) who feasted on the remains of a tyrant (Thrasylbulus). It is no wonder, then, that rhetoricians throughout history have been both fascinated and horrified by the intrusion of the nonhuman animal in the realm of human affairs. The rhetorical tradition has long groped in the dark for a meaningful method of separating man from beast. Isocrates said in his Panegyricus that eloquence and reason set us apart, but he also excluded most Greeks from full humanity, claiming that one needed a proper Athenian tutor to be any better than a barbarian. Cicero argues that persuasion creates the human-animal boundary in his rhetorical texts, and that reason is the cause of our disconnection in his philosophical texts;

it seems more important to him that we make a distinction than we remain entirely consistent in what the basis of that distinction is. Examples of rhetoricians attempting to separate humans from other animals abound in the history of our discipline, but why? What is it we lose if we admit that we are not the only species to persuade, and that our persuasion is not even limited to audiences of our own species much of the time? In this paper, I would like to debunk some of the common disciplinary myths that support human exceptionalism by exploring the persuasive activities of rhetorical animals. As ethologists learn more about animal cognition, humans are forced to change the way we make ourselves special. Indeed, the goal posts have been constantly shifting since the first philosophers undertook this task, to the point where exceptionalism has nowhere left to hide. Animals, we have discovered, do all of the things we have so long attributed only to humans – some fashion tools, some deploy reason to solve problems, some even use syntax to organize their languages and proto-languages – and some animals do some of these things better than humans ever could. Far from automatons or slaves to instinct, animals are thinking, communicating, rhetorical beings, and the study of their persuasive techniques can help us break down the type of hierarchical thinking that leads so often to oppression and violence against the other.

Scientific Authority Online

Jean Goodwin, Iowa State University

Even in the classical age of "The Orator," it was widely acknowledged that in rhetoric, powers and constraints were always paired. Carolyn Miller follows Leff in pointing out that the classical tradition tempers the power of the rhetorical agent. Both Isocrates and Cicero, who celebrate the agential power of the speaker, also point to powerful constraints on the speaker, those of the audience and of communal tradition. The rhetor cannot be an autonomous originator and expect to succeed in persuasion—and never could ("What can automation tell us about agency?" p. 146) Scientists' power to declare what is similarly limited: limited by their conspicuous commitment to the Mertonian norms as enforced by institutions such as peer review. Indeed, it is scientists' willingness to thus bind themselves that renders them trustworthy authorities as opposed to illegitimate authoritarians. But what is left of expert authority when the traditional institutions are left behind in new media environments? Online, Wikipedia has had (surprising) success in becoming authoritative through taking responsibility for "giv[ing] free access to the sum of all human knowledge," as defined by content standards and enforced by elaborate procedures. By contrast, attempts to build more expert-oriented resources have largely failed; traditional mechanisms of authority do not flourish online. In this submission, I propose to examine the more successful science blogosphere to see what constraints scientists have managed to impose on themselves in order to generate a limited, and therefore trustworthy, rhetorical agency.

Acts of Rhetorical Agency: Redrawing Boundaries in Technoscientific Hybrid Forums

A Rhetorical Model of Translation: A Methodological Proposal for Networked Agency in Climate Risk

Kenneth Walker, University of Texas at San Antonio

Technoscientific risks compel rhetorical theories of agency to conceptualize the distributed and networked nature of deliberative performances (Beck, Graham, Herndl and Licona, Miller). By grafting a rhetorical apparatus onto actor-network theory (Callon, Lascoumes, and Barthes, Latour), this presentation offers a mixed-methods model for the study of

agency across cases of technoscientific risk. To demonstrate, I trace the actor-network of the loaded climate dice meme over one year of networked media performances with multiple kairos of extreme weather events, including record-breaking heat and Hurricane Sandy. My rhetorical analysis attempts to understand how the performances of the climate dice meme redraw the boundaries between personal, technical, and public agency, and foster deliberation over climate risk. Crucially, these deliberations are constituted by a process of translation—the work through which actors modify, mediate, and displace their various and contradictory interests (Latour 311). The analysis highlights three sites of translation: the circulations of the loaded climate dice meme; the visual mediations of scientific expertise; and the networked deliberations on uncertainties across a distributed media environment. The agency to instantiate political change in this case is conditioned by the ability of the loaded dice meme—and its associated scientific authorities—to legitimize extreme weather as deliberative events that personalize climate risk as high consequence, low probability games of chance. I suggest that similar approaches to networked agency allow scholars to understand the material-semiotic implications of rhetoric in the hybrid forums of technoscientific risk.

Engineering Agency Attribution: Lessons from Rhetorical Studies for the Creation of Ethical and Effective Science-Policy Fora

Scott Graham

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee

Rhetoricians are very familiar with the long-standing problem of inclusion in science-policy deliberation (Blythe, Grabill and Riley, Koerber, Peterson and Horton, Schwarze, Wynne). Traditionally, the issue has been framed in terms of the manifest value of democratic access and how best to include the marginalized voices of non-expert classes. Indeed, science-policy scholars have documented a systematic marginalization of these voices in issues of public health, toxic waste storage, nuclear contaminants, and climate change. A long history of governmental agencies, in concert with technical experts, making policy decisions without public input strongly suggests the need for an increasingly democratic approach. However, much of this work focuses significantly on getting diverse stakeholders “a seat at the table,” as it were and not so much ensuring that they have the requisite agency and authority to participate as coequals when they arrive. Rhetorical scholarship in agency theory can productively inform efforts to ensure not only more equitable, but also more effective, inclusion. In wedding our notions of agency as a posthoc discursive attribution (Miller) and the strategic occupation of a material-semiotic subject position (Herndl and Licona), we can start to imagine the kind of science-policy deliberative events which might help to ensure that included stakeholders have the requisite material-semiotic authority such that they are eligible for posthoc agency attribution. To that end, this presentation will examine recent efforts in rhetorical studies to evaluate the efficacy of stakeholder participation in science-policy deliberation (Graham, et al, Teston, et al, Majdik, DeVasto).

Extensions of Rhetorical Agency in Grassroots Sensing Technologies

Ashley R. Kelly

University of Waterloo

Technoscientific risks, the kinds produced by modern human activity, have several essential characteristics outlined by Ulrich Beck (1992), including that they are manufactured as opposed to natural, inequitably distributed among global populations, and they are often imperceptible. Imperceptible risks, such as the health risks posed by radiation, are those we cannot perceive with our own senses. However, we humans are able to supplement our senses with sensory technologies that help make visible these risks. In this way we extend

ourselves, our senses, through a marriage between human and nonhuman; that is, we extend our senses by developing technologies that translate imperceptible material phenomena such as radiological events into a material-semiotic apparatus (c.f., Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Marshall McLuhan). This extension of the human nervous system through technological apparatus rejects an effort to “draw the line” between human and technological actor (Miller 152). Rather, sensing technologies function as extensions of our nervous system and expand our rhetorical agency by unfolding new possibilities for sensing and responding to technoscientific risks. Technical agency, then, is enfolded in personal agency. Growing grassroots citizen science movements provide a useful site for empirical analysis of this phenomenon. Examining three grassroots sensing projects where technological systems are designed and deployed in response to technoscientific disasters, this study investigates technical and personal agency as a nexus for distinct rhetorical agency. Each case illustrates how the relationship between human and sensing technology develops, the rhetorical decisions and design behind the technologies, and the rhetorical purposes to which human and technology respond together.

Scientific Rhetoric: Individual Agency in the Public and Private Sphere

Speaker 1: Bonnie Tucker, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

The American Civil Liberties Union describes, “The War on Women” as “the legislative and rhetorical attacks on women and women’s rights taking place across the nation...a wide-range of policy efforts designed to place restrictions on women’s health care.” Importantly then, the ACLU asserts that the war on women is largely enacted rhetorically, but also that it is intertwined with laws that determine the material conditions of women’s health care. Within this presentation Speaker 1 will analyze several examples of how the rhetoric of scientific evidence or proof is used argumentatively by both defenders of women’s reproductive rights and those who seek to limit those rights; oftentimes scientific rhetoric is cast as objective or beyond the scope of ethical considerations. Indeed, the legitimacy of scientific discourse is interestingly coopted by both sides of this debate to gain authority and to promote consensus. Ultimately, Speaker 1 argues that this scientific rhetoric develops circumscribed identities for the women affected most by the discourse and defines their bodies as objects of public dialogue to be regulated. This presentation will build upon theoretical work on the rhetoric of science that points out how science constructs individuals’ identities (Zerbe, 2007) and often classifies or labels those individual beings as agentive or non-agentive.

Speaker 2: Chris E. Iwertz, Ohio State University

It is estimated that 90% of fetuses diagnosed with Down syndrome in America are aborted and 75% of parents will choose to abort a fetus after receiving a diagnosis of Down syndrome (Hennessy, 2013). In this presentation, Speaker 2 will explore political and medical mobilization of discourse surrounding abortion as it currently does not allow for attention to the body of unborn children with disabilities because such discourse disrupts the clean distinction between a fetus’s right to life (specifically what is scientifically and socially constructed as a *normal* life) and a woman’s right to choose. Evaluating examples from Wrongful Birth Law, the speaker will explore discourse that constructs agency within the body and birth of a child with Down syndrome as the choice of a women to select an *unnatural* or *abnormal* life for her child, which is further stigmatized through legal recognition and medical prognosis of human bodies diagnosed with Down syndrome.

Speaker 3: Oren M. Abeles, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

This presentation examines an exchange of rhetorical figures between early 19th century agriculturalists and the biological arguments articulated in Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*. The presentation argues Darwin borrowed particular figurative devices from writers arguing for modern agricultural practices, principally methods of stock breeding that allowed humans to exercise a new level of control over animal morphology. Yet if these pioneering farmers were publicized by Darwin and others as singular causes of evolutionary change, in their private writing they spoke of themselves as much more entangled within broader organizations--actor-networks indivisible from the wider, distributed "Cause" for which they were striving. That Darwin recirculates the former narrative and not the latter has important repercussions, not simply for his theory of biological change, but for allied discussions in modern political, economic and cultural philosophy. And within discussions of evolutionary biology, that the Darwinian model retains a distinctly causal linearity can, this presentation argues, be traced back to its initial distinction between agentic farmers, their private actions, and the broader public environments in which they act.

Speaker 4: Sean Kamperman, Ohio State University

This presentation takes as its subject theories of rhetorical agency in special education literacy pedagogy. Academic research centers such as the UNC School of Medicine Center for Literacy and Disability Studies seek to better understand the literacy learning difficulties encountered by students with cognitive and intellectual disabilities. While valuable, the approach of these institutions is severely limited by their grounding in medicalized theories of remedial education. Such theories view both illiteracy and disability as co-constitutive deficits—a perspective that unfortunately has gained much authority in both educational policy and the mainstream media. Reading and writing, conceptualized as autonomous, culturally invariant skills (see Street, 1984), are too often assumed to confer social, economic, and political benefits without empirical proof (Graff, 1979). In this presentation, Speaker 4 argues that the poverty of perspectives on these issues can be traced to a lack of communication between literacy studies and disability studies. Speaker 4 examines how individualistic curricula such as UNC's Whole-to-Part Model of Silent Reading Comprehension ignore insights into the collaborative nature of reading and writing in everyday social contexts (see Clanchy, 1993; Saenger, 1982; Sherman, 1995). Ultimately, Speaker 4 argues for models promoting interdependence and rhetorical agency over normalizing rhetorics of communicative competence.

Agency and Risk

Citizen (and/or) Scientist: The Italian Judicial System's Vacillating Verdict on the Agency and Ethos of the L'Aquila Earthquake Scientists

Leah Ceccarelli and Pamela Pietrucci, University of Washington

In October 2012, six Italian scientists with expertise in earthquakes, along with a government official who spoke to the public in their name, were convicted of manslaughter and sentenced to six years in prison. They had participated in a meeting of the Major Risks Committee a week prior to the massive earthquake that struck L'Aquila in April 2009. The court held that they were negligent not only for conducting a grossly inadequate risk assessment, but for conscious and uncritical complicity in the media operation that surrounded the meeting, including a press conference held by the government official (and attended by three of the scientists) that misled the public with the disastrously reassuring (and inaccurate) claim that the swarm of minor earthquakes that had been plaguing the

area was a favorable sign since seismic energy was being dissipated. A few months ago, an appeals court reversed the conviction of the scientists, upholding only the conviction of the government official. Carolyn R. Miller argued in 2003 that the separation of risk assessment from risk communication, while commonly assumed by those who practice both, “is a false distinction.” Examining the way that the scientists’ agency and ethos are configured in the two decisions, we argue that the first decision interpellated the figure of the responsible scientist-as-citizen who is expected to correct inaccurate information communicated to the public in his/her name, while the second assumed a false distinction between public and technical spheres that inappropriately absolves scientists from their responsibilities to fellow citizens.

Agency and Responsibility in Transportation Systems

Nathan R. Johnson and Meredith R. Johnson, University of South Florida

This presentation explores the question, “How do agents deploy responsibility when among objects and people?” Public transit systems—busses, cabs, or subway services—require coordination between drivers, schedulers, riders, timetables, routes, vehicles, and a number of other people, objects, and techniques. Through anthropological case research on a K-12 bus system, we identified how agency and responsibility travels from school to home and back again. In the bus system we study, children are labeled to account for them. These labels are just one technique that account for the mass of students. In this presentation we discuss what forms of agency become responsible for supervision when there are hundreds of thousands of children to track. This question is particularly important when children get lost and publics demand that someone be held culpable for lost children. Responsibility is a concept that is usually projected onto human authorities but needs to be rethought with new theoretical perspective. Our research builds a vocabulary for that perspective.

To investigate constructions of responsibility, we conducted an anthropological analysis of large systems in the STS tradition. Our analysis is supplemented with bussing maps, route information, phone call data, and observation notes. In particular, we maintain that responsibility should be an active part of initial infrastructure discussions. We suggest two potential avenues for this vocabulary: 1.) responsibility should be built into infrastructure as a part of its development and 2.) there should be multiple options for locating rhetorical responsibility.

Generating Mosquitoes: Rhetorical Invention and Agency in Genetic Pest Management for Disease Control

Molly Harzog, North Carolina State University

Miller (2007) described attributions of agency as “a kinetic energy of performance,” that is “generative of rhetorical action” (p. 152). As she has discussed elsewhere (“The Aristotelian Topos: Hunting for Novelty,” 2000), the generation of rhetorical action falls within the purview of the canon of invention. Scientists, in particular, seem to attribute agency to the organisms they study in rhetorical invention. For example, the study of human vectored diseases involves understanding the transmitting organism (the “disease vector”) and its capacity to act in the world in ways that spread disease. Researchers in genetic pest management think from the perspective of the disease vector in order to develop genetically modified organisms that will encourage the vector to behave in a manner that disrupts the disease transmission. This presentation will investigate these implications of agency on rhetorical invention in genetic pest management for disease control, using

genetically modified mosquitoes for controlling dengue and malaria as case examples. This project combines stasis theory with boundary objects to explore how mosquitoes are defined as biological agents in processes of rhetorical invention for genetic engineering. These scientists first define Anopheles or Aedes aegypti mosquitoes as boundary objects to facilitate research across different laboratories. Second, scientists build gene constructs, using processes of rhetorical invention that persuade the mosquito to behave in a way that discourages disease transmission. Building on Miller's (2007) conception of agency, this presentation will provide a framework for understanding how scientists' attribution of agency to disease vectors creates a space for a generative notion of rhetorical invention in genetic engineering.

Automation and Agency

Finding Agency in the Data Science Machine: Understanding Emerging Climate Change Arguments from Automated Data Modeling

Candice Lanius, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Carolyn Miller's piece "What can automation tell us about agency?" is groundbreaking for its contribution to understanding agency and responsibility when humans rely on automated systems. Miller's insights are increasingly relevant in the context of data science, a new field that has expanded rapidly over the course of five years. In data science, particularly "big data", much of the analytical process is beyond the conceptual power of human agents, so interpretation and processing has become automated. Miller's conceptualization of agency as a property of the event (analytic process), not something found exclusively in human analysts, opens a door to important questions about the algorithm and code's role in constructing arguments about human behavior in conjunction with the analyst. In one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today—climate change—modeling the interaction between human behavior and the environment is foundational to understanding and intervening. I will use Miller's contribution for understanding agency to investigate the ideology and rhetorical impact of a series of big data projects: Google's Earth Engine, Microsoft Research's Madingley Model, and Data.gov's Climate data resource. Each of these projects automates their inquiries in distinct ways to address the climate change crisis, and it is important to understand what the rhetorical and political implications of automation are for the global community.

Big Data and Rhetorical Analysis: Rethinking Critical Methods for Large-Scale Textual Analysis

Aimée Kendall Roundtree, Texas State University

Databases of digital media service providers, social media content, governmental open data projects and other sites of large data sets are valuable and promising primary sources for rhetorical analysis and intervention. However, the sheer volume of textual data makes it difficult if not impossible to deploy traditional methods of rhetorical analysis—from critical theory to content analysis between coders. Scholars use technology solutions—such as text analytics programs designed by SPSS and other statistical software brands, software designed by linguists and communication scholars such as DICTION and DISCURSIS—but with varied approaches and degrees of success (e.g., rhetorical precision and insight). This presentation will enumerate the particular challenges of rhetorical analysis of big data by examining one case studies (one of an ongoing project with the Austin Fire Department analyzing incident reporting trends over the past 10 years) and it will review and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of

various guidelines and best practices (published by statistical software companies and research consultancies such as Butler Analytics) in order to approach developing a framework for guidelines in our field. The project draws heavily from Carolyn Miller's work on the agency of automated assessment systems (2007), rhetoric's disciplinary distinctions (2009, 2013), and the humanistic capacity and responsibility of technical communication (1979). Ultimately, I will partially contend that technology can augment, but not replace, close reading for general categorization but not critical thinking, and that big textual data projects may also call for ethnographic methods such as embedded observation over time.

Can Automation Support Agency?

James Wynn, Carnegie-Mellon University

In "What Can Automation Tell Us About Agency?" Carolyn Miller explores rhetorical agency by examining objections to using automated assessment systems to evaluate students' spoken and written arguments. From these objections she concludes that speech and composition scholars are unwilling to assign agency to computerized assessment systems because they believe that agency develops from the interaction between the rhetor and their audience. Although Miller vocally rejects the notion that agency should be granted to automated assessment technologies, she remains silent on whether these technologies might help rhetors gain agency. My paper explores this unexamined aspect of the relationship between technology and agency by investigating how citizen science—the use of Internet and internet-connected technologies to crowdsource information about risk and natural phenomena—may help achieve the goals of agency set out by Miller. In the conclusion of her paper, Miller argues that rhetorical scholars "should be concerned less about empowering subaltern subjects and more about enabling and encouraging attributions of agency to them" (153). In my paper, I will examine how digital technologies helped the residents of Pepys Estate in East London develop technical arguments about noise pollution in their neighborhood. I will argue that these digitally supported arguments helped them gain a public hearing, and thereby agency, for their grievances about noise pollution. Conversely, my paper will also explore the limits of technology to grant agency to this subaltern public by investigating the immediate response of borough officials to these risk arguments and the long-term solutions that were enacted to address them. By examining the resident's arguments and the borough's responses in this particular case, this investigation draws conclusions about the benefits and limits of digital technologies as means of gaining agency for subaltern arguments in mainstream audiences.

Rhetorical Agency, Health, and their Affective Relations

Fitness Trackers, Health, and Rhetorical Agency's Affective Figures

Chris Ingraham, University of Colorado, Boulder

Popular rhetoric around health in America often struggles to reconcile cultural ideals of health as habitual or as attentive practice. In the former case, health is process, sustained habitually over time through such commitments as a "balanced diet" or an "active lifestyle." In the latter, health is product, the outcome of a more active effort, typically achieved through the latest dietary fads and quick-hitting exercise routines. Recently, wearable fitness trackers like the Fitbit, Jawbone UP, or Apple Watch have intervened in how human bodies perceive, pursue, and monitor their health. These technologies monitor the physical

activity of their wearer as a way of both cultivating healthfulness as process (habit) *and* healthfulness as product (practice). As post-human extensions of our bodies—and more particularly, as surveilling bio-technologies that rhetorically influence human behavior—fitness trackers underscore the anthropocentric insufficiency of treating rhetorical agency as “the capacity of the rhetor to act” (Geisler 2004, p.12). Instead, I argue that rhetorical agency is better understood through the ontological lens of affect theory, which rather foregrounds the “capacity to affect and to be affected” (Braidotti 2006, p.136). To do so, in this presentation I discuss five ways that fitness trackers prompt us to conceptualize rhetorical agency affectively: as *matrix*, *scale*, *hierarchy*, *network*, and *algorithm*. Though not an exhaustive typology, each of these five figures corresponds with different ways of understanding health and the agential capacity that human subjects do or do not have in its regard.

Architecture as Antecedent for Contemporary Constructions of Patient Agency

Jennifer Malkowski, California State University - Chico

Nathan Bedsole, University of Colorado at Boulder

The discursive constitution of the subject-as-patient, itself a contingent arrangement, construes the agency of that subject in an investigable way. Guided by Lundberg’s (2015) examination of the *scientific* elements of rhetoric, in this essay we argue that, like the structure of the unconscious, the structure of health settings affects the possibilities for how bodies mean and how patients act. Via rhetorical field methods and close textual analysis, we examine two sites of medical practice with decidedly non-medical histories and architectures: salvaged abandoned tobacco factories repurposed for biotechnological innovation in Winston-Salem, North Carolina and reoccupied military bases used for medical education, research, and practice in Aurora, Colorado. In doing so, we argue for the continued impact of structural preconditions for current constructions of patient agency. Specifically, we find two types of rhetorical revision at work in reappropriated health spaces: one in the architecture that animates and automates bodies allowed to occupy those spaces and another in the potentiality (imagined or otherwise) for how bodies behave better via technology. As complex, hybrid rhetorics of space and place, past and present, modern and postmodern, architectural histories about the intersections of health and production hold implications for how the issue gets understood, experienced, and, ultimately, commodified today. Thus, situating our argument about affect and agency in physical places and temporal spaces that influence health permits a serious investigation of what ethical considerations for the individual arise out of a social world informed by architecture, and what this means for the evolution of patient agency specifically.

Rhetorical Agency as Affective Attribution: Heartbeat Bills and Kinetic Power

Emily Winderman, North Carolina State University

When Carolyn Miller theorized agency as an attributive process, she offered a productive way to think about the imaginative processes of bestowing vital capacity upon another. Within the context of health and medical discourses, Lisa Keranen and Megan Foley have recently attended to how rhetorical attributions of voice have the ability to bestow agency upon a body that is otherwise deemed voiceless. Yet, a lacuna remains concerning *why* some bodies are granted a greater capacity to act than others. This presentation supplements these conversations and asks how fetal imaging technologies can encourage the attribution of vital agency to fetal “heartbeats.” As Heartbeat Bills attempt to outlaw abortion care at the moment a fetal heartbeat can be detected, the legislation grants the mediated production of a heartbeat the ability to signify protectable life. In this presentation, I perform a reading of Ohio’s 2011 public attempt to generate support for the

Heartbeat Bill by administering public ultrasounds and encouraging audience members to hear a fetal “heartbeat.” I argue that the kinetic power of Heartbeat Bill laws is dependent upon a sympathetic rhetoric that can encourage the audience to connect with ultrasound images through a visual and aural experience. Drawing upon literature that links sympathy to care giving behaviors, I argue that rhetorical theories of pathos can account for why agency is bestowed upon some bodies and not others. This reformulation of rhetorical agency as an affective attribution holds implications for developing rhetorical strategies for rebuilding political coalitions around reproductive justice issues.