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POROI | PROJECT ON THE RHETORIC OF INQUIRY

Ways and Means: Rethinking the Rhetoric of Inquiry for the 21st Century

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ABSTRACT:

Tracing the journal's history from its inception in 2001 to its present transformation, this essay explores how *POROI* has shaped and been shaped by broader disciplinary, institutional, and technological shifts. Highlighting key contributions to rhetorical inquiry—spanning science, technology, medicine, and beyond—the issue revisits influential articles that have defined *POROI*'s mission while inviting scholars to reimagine its future. As *POROI* embraces new ways of knowing and responds to contemporary challenges, it seeks to foster an inclusive, interdisciplinary space for examining the rhetoric of knowledge production in the 21st century.

KEYWORDS:

History, rhetoric of inquiry, science, technology, medicine, anniversary

POROI or *Poroi*, depending upon whom you ask, began being published in 2001 as a semi-annual journal. The journal was a result of ongoing meetings that began in 1980, some of which had led to the *Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*, originally published in 1987. This set of meetings eventually was codified as the Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry (POROI), an interdisciplinary program at the University of Iowa. POROI had an expansive agenda; it included seminars, workshops, national conferences, a variety of classes, a Graduate Certificate Program in Rhetorics of Inquiry, and its most well-known accomplishment, the peer-reviewed journal *Poroi: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetorical Analysis and Invention*. For the last 24 years, *Poroi* has published research on the rhetoric of inquiry.

Why *Poroi* you ask? The magnanimous founders of the project sought a way to differentiate the journal from the larger set of activities of the group's agenda. The journal's 2001 mission noted that the "title is more than an acronym. Poroi is the plural of poros, ancient Greek for a way through or across, as in a track through the mountains or a river ford. In Greek democracy, poroi meant "ways and means," with classical rhetoric probing the available means of persuasion." Naming the journal as *Poroi* forged a serendipitous middle

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way between the project's acronym and the Greek word (*Mission of POROI Journal*, 2001). The early 2001 imprint of the journal even included a wordmark that visually blended the Greek undertone with the interdisciplinary program. The figure below was used to represent *Poroi* the journal.

Figure*: Original Workmark for the Journal*

There is rich polysemous meaning being performed in that wordmark. It certainly is very close to the Greek word πόρος (poros) and πόροι (poroi), but the mathematical character for pi clearly suggests a connection to the very heart of POROI, *Poroi*, and πόροι. The rhetoric of inquiry project was largely invested in exploring the process of knowledge production and learning, and much of its publication run has been devoted to the institutionalized history of the disciplines and the professions. Indeed, one of the primary founders was Deidre McCloskey, well known for her *Rhetoric of Economics* (1985), which plumbed the disciplinary assumptions and scientific rhetoric of discourse in economics. The first issue of *Poroi* was devoted to the rhetorics of biology. From these beginnings, the journal has expanded significantly to include knowledge production and learning across a variety of institutions and ways of knowing. The first issues of *Poroi* invited a variety of submissions to fulfill that mission, including but not limited to "film takes," "multimedia inquiries," "myth scapes," "rhetorical inventions," "strategy studies," and "word tours" (*Poroi: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetorical Analysis and Invention*, 2004).

In some ways, *Poroi* found its ideal partner in the Association for the Rhetoric of Science, Technology, and Medicine (ARSTM), which has had its own vibrant history of names and acronyms. ARSTM began as the American Association for the Rhetoric of Science and Technology (AARST), before transitioning to ARST (dropping the American) to denote its growing international presence, and then finalizing today as ARSTM, where it has served as a home for rhetoricians of medicine along with those studying science and technology. Since 1992, AARST/ARST/ARSTM has been hosting conferences that align with the interests of the Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry, and this alignment has led to numerous special issues that were edited by ARSTM members. Perhaps the most notable of these was the special issue on "Inventing the Future: The Rhetorics of Science, Technology, and Medicine," which set a research agenda for ARSTM shortly after *Poroi* celebrated its tenth anniversary as a peer-reviewed journal.

As the decades have passed, both *Poroi* and ARSTM have adjusted to the rhetorical context of their times. The organizations have been impacted by a number of historical

events, not the least of which were the 9/11 attacks which forever changed air travel, the rise of social media, the popularization of mobile devices, the completion of the human genome project, the adoption of the Kyoto protocol, the long-term effects of Hurricane Katrina, the completion of the Large Hadron Collider, the launch of cryptocurrency, the expansion of space exploration, and the worldwide spread of COVID, to name just a few events that have shaped the 21st century's perspective on science, technology, and medicine.

The histories of POROI, *Poroi,* ARSTM, and the global events that they respond to beg the question: **what does it mean to conduct research on the rhetoric of inquiry today and how does it differ from when *Poroi* began?** "Inquiry" brings along a variety of denotations and connotations. Inquiry could mean seeking information, investigation, or systematic questioning. It implies an effort to uncover truth, resolve uncertainty, or deepen understanding. More subtly, inquiry could suggest intellectual rigor, as in scientific inquiry or philosophical inquiry, where disciplined methods are applied to expand knowledge. In some contexts, inquiry takes on an authoritative or bureaucratic tone, as in government or institutional inquiries, where the term is associated with accountability, oversight, or scrutiny. Or inquiry can evoke interpersonal dynamics, as in a personal inquiry into someone's well-being, which suggests concern and attentiveness. "Inquiry" carries both neutrality and intention—it can be passive, as in simply seeking knowledge, or active, as in interrogating power structures, institutions, or epistemologies.

This issue of the journal invites answers to that question. The following pages document nine of the most influential articles published during *Poroi*'s publication run to date. This issue republishes them as inventive material for to support next year's 25th anniversary issue, devoted to the renewal and rebirth of *Poroi* as *POROI*. Although *Poroi* has served its readers exhaustively and productively, 2026 welcomes a new rhetoric of inquiry that recognizes the far-reaching influence of *POROI: Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry* as in service to the interdisciplinary community. Because of this, **this issue serves as a call for papers** that envisions the future of *POROI* while being respectful, attentive, and appreciative to its past as *Poroi.*

REVISITING POROI'S MOST INFLUENTIAL WORKS

David Depew's "Introduction to a Special Issue on Rhetorics of Biology in the Age of Biomechanical Reproduction" was the first *Poroi* article (2001). Depew's introduction to a collection of essays on biotechnology lays the foundation for later explorations of science and rhetoric. He foregrounds the power of rhetorical strategies in shaping public perception of genetic engineering, eugenics, and other transformative practices in biology. By illuminating the relationship between scientific discourse and democratic debate, Depew helps set the stage for *Poroi*'s broader mission to examine how institutions, disciplines, and publics negotiate new scientific possibilities.

Herbert W. Simons' "The Globalization of Rhetoric and the Argument from Disciplinary Consequence" captures a moment when rhetorical methods were rapidly diffusing across

adjacent fields such as sociology, literary studies, and philosophy (2003). In tune with *Poroi*'s interdisciplinary spirit, Simons asks how rhetoric scholars can preserve their distinctive identity while collaborating widely. The piece underscores both the productive possibilities and the institutional challenges that arise from expanding conversations about rhetoric well beyond communication departments and into global academic communities.

André Brock's "Who do you think you are?: Race, Representation, and Cultural Rhetorics in Online Spaces" investigates how Black identity is both enacted and contested in digital "third places," focusing on blogs, social media, and other interactive forums (2009). Brock looks closely at high-profile examples like Kanye West's post-Katrina comments and the Rev. Joseph Lowery's inaugural benediction for President Obama to trace how Blackness appears in public debates. These digital dialogues, he argues, reveal evolving norms for who gets to speak for a group. By centering on the interplay between private conversation and very public performance, Brock shows how online spaces can simultaneously challenge and reinforce collective notions of race.

The next two articles add to the contemplative future-thinking perspective of this special issue. "Promoting the Discipline: Rhetorical Studies of Science, Technology, and Medicine" by Jeanne Fahnestock examines how rhetorical thinking informs both scholarly critiques and public engagement with science and medicine (2013). Calling on rhetorical historians to harness methods such as topical invention, argument analysis, and stylistic study, she speaks directly to the heart of *Poroi*'s mission: revealing how knowledge-making practices in specialized fields both reflect and shape larger social assumptions. Similarly comprehensive, John Angus Campbell's "State of the Art Twenty Years On: Reflections" looks back on the emergence of rhetoric of science, underscoring how key figures and intellectual milestones shaped the field's trajectory (2013). Consistent with *Poroi*'s attention to the "ways and means" of knowledge, Campbell shows the fruitfulness of rhetorical inquiry for critiquing scientific texts, urging the continuation of dialogues that explore the relationship between science, democracy, and public argument.

The following articles from Ceccarelli and Gottschalk Druschke provide a call and response to the potential audiences of the journal's readers (2013; 2014) "To Whom Do We Speak? The Audiences for Scholarship on the Rhetoric of Science and Technology" by Leah Ceccarelli poses a fundamental question about the publics rhetoricians serve. True to *Poroi*'s expansive mission, she enjoins critics to engage policy makers, scientific communities, and broader publics, rather than addressing only fellow scholars. By detailing how rhetorical work can inform decision-making, Ceccarelli builds on *Poroi*'s legacy of bridging theory and practice, while reminding us that rhetorical inquiry can foster real-world transformation. In "With Whom Do We Speak? Building Transdisciplinary Collaborations in Rhetoric of Science," Caroline Gottschalk Druschke reflects upon her experiences working on environmental research projects with scientists, students, and local communities. By integrating rhetorical insight into field-based initiatives, she illustrates the ways collaborative partnerships can transcend conventional scholarly boundaries. Mirroring *Poroi*'s own wide-ranging pursuit of

rhetorical knowledge, Druschke's approach showcases how a rhetoric of inquiry can help solve practical problems while generating new theoretical insight.

Randy Allen Harris' "The Rhetoric of Science Meets the Science of Rhetoric" brings the cognitive sciences into conversation with rhetorical theory, expanding *Poroi*'s interest in forging connections that transcend traditional disciplinary lines (2013). Exploring Kenneth Burke's theories of form and identification, Harris suggests that rhetorical analysis may benefit from empirical insights on human cognition—and vice versa. This piece exemplifies *Poroi*'s commitment to an interdiscipinary study of rhetoric and audience in scientifically informed contexts.

Continuing *Poroi's* long-term focus on collaboration, "The Rhetorics of Health and Medicine: Inventional Possibilities for Scholarship and Engaged Practice" by J. Blake Scott, Judy Z. Segal, and Lisa Keränen maps out rich opportunities for rhetorical study of health and medicine (2013). In line with Poroi's dedication to exploring knowledge-production processes across institutions, they encourage collaboration with clinicians, policymakers, and public audiences. Their call for inventional possibilities resonates with *Poroi*'s founding ethos, inspiring new research methods and meaningful practice at the intersection of health, science, and society.

Jennifer L. LeMesurier's "Uptaking Race: Genre, MSG, and Chinese Dinner" speaks to that call from Scott, Segal, and Keränen. Through an exploration of so-called "Chinese Restaurant Syndrome," she highlights how one letter to the *New England Journal of Medicine* helped turn monosodium glutamate (MSG) into a racialized concern (2017). By weaving the concept of "uptake"—the ways audiences select and interpret texts—into her analysis, LeMesurier illustrates how sensational media framing and subtle forms of bias fused public anxieties about MSG with longstanding prejudices toward Chinese food. Her piece underscores the power of genre conventions in constructing or dismantling stereotypes, ultimately spotlighting how beliefs about authenticity, risk, and racial difference persist in everyday dining practices.

Finally, "Five Considerations for Engaging with Big Data from a Rhetorical-Humanistic Perspective" by Zoltan P. Majdik speaks to *Poroi*'s longstanding concern with how institutions and experts validate knowledge (2021). By focusing on key rhetorical concepts—relationships, observability, patterns, diachronicity, and audience—Majdik shows how rhetorical scholarship can sharpen critiques of big data and inform data-driven projects themselves. In keeping with *Poroi*'s goals, he forges a path for rhetorical inquiry to engage the latest shifts in technology and scientific practice, expanding the journal's hallmark interplay of tradition and innovation. This is both the newest and potentially most important article of this issue. Although Majdik does not specifically reference generative AI or synthetic text, he provides a theoretical framework that is important for considering both in the future.

LOOKING FORWARD

All eleven of these pieces illustrate the breadth and depth of *Poroi*'s impact on how we approach science, technology, medicine, and beyond. Over the course of more than two decades, *Poroi*'s authors have shown us how rhetorical methods—grounded in critical theory, empirical analysis, and collaborative practice—can illuminate how we inquire about our world and its language. As this collection makes clear, *Poroi* has always embraced the Greek notion of πόροι: ways and means. In doing so, the journal continues to spur the expansion of rhetorical inquiry into new territories and unforeseen challenges—inviting everyone to join in envisioning the future of *POROI* as a project, community, and now the re-envisioned acronym of the journal *POROI: Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry*.

Starting with this issue, *Poroi: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Rhetorical Analysis and Invention* will become *POROI: Project on the Rhetoric of Inquiry.* You'll notice this performed in parallel through the journal's updated visual look, starting with this essay. The point is not to leave behind *Poroi*'s past but to recognize that the journal is continuing to change and to stay relevant to current social issues related to the production of knowledge and knowing. *POROI* recognizes that an explicit connection to the history of Greek rhetoric may not be the most relevant *way* to address issues that are intercultural and inclusive, and embracing the ways and means of knowledges that are mutually exclusive, but mutually constitutive.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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