

PREFACE

The papers and abstracts in this volume are from the *First International Conference on Cultural Attitudes Towards Technology and Communication* (CATaC'98), held at the Science Museum, London, in August 1998. They represent state-of-the-art research at the convergence of communication theory, philosophy and cultural science in the context of new communication technologies and they open a scholarly dialogue for a deeper understanding of the interaction of culture and technology.

The aim of this conference is to provide a meeting point for international scholars to discuss our thematic question: *how do diverse cultural attitudes shape the implementation and use of CMC technologies?* The purpose of the conference is twofold: (i) to facilitate a dialogue among the representatives of a wide variety of disciplines and countries who participate in this conference; and (ii) to bring together papers that articulate the connections between specific cultural values and present and/or possible future communicative practices involving computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies. The papers will help readers, researchers, and practitioners of "electronic democracy" better understand the role of diverse cultural attitudes as hindering and/or furthering the implementation of global computer communications systems such as the Internet and the World Wide Web.

The conference program offers a range of forums, including a panel on *Global Culture, Local Culture, and Vernacular Computing: The excluded 95% in South Asia*, a *Triialogue on Philosophy, Communication Theory, and Cultural Criticism* drawn from session discussions on the issues identified, and papers that address research in seven topics:

- The Politics of the Electronic Global Village
- Homogeneity, Marginalization, and the Preservation of Local Cultures
- Communication in Virtual Communities
- Sociocultural Convergence
- East/West Cultural Attitudes and Communicative Practices
- Culture and the Design of Technology
- Communication and Technology in Organizations

We are also privileged to have Dr John Durant, Professor of Public Understanding of Science, as the keynote speaker.

The conference could not have occurred without the efforts of many people. We would like to thank the *authors* for their research and scholarship efforts,

the *organizing committee members* for shaping the conference; the members of the *editorial board members* for their contribution and constructive reviewing of submitted papers, and the *sponsors* for their support. Particular thanks go to *Simon Joss* and *Debbie Cahalane* for setting the scene at the Science Museum; to *Suzanne Tagg* who embellished the scene and was an invaluable liaison between the absentee co-chairs and the local players; and to *Sara Gwynn* for her assistance during the conference. All these people have contributed to creating an illusion of an effortless and seamless conference.

Welcome to CATaC'98! We invite you to exploit fully the opportunity of meeting scholars from communication theory, philosophy and cultural sciences and engaging in an interdisciplinary dialogue.

Fay Sudweeks
Co-Chair

Charles Ess
Co-Chair