

# Epilogue

It is now time to reflect upon the major themes as referred to in the title of the conference and this publication: 'Computers and networks in the age of globalization'. In retrospect this was a very large question to address — possibly too large. Who could be the subject or subjects who could know such things and adequately address a question of this size? Nevertheless, the papers assembled here do address specific aspects of this issue and they have advanced the debate. But advancing the debate has both a positive and a negative side: on the positive side it represents a kind of progress, while on the negative side it exposes some hidden shortcomings.

Take the theme of 'globalization', for example. It poses a universal term that everyone around the world should relate to; hence it should unite us in a quest. But it refers to economic power, and the human experiences of it are as diverse as human beings themselves. We might say that, for us, the challenge of globalization is to rescue it from being an economic category to become one that refers to cultural diversity — a diversity that we could do more to understand, to share and to benefit from.

Or take the theme of 'networks' which, particularly through the Internet, is another universal phenomenon. Though it is a purely technical term, it raises many issues that young people clearly relate to. For many people, the Internet raises major questions of human values and is similar in this respect to the environment, world poverty, and social exclusion. Their frequent association of the Internet with freedom is, to some, an example of utopian thinking — but what is the point of asserting human values if they are not tinged with utopianism? Can our discussions reflect this burgeoning expression of human choice among the young or are we, in the name of human choice, assigned only the role of guardians and moral police force?

And so the themes of this conference have evolved to become self-reflective. With technology, as with art, the meaning no longer resides exclusively with the authors but is negotiated between them and the public. Human choice and computers is, and has always been, about such dialogues but now the form of the dialogue needs to undergo change. Future activities in the field of 'Human Choice and Computers' need to recognise that our understanding of the world has moved beyond modernism. Technology no longer means only what technologists say it means. Rather, its meaning is constructed by processes (such as 'Human Choice and Computers' conferences). In the future, they will have to be a different kind of event, focussing more on such processes.