FOREWORD

Cultural acts are increasingly mediated by the application of digital media. What has emerged is a regime characterized by an incessant and aggressive pursuit of newness. The sheer pitch of innovation has made any attempt to curate a comprehensive collection of writings on the topic seem destined for an accelerated decline into obsolescence.

In the present moment, the pressure caused by the explosion of digital services and commodities is such that the traditional capacities and interests of the cultural producer are largely orphaned. It remains to be seen whether traditional methods of artistic and scholarly production — relying on forms of intelligence cultivated by centuries of analogue thinking — will continue to maintain their relevance. The survival of traditional forms of art and scholarship, as well as the potential development of a new art and intellectual practice, relies (as always) on the degree to which the faculty of human imagination finds itself replenished by the exercise of these skills.

'Throughput' is clearly related to the postwar neologisms, 'input' and 'output', which represent the opposite ends of the chain of information. These two words have long since become naturalized by everyday use. The appeal of the title *Throughput* lies precisely in its present unfamiliarity, which seems to promise a metaphoric potential now atrophied in its more familiar kindred. While the idea of throughput represents a limit, it also represents the mutability of such limits. As we struggle with the recognition that the speed of analysis and comprehension can never hope to compete with the speed of change, we find an increasing need to substitute the speculative for the analytic. The necessity of speculation could be interpreted as our inability to make sense of the present, or, more positively, as an indication of our capacity to refigure limits as things unfold. Many of the papers found here are actively engaged in this refiguration.

This issue of *Public* marks our first collaborative venture. We would like to acknowledge the support that the McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology has provided for this issue, with special thanks to the Program Director, Derrick de Kerckhove. *Public 11: Throughput* contains a section devoted to an analysis of the Culture Technologies Convergence Conference, organized by Professor de Kerckhove in the spring of 1994. This important event brought together specialists from the fields of art, the academy, business and high technology, in a forum devoted to debating the questions posed by the intersection of culture and technology in the wake of the digital intervention.