Preface

This special issue consisting of 20 original contributions is devoted to Professor Christian Choffrut on the occasion of his 60th birthday (May 5th, 2006). We edited this issue with enthusiasm to express our esteem and respect to one of the most original and recognized researchers in the theory of automata.

All contributors are either co-authors, close friends or former students of Christian. The papers reflects broad scientific interests. In many articles a fundamental topic is "rationality"—a topic which is central in scientific work of Christian. Indeed, this is the motivation for the title of the issue: *Art of Rationality*.

During his studies at the Ecole Politechnique, Christian was divided between scientific and humanistic interests. This broad mindedness to various aspects of life is a characteristic feature that the friends appreciate in Christian. This attitude is witnessed by the vivacity of his interaction with different cultures: Christian can express himself fluently in seven languages, he has a non-superficial knowledge of countries that he visits, and he likes to explore the historical, artistic and naturalistic aspects of other cultures.

The scientific activity of Christian has been deeply influenced by his encounter with M.P. Schützenberger, who was the advisor of his Ph.D. thesis. Christian remembers with pride those days as a student of Marco when a challenging theory was created, the theory of sequential functions, motivated in a natural way in automata and monoids, "les mammeaux de l'informatique théorique". Christian extended this research with coherence and scientific rigour to the rational relations or more generally to the rational parts of monoids, obtaining the unmatched reputation as an expert of this area. In the later years he has applied this knowledge in quite different areas such as automatic groups. Since 1991 he has been the editor-in-chief of the prestigious journal *Theoretical Informatics and Applications*, to whom he has given a great contribution with his habitual energy.

Christian has a strong personality. On one hand he is very competitive both in science and in every day life. In science he always wants to understand the real underlying facts of a theorem—and then tries to find a shorter proof, often via tools of rational relations. In personal life he never accepts the facts that he cannot do the same as his friends e.g., in mountain or tree climbing. On the other hand, he is very polite—a real gentleman—despite that he typically has very frank opinions.

Finally, we want to thank all those people who strongly supported the preparations of this special issue: the contributors who were so enthusiastic and reliable throughout this process, the reviewer who did a remarkable job, and last but not least the editor of TCS-A, G. Ausiello, who eagerly accepted and encouraged to fulfill this goal.

We three, as close friends of Christian, feel privileged of having a chance to edit this special issue.

We wish you, Christian, A Happy Birthday and successful and rational years to come.

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