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Panel – Assessing Critical Social Theory Research in Information Systems

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The Critical Social Theory (CST) program of information systems research is now just over a decade old. Although the number of researchers associated with the CST program are few, they have had a disproportionately larger impact on the field than other research communities. The main reason for this disproportionate impact can be found in the intense and incisive radical critiques of the foundational assumptions of our field that CST researchers have conducted. These radical critiques have helped to open up the theoretical debate on IS research and point out new directions for future inquiry. But as we turn the century, new challenges are emerging. New information technologies (IT) are rapidly invading all social forms of life, impinging upon the daily experiences of individuals and radically changing the relationship between people and IT. Like no other research program, the CST approach is based on the ideals of emancipation from blind technological rationality and uses of IT that enhances freedom and justice. How then will the CST research program respond to

developments in new information technologies which have the potential to be intensively oppressive?

This panel brings together leading CST-IS researchers and, in keeping with CST tradition, opposing voices to ensure critical self-reflection and debate. The debate and discussion will examine the emergence of new socially transformative information technologies and the role of CST research in helping to shape the future.

Ojelanki Ngwenyama will chair and moderate the panel. He will make introductory remarks that set the panel agenda and closing remarks that tie together the panelists' comments. Kalle Lyytinen will outline the basic tenets of critical social theory and its short history and impact on the theoretical foundations of IS research. Gordon Davis will provide a critique of the critical social theory approach and provide a more general perspective on how CST fits in the mosaic of IS research. Duane Truex will outline some of the important social issues that are emerging around new information technologies and suggest how some of these can be carefully examined and understood from a CST perspective. Finally, Paul Cule will open the debate on the future of CST research in the context of new emerging information technologies.