

Preface

The journey leading to this topical issue began in the summer of 2003 at a small café in Montreal. The goal was to bring together many active members of the many-body reaction community to seek a consensus on the accomplishments in our field; the many things we have come to know and also, the things we do not yet know. As the reader will discover, consensus may sometimes mean agreeing on where we still disagree. The authors of this topical issue have tried to bring together diverse perspectives and present highlights of what we have learned and of some of the open questions.

The first stage was an online discussion of accomplishments and open questions. The most important topics emerged and discussion leaders were identified. After this we met in Catania, Sicily, in January, 2004, where we had a workshop with no invited talks. The workshop intensified the discussions and fostered debate. A set of working groups were formed. We then met at Smith College, Massachusetts, in June, 2004, for a day and a half of invigorating discussions. Each of the working groups reported its progress, and the community began to assess the status of our undertaking. The idea to collect the projected review papers in a common publication emerged at that time. We left with more homework and reconvened at Texas A&M University, Texas, in February, 2005, for our third workshop. It was there that the hard work of the first year and a half started to merge into the form that we present here.

This topical issue is the result of this extraordinary journey. We do not see it as an aim achieved, but rather as a milestone by which we can judge our progress as the journey continues toward an even greater knowledge of the dynamics and thermodynamics of heavy-ion collisions.

None of this would have been possible without the generous intellectual contributions of many individuals and the dedicated efforts of the local organizers of the workshops. We would also like to acknowledge the financial support of LNS-INFN Catania, Physics and Astronomy Department of the Catania University, Smith College, and Texas A&M University. To all of them we express our sincere thanks.

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