

Preface

The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in a Digital Age is a book about innovative, virtual institutions. It is at the same time an experiment that uses a *virtual institution* as part of its subject matter and as part of its process. Like such recent books as Chris Anderson's *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More*¹ and McKenzie Wark's *Gamer Theory*,² this book had, as its beginning, a first draft hosted on a collaborative feedback and writing site. Where this book differs in some respects from others is that it uses this experiment in participatory writing as a test case for virtual institutions, learning institutions, and a new form of virtual collaborative authorship. The coalescence of meaning and method are a hallmark of participatory learning—and this book uses this participatory method to help support that meaning.

This has been a collective project from the beginning, and so the first acknowledgment goes to all those who supported it and contributed to it. Funded by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as part of its initiative on Digital Media and Learning, *The Future of Thinking: Learning Institutions in a Digital Age* began as a draft that was written together and then posted on a collaborative Web site developed

by the Institute for the Future of the Book (<http://www.futureofthebook.org>) in January 2007. The draft remained on the Institute's site for over a year (and still remains there), inviting comments from anyone registered to the site. A new digital tool, called CommentPress, allowed readers to open a comment box for any paragraph of the text and to type in a response, and then allowed subsequent readers to add additional comments. Hundreds of viewers read the draft, and dozens offered insights and engaged in discussion with the authors or with other commentators.

Three public forums were held on the draft, including one at the first international conference convened by the Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC, pronounced "haystack").³ HASTAC is a network of academics and other interested educators who are committed to creative use and development of new technologies for learning and to critical understanding of the role of new media in life, learning, and society. HASTAC is both the organizing collective body around which this book developed and the subject of one of its chapters. Without the energetic participation of those who contributed to the Institute for the Future of the Book collaborative site, to the HASTAC network and conference, and to the various forums on digital institutions, this book would look different and certainly be less visionary. The names of project participants are included in the contributors list. Where appropriate, specific contributions are also noted throughout the text.

In the print version of this book, text boxes offer examples of learning institutions that have begun to chart visionary paths for other institutions to follow.⁴ In the online version, URLs point to sites where one can find out more about innovative digital learning experiments and institutions. Although the scope of the main discussion is on university education and

digital communities among adults, Bibliography II includes an annotated listing of K–12 and youth-oriented institutions that are taking the lead in exploring what virtual learning institutions might accomplish and how.

Zoë Marie Jones, a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art, Art History, and Visual Studies at Duke University, joined this project in the fall of 2007. Collaboration (especially with so many participants) is an enormous amount of work, and Ms. Jones took charge of the complicated process of integrating the responses and feedback from the virtual contributors into the final draft in a way that allowed conscientious acknowledgment of those contributions, both individually (where appropriate) and collectively. She helped organize this input in a coherent fashion. She found models, resources, and bibliographic information that added practical wisdom and examples to the theoretical discussion of virtual institutions. We cannot thank her enough for her brilliance and dedication throughout this project.

As authors, scholars, teachers, and administrators, we are part of many institutions. One conclusion offered in this book is that most virtual institutions are, in fact, supported by a host of real institutions and real individuals. This is an important point because it is part of the mythology of technology that technology is “free.” This book seeks to deflate that myth by underscoring how the most inventive virtual and collaborative networks are supported by substantial amounts of organization, leadership, and funding. Like an iceberg, sometimes the “free” and “open” tip of virtual institutions is what is visible, but it is the unseen portion below the virtual waterline that provides the foundation.

For example, HASTAC could not exist without the work of many individuals who contribute their time and energy, many

of whom are located at the two institutions that provide the infrastructure support for HASTAC: Duke University and the University of California. We thank both of these institutions and their administrators for having faith in HASTAC back in 2002, when many were skeptical that a virtual organization could have any impact or staying power.

At Duke University, infrastructure as well as a community of energetic and committed colleagues comes from the John Hope Franklin Center for Interdisciplinary and International Studies and the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute. For their early and continuing support, we thank: President Richard Brodhead; Provost Peter Lange; Vice-Provosts Gilbert Merckx and Susan Roth; Deans George McLendon, Gregson Davis, and Sarah Deutsch; and past John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute Director Srinivas Aravamudan (now Dean of the Humanities and Arts) and the current FHI Director, Ian Baucom. We also thank, for their tireless contributions to HASTAC and to this project, Mandy Dailey, Jason Doty, Erin Ennis, Sheryl Grant, Erin Gentry Lamb, Mark Olson, Fred Stutzman, Jonathan E. Tarr, and Brett Walters, and the three newest members of our Duke HASTAC team: Fiona Barnett, Nancy Kimberly, and Ruby Sinreich.

At the University of California, infrastructure comes from the University of California's Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI), the humanities institute serving the 10 universities making up the University of California system. We thank the following administrators for their support: University of California Irvine's Executive Vice-Chancellor and Provost Michael Gottfredson, University of California Irvine Vice-Chancellor for Research Susan Bryant; and former University of California Vice-Provost for Research Lawrence Coleman. As the founding Director of the California Digital Library, Dan Greenstein was enormously supportive in getting HASTAC off the ground. We

also thank the staff members, present and former, at UCHRI for their engaged and sustained efforts on behalf of HASTAC: Dante Noto (formerly at the Office of the President and now the head of Development and External Relations at the Institute), Kevin Franklin (now Interim Director of the University of Illinois Institute for Computing in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at Urbana-Champaign), Suzy Beemer (now working in Advancement at Stanford University), Irena Richter (now the Associate Director of the Institute for Humanities Research at University of California, Santa Cruz), Shane Depner, Khai Tang, Justin Tang, Arielle Read, Jennifer Wilkins, Jessica Pham, and Stefka Hristova.

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Finally, there are two people who have been interlocutors (perhaps more than they would have wished) in all things digital and all matters HASTAC: Ken Wissoker, Editorial Director of Duke University Press, and Philomena Essed, Professor of Critical Race, Gender, and Leadership Studies in the Antioch PhD Program on Leadership and Change. There is nothing virtual about their critical acumen and loving support—and we learn more from them every day.

Notes

All links are accurate as of July 1, 2009.

1. Chris Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business Is Selling Less of More* (New York: Hyperion, 2006).
2. McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
3. The forums took place on February 8, 2007, in Chicago, Illinois; April 21, 2007, at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, at “Electronic Techtonics: Thinking at the Interface,” the first international HASTAC conference; and on May 11, 2007, at the University of California’s Humanities Research Institute in Irvine, California.
4. Although many conventional learning institutions have made great strides in recent years (see, for example, Jason Szep, “Technology Reshapes America’s Classrooms,” *New York Times*, July 7, 2008; and Bibliography II in this book), there is still significant progress to be made. Conventional learning institutions must reexamine their entire structure and approach to learning before they can truly enter the digital age.