

LP: I've become acutely aware in the last year of how much my own critical position has been formed in direct relationship to living in the United States and also inside the particular context and practices of NYC's culture industry. I'll soon be leaving for Stockholm, to work with Maria Lind — whose critical sense of curatorial practice I have long admired and learned enormously from — at Tensta Konsthall. It will be really interesting to see how my ideas change and evolve in relationship to this new context. For me one of the most compelling aspects of going to

AB: Clearly... so do you think your practice will change when you move to a different geographical context, as there will be different things to resist?

LP: Okay, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't resist it or think about it. Capitalism in and of itself is not an unstoppable force, it's the people and policies who guide it that determine its limits. I try to conceptualise curatorial practice as one possible space of resistance.

AB: Surely the limits of capitalism's capacity to exploit are endless?

LP: I think it reflects a broader trend, and one well beyond just the art context. Capitalism seems to be keen right now on utilising our rather basic human need to communicate, to make meaning, to relate to one another, to its own economic ends in online space.

work in Sweden is the seemingly different notion about how society is constituted and wealth is distributed. Not to mention how art is funded and what its role in society might be.

AB: I think this is something that particularly interests me, having spent a couple of years in LA and now being based in London again, that the art world (and of course, I am generalising) considers itself to be 'international', to be well acquainted with the ('worthwhile') dispersed locations of the globe, and this is of course aided by the Internet. Yet, we all remain tethered and shaped by our geographical location. To me, it's important to respond to where you are and I suppose, inevitable...

LP: An urban planner once pointed out to me that most online cultural production still happens in the very same urban centres that dominate cultural production offline. And I agree, I think responding to the specificity of context is vital, but I also see the online challenging how we think about the notion of context too.

AB: Yes, I think there is that possibility, and of course, it's impossible to deny the opportunities enabled by online space and encounters — this conversation being one of them — but I think it is important to remain conscious of the ways the online is linked to the constraints of real world context, your urban planner anecdote being exemplary of this.

LP: Well, to my mind, technology is only capably of

AB: I suppose from an observation that certain 'shifts' in artistic practices — and I am speaking broadly here — towards collaborative and research process, and an increasing reliance on networks, are not well represented within a fixed time and space. These particular tendencies, which perhaps could be loosely associated with the idea of 'longevity', interest me greatly. I'm interested in the idea of

LP: Exactly...though beyond just the Internet, which is one embodied example, I'd characterize it as a result of what I prefer to think of as "network culture" more broadly. I'm curious, where does your 'wariness' come from?

AB: Such as those that are a result of the Internet?

Laurel Ptak: I don't think I would choose the word wary, but I certainly would characterise myself as the kind of curator who has been interested in thinking about new models, and specifically models that map well onto changed or emergent social, cultural, economic conditions.

Antonia Blocker: Do you think it's fair to say that both you and I, as curators, are somewhat wary of the traditional exhibition format?

*The following conversation took place via Skype and e-mail.*

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Antonia Blocker and Laurel Ptak**

Antonia Blocker

LP: Interactions to be had online are often said to be characterized by 'weak ties'. And online publics are distributed, that is, as a cultural form the Internet has

AB: Yes, I think this idea of control is interesting. As a curator, when organising an exhibition in a fixed space for a certain amount of time, there is a huge amount of control. You can easily regulate what is made public. But then at the same time, I think this instantaneous archive could be questioned. To me, the beauty of a project online is that it can always be engaged with, shifted and changed. I suppose this idea of control also relates to constituting a public.

of the internet's presumed 'efficiency'. One's ideas can change and evolve so much over time. There is an imperative today to make our thoughts highly public when we are still in the process of forming them and might not have had the time or context yet to come to terms with the ramifications of our words, actions or ideas. That can be beneficial sometimes, don't get me wrong, but it can also feel at odds with this notion of the eternal archive. For instance, sometimes I wish a certain video of me talking about art, put online by someone else several years ago, was not near the top of the search results for my name. But in contemporary culture we have accepted that is how things circulate and we don't have much control. There is also often the question of who benefits from whose authorship and on what terms. But there's another crucial aspect to the idea of what can happen online versus offline that I think is important to mention here: how a public is constituted.

the whole process being relevant and important, rather than just the end result, which can easily be displayed in an exhibition space. I also believe that the Internet holds untapped depths in terms of artistic and curatorial practice.

LP: Well, the online exhibition certainly presents itself simultaneously as an experience and an archive. But I would challenge the assumption that longevity is always a good thing. I believe that ephemeral gestures and even forgetting can be important in the production of culture and histories. But it's also interesting to think about the ways that network culture sends us mixed messages about temporality, it embodies both an exponentially smaller idea of the now with its constant update culture in addition to this eternal past.

AB: I had mentioned to you earlier the idea of the 'inefficiency' of the exhibition, which had stemmed from quite an offhand comment made by the artist Sean Dockray, in another Skype conversation. He related the idea of inefficiency to the production of an exhibition in the small space he runs in Los Angeles, Telic Arts Exchange. Namely, that there is so much effort to create something that a number of people pay attention to on the opening night and then after a couple of weeks, it's gone. It's so ephemeral. So I like this idea of the format itself creating its own archival presence. The 'trace' doesn't have to be manufactured (catalogue, install shots, etc.) as it's integral.

LP: As someone who has been actively curating online for nearly 5 years now, I can also attest to some problematics

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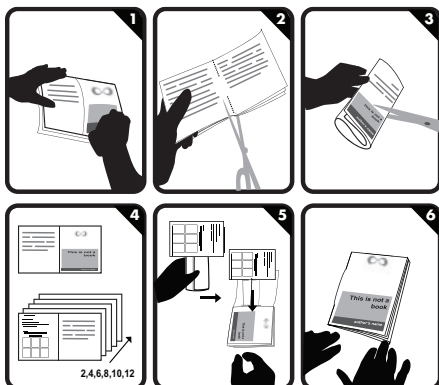
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**Laurel Ptak** frequently lectures, blogs, teaches, collaborates, writes and organizes projects online & offline. She has worked in New York City for institutions including the Guggenheim Museum, Art: 21, PS1 Contemporary Art Center/MOMA and Aperture Foundation. In August 2011 she will join the staff at Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm. Since 2006 her work as an independent curator has attracted international attention for critically attending to the cultural implications of online space for art. Her projects have focused on network culture, socially-engaged art, image-based practices and open culture. She is currently developing research and exhibition projects around art and intellectual property; the history of cyberfeminism; debt as aesthetic & social form; and a politics & philosophy of the online image.



# curating.info

**Curating.info** was founded in 2006 with the mission of becoming the top resource for curators of contemporary art on the web. Curating.info provides essential information on jobs and opportunities as well as insightful editorial opinion that is relevant to the professional development of curators worldwide. In 2011, the first Curating.info Fellowship was established in partnership with the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow. **Michelle Kasprzak**, the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Curating.info, is Canadian curator and writer based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She is a Curator at V2\_ Institute for the Unstable Media, Project Director at McLuhan in Europe 2011, and a member of IKT, the International Association of Curators of Contemporary Art. She has appeared in Wired UK and on radio and television broadcasts on the BBC and CBC. She was recently appointed as part of the curatorial team for the 2012 ZER01 Biennial in San Jose, California.

Maybe an even better example of what we are speaking about is a project called 'In Real Life' that I curated in 2009, letsmeetinrealife.com. The exhibition invited innovative and independent online art initiatives to come do a 4-hour residency inside an exhibition space — attempting to explore how the production, distribution, consumption and analysis of culture were rapidly evolving in the online context. In particular, the exhibition aimed to render the labour of these online practices transparent, providing "real"

LP: No, while it's not 'instantly archived' in the way we were speaking about earlier, it sets things in motion for both me and the public that can feel ongoing and continuous to me.

AB: So do you consider the moment of mediation to be just that, a moment, something rather...abrupt, rather than something continuous?

In my own experience I've worked hard to create exhibition contexts that explicitly bridge the gap between, and are self-reflexive about, the online and the offline. For the project with Marysia you're speaking about, I was attempting to negotiate the fact of distance in our working process. With her being based in London and me in New York City, our conversations and research that make up our long-term collaborative project on art and intellectual property mostly transpire online. I saw a utility in materializing these things in public space though. The face-to-face encounter, the moment of mediation and exchange with an audience, as a curator, feels really important to me. Maybe in a way it comes from the fact that so much of my own research and exhibition making has happened alone, in front of my laptop.

allowed for a novel idea of public space to emerge — one that allows for our shared experiences to happen simultaneously yet privately. Having curated in both online and offline contexts I can say that what one can expect from the engagement of an online audience is not necessarily interchangeable with what happens with an audience in person. I am not advocating for one over the other, I think of the online and offline as very complementary modes, but we should attend to their differences. Writing on ethics, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas interestingly emphasized the face-to-face encounter as basis for intersubjective relation, which opens up, as he termed it, 'infinite responsibility' to the other. That's worth thinking about.

AB: Perhaps we could relate this to examples from your own practice and your collaboration with the artist Marysia Lewandowska. Am I right in thinking that there is a very clear online aspect to this collaboration, specifically your online residency platform wehavethetechnology.org, but that an element of this collaboration was also reflected in the reading room that was part of your graduating show at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College?

LP: Well, the 'traditional exhibition' as a kind of cultural form itself has a longevity that I admire and an impressively durable history, if you think about it. Its origins might be rooted in a sensibility that can feel rather far from our contemporary context, but on the other hand I think the exhibition has survived for so long because it has remained open and rather flexible to various modes of art practices, institutions, publics, technologies, etc.



**Antonia Blocker** is a London based curator interested in how audiences can engage with artistic practices and institutions in ways that are alternative to the traditional exhibition format, rather than supplementary. Over the past two years she has co-curated projects at The Showroom, London, Wying Arts Centre, Cambridge, and on ResonanceFM. Previously based in Los Angeles, she has worked for organisations such as Telic Arts Exchange, Art2102 and Machine Project. She is currently working for the Public Programmes department at the Serpentine Gallery and co-curating the exhibition *All I Can See is the Management*, which will open in October at Gasworks, London.

reproducing dynamics that on some level already exist...despite our wish to often give it more agency than that.

AB: I think you're absolutely right and, in a way, I think this relates back to my thinking of the traditional exhibition format, and to using online space in a curatorial manner... I think, to some extent, we are limited in what we do online by our understanding and experience offline. There seems to be a certain lack of imagination in some respects.

LP: Yes, but I think curators and institutions in particular have been slow and unimaginative in this regard. Hopefully, that is changing now. One of my first tasks for my new job is to apply just these sorts of ideas we've been discussing to how an art institution can exist in an online context. I am really excited for this!

AB: I'll look forward to seeing what you come up with!

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AB: Yes, I think it certainly relates to this idea of 'experience economy'. We want to be involved, to not just receive, but also help create... But then, also, I don't want to force greater significance on to something that is simply reflective of my own interests.

LP: It's not that I don't agree, but I also think it's important to ask *why* those modes feel the most productive right now. There's that great line: the injunction of capital to its subject used to be "consume!" and now it is "communicate!"

AB: To me, it feels like there is still untapped potential in using the Internet as a curator, although I am rather hypocritical, as I haven't made any attempts to do so, so far. Although, I agree with you, that although there is a huge resource in the online, the offline is still incredibly important, the face-to-face encounter, although I don't necessarily find this in the exhibition space, but more in the spaces of dialogue, the meeting, the seminar, the lecture. Certain projects that interest me use the online space to facilitate real life encounter, the Public School, in Los Angeles, and Time Bank being two examples.

beginning to recognise. But that said, speaking from my own experience running a website about contemporary image-based practices for almost 5 years now I do feel that there is a really wide audience for this particular project, in terms of age, geography, education, class, that I have not seen reproduced very often in 'offline' space.

life" access to these cultural producers and overall inspiring public dialogue around their practices. It was fairly self-conscious about tracing the differences that would emerge between online and offline publics.

AB: You mentioned before how different the publics are when constituted by something online and something offline; in this instance how do you reconcile those two different audiences?

LP: I would say in many ways their behaviours are distinct. One thing that I always liked about online curating, and something that got me thinking about it in the first place, was that I felt particularly critical of the kind of social engagement, power relations and hierarchies I often experienced around me in New York where I have lived and worked inside the culture industry, in various capacities, for a decade. I thought online exhibitions might not have so many 'barriers' that would prevent people from looking or participating.

AB: Did you find this to be true? Or do you think that our own 'internets', namely what we look at online, how we move through online space, are still very much tied to an actual location, and subsequently to our behaviours in that location?

LP: I imagine the online invents new kinds of barriers, social relations and power dynamics that we are only