

## ***New Climates for Curatorial Practice: Exhibiting Art Across Distributed Networks.***

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What if a blog could be thought of as an exhibition? It would turn blogging activity into curating. [...] I (the blogger) am responsible for selecting works (and other relevant documentation for the purpose of this blog/exhibition), displaying them (their urls) and recontextualizing them from my own point of view. [...]

The practice of curating remains the same, only the context changes.

So start staging your own shows. Select, include, exclude, draw similarities, contextualize, organize [...] Blog your heart out.

– Luís Silva, *SOURCE CODE*.<sup>[1]</sup> Posted on March 11, 2005 at 3:14 PM.

Here are some of these new paths which facilitate movement of information between people, listed in no particular order: SMS, forward and redirect function in email clients, mailing lists, Web links, RSS, blogs, social bookmarking, tagging, publishing (as in publishing one's playlist on a website), peer-to-peer networks, Web services, Firewire, Bluetooth. These paths stimulate people to draw information from all kinds of sources into their own space, remix and make it available to others, as well as collaborate or at least play on a common information platform (Wikipedia, Flickr).

– Lev Manovich, "*Remix and Remixability*."<sup>[2]</sup>

### **Towards a New Curatorial Operating System**

What does it mean to curate in the age of networked systems? In the introduction to *Curating Immateriality*,<sup>[3]</sup> Joasia Krysa states, "Curatorial work has become more widely distributed between multiple agents including technological networks and software." How does this new curatorial "operating system" function? What kind of art is compatible with it? Who is a curator, and what strategies of selection, presentation, re-contextualization and distribution does s/he employ? What restructurings occur in the relationship between artist, site and curator? What kind of protocol or principles of control are active in this system?

Curating new media art, as a field of theoretical and practical concerns, is continuing to be mapped out by researchers, artists, critics, theorists and curators alike. In the essay "On Misanthropy," also in *Curating Immateriality*, Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker examine the challenges of curating *computer viruses*,<sup>[4]</sup> linking the act of "caring" (the Latin *curare*) with its museum derivative, "curating"—a practice that requires a negotiation of control and transformation. Beth Granter, in her dissertation at the University of Sussex titled "*Curating New Media Art*,"<sup>[5]</sup> describes the conceptual and practical complexities involved with bringing new media art into the exhibition space. However, these essays, along with much of the discourse on curating new media art, in fact contain a pervasive assumption: one will curate new media using the strategies and platforms of **traditional curating**; new media art must be adapted to fit the white cube confines, or "hardware," of mainstream exhibition practice.

Why not update, upgrade and refresh the curatorial practice as well? Why not curate new media art **with new media**? The site of curatorial production in the twenty-first century has expanded to include the space of the Internet and its associated networks, technologies and systems. As Krysa suggests, curating new media with new media requires a reformulation of curatorial work itself; as control, power, and agency become increasingly distributed, traditional roles (such as "artist," "curator," and even "space") are blurred. Curating becomes a matter of software.

The Internet and software—especially "*Web 2.0*"<sup>[6]</sup> personal publishing platforms, or *weblogs (blogs)*<sup>[7]</sup>—open the possibility for parallel and distributed spaces for viewing and exhibiting art, ones that are open to anyone with access to the network. What are the

properties of these networked, “open-source” curatorial spaces? In what ways do curatorial technologies (e.g. weblogs) intersect with curatorial strategies, concepts and statements?—In the age of distributed curating, what kind of exhibitions can and should emerge? Furthermore, as Luís Silva questions in his weblog *SOURCE CODE*, are all blogs essentially curatorial exercises, or only those blogs identified as such? Can any webpage be called an “exhibition,” or must we reserve and strictly allocate this category?

*New Climates: A Weblog Exhibition* is an exploration of these questions through the development and production of an online curatorial space. In addition, it is an effort to provide a platform for exhibiting and discussing artwork on *climate change*,<sup>[8]</sup> a topic that is increasingly relevant to artists today. This essay will combine an analysis of the *New Climates* exhibition with a discussion of the constantly evolving paradigms of the “distributed,” “software,” or “immaterial” curatorial practice. In the process, a sketch of the distributed curator as “software manipulator” and “filter-feeder” will emerge.

### View Source: Exhibiting (With) Software

The term “distributed,” as explained by Joasia Krysa in her discussion of “curating immateriality,” applies both to *new media art*<sup>[9]</sup> works, which activate networks and dynamic systems, and to the practice of curating these works—a practice which is distributed across a multiplicity of agents, including traditional (museum and gallery) curators, artists, audience members, Web programmers, bloggers, hackers, software-enabled processes and others. This is not to say that distributed curating is unregulated or undefined. On the contrary, a “protocol” of curating persists in the form of principles of control: selection, display, re-contextualization, distribution, etc. But these decisions become the domain of a broader group, rather than that of a single curator associated with a gallery or museum. In fact, all productions on the Web—not only those activities declared as “curatorial”—have a curatorial component, in that they negotiate openness and constraints, selecting content to fit the parameters of a set virtual space. Bloggers, for instance, produce a series of entries that together present a view of a certain topic or theme. Can we then consider each post in a weblog as a re-contextualized “work” in a cumulative exhibition?

*New Climates* takes a position in response to this question: An exhibition must present art—or objects that can be considered art—and provide access (even if this is through a hyperlink) to the works themselves. Exhibitions also have the capacity, if not the cultural responsibility, to foster and host the creation of new works; indeed, the primary function of *New Climates* is to add voices (of artists, curators, spectators and others) and creative material to the developing discussion on climate change, rather than to solely recapitulate or reframe what has already been said.

While the process of curatorial selection remains relatively unchanged in new media curating, how works are “displayed” (spatially arranged and presented to an audience) requires rethinking. The tasks of a curator include installing, orienting, and juxtaposing various artworks in an established space—but this space need not exist physically, nor in a single locality or temporality. We must expand our conception of “arrangement” beyond the orchestration of physical objects in a gallery to include the virtual, compound, and networked spaces of the Internet.

In exhibiting art on the Internet, spatial arrangement includes dissemination across the entire network (the show can be viewed by anyone with the proper interface technology) and the possibility for temporal arrangement emerges. Websites and weblogs, curatorial or otherwise, are engaged in a process of constant updating, the content and organization of the site changing over time. Blogs, in addition, emphasize *syndication and subscription*,<sup>[10]</sup> wherein users are alerted to changes (new posts) via RSS feed aggregators, bookmarking services, or e-mail announcements. A Web curator can arrange and display her/his exhibition along the temporal axis. Taking advantage of this new curatorial “dimension,” *New Climates* will continuously “launch” artworks over a period of at least three months.

In software curating, new possibilities also emerge for the processes of re-contextualization and distribution. For instance, “tags”[11] provide a way to describe, organize and group artworks by keyword or category. Rather than didactic statements about the works or static institutional constructs, tags, along with hyperlinks, constitute a kind of curatorial “gesturing”—indicating approaches, broad readings, and locations of various artworks. The question arises as to whether the spatial arrangement of links, which point to works already “out there” on the Web, constitutes an exhibition. Indeed, a single artwork existing on the Internet might be included in dozens of online exhibitions simultaneously, each entry consisting of a “linked artwork.” Still, every re-contextualization of the work has the potential to alter the way it is perceived and, with interactive and site-specific projects, the work itself. *New Climates* makes overt use of links and tags to construct what might be called “hyper-re-contextualizations” of the included works, using these software features to dynamically frame the artworks—a mobilizing rather than static curatorial activity—within the exhibition and the larger space of the Net.

A weblog exhibition can be easily (and inexpensively) distributed to a vast audience, simply through its placement on the public space of the Web, often facilitated by blog indexing services (*Technorati*)[12], social bookmarking tools (*del.icio.us*)[13], and syndication technologies (*RSS*[14,] *FeedBurner*[15]). The audience of an online exhibition is necessarily more geographically (and, in all likelihood, economically and socially) diverse than the body of visitors to a gallery in a specific city, showing a single show for a fixed duration. Web exhibitions, in addition, often remain online indefinitely—open to countless revisits, even as their software, links, and content become obsolete.

With “Web 2.0,” “a version of the Web in which information is broken up into ‘microcontent’ units that can be distributed over dozens of domains,” suggests Lev Manovich in the essay “Remix and Remixability,” we have access as curators and artists to “a new set of tools to aggregate and remix microcontent in new and useful ways.” The artworks that constitute *New Climates* are cultural objects consisting of dislocatable parts that can be distributed separately through different networks, communities and technologies. Each “artwork-post” may contain: an embedded video file or downloadable project, texts written by the artist and curator, specific category tags, software design elements, hyperlinks and viewer comments. The post-as-artwork model presented in *New Climates* illustrates Manovich’s concept, particular to “Web 2.0,” of information objects made up of packaged “microcontent.” This structure of an artwork “package” invites remixing and redistribution by an audience acting individually or collectively. For instance, the text from an exhibition entry might be re-blogged, a link to a project sent via *SMS*[16], and a video work shared on *YouTube*[17]. The granular components of each “blogged artwork” will be separated, individually accessed, recombined, and sent in multiple directions across various networks.

### Defining “Curator 2.0”

The new media curator is an administrator, producer, “filter-feeder,” and a manipulator of systems: s/he is “part of a continuous process of selecting and filtering—describing, classifying, creating contexts and re-contextualizing within the online environment” (Krysa 17). The domains of the “filter-feeder,” as laid out by Christine Paul in “Flexible Contexts, Democratic Filtering and Computer-Aided Curating: Models for Online Curatorial Practice” (included in *Curating Immateriality*) are peripheral and dispersed—often skirting the boundaries of traditional art communities. Net art, Paul suggests, calls for a curatorial practice that challenges the systems of power and “structures of legitimation” of traditional art world institutions. She identifies this as a “‘museum without walls,’ a parallel, distributed, living information space that is open to interferences by artists, audiences and curators—a space for exchange, collaborative creation and presentation that is transparent and flexible” (Paul 81). Software curating, just like the exhibitions it produces, is inherently open and variable, not exclusive and fixed. Rather than maintaining a static formation in a physical space, online exhibitions are “hyper,” spreading via links, appropriations, and software into a plethora of other Web-spaces.

“Immersing art in life,” writes Seth Price in his essay “*Dispersion*”[18], “runs the risk of seeing the status of art—and with it, the status of artist—disperse entirely.” Price theorizes the position of the art object, and its creator, in the age of “distributed media” (circulating information in the social sphere, and the portable devices used to store and access it). Rather than localized in space and time, artworks are dispersed and reproduced in “a model that encourages contamination, borrowing, stealing and horizontal blur.” Though he never makes direct reference to the state of the curator in this system, Price alludes to the mounting importance of presenting, reframing, and distributing the chaotic and copious information in the global media archive—a task that is unmistakably curatorial. As the role of the artist becomes dispersed (beyond the rigid definition of the value-centric marketplace) it is easy to imagine that the role of the curator follows a similar trajectory—no longer confined to traditional art objects, s/he can produce artistic and social contexts through the exhibition of existing material anywhere in the expansive cultural field.

As Price addresses digital technologies in his discussion of art consumption, he makes a vital point: “an art distributed to the broadest possible public closes the circle, becoming a private art [...] digital distribution techniques allow for increasing customization.” With portable (and personal) digital technologies, art released into the public sphere is, at the locus of reception, “private.” Encountering net art or a Web based exhibition is an individual experience of a public network; the curator, artist and viewers (as a plurality of individuals) interact across divides in virtual, and often physical, space.

Weblogs provide a technological platform to “focus,” “filter,” and “individualize” the abundant material in the public realm of the Internet; this is a process of “closing the circle”—selecting, customizing, contextualizing and presenting certain pieces of information (art or otherwise) for a prescribed community of individual viewers, as well as virtual “passers by” (surfers who encounter the site by chance). This brings us back to Luís Silva’s implicit question: Is all blogging essentially curating? Is it enough to present selections, organizations and re-contextualizations of media objects, as arguably all bloggers and Web administrators do, or must curating online involve the coordination of objects declared as “artworks,” or new artworks in particular? One approach to this rather impenetrable problematic is to simply recognize that the activity of blogging is *curatorial* (rather than “curating” per se), in that it incorporates similar processes as those involved in the coordination of an exhibition.

In an interview for *Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI)*[19], Caitlin Jones discussed the multidisciplinary role of the new media curator with Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook—co-founders of the *Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss (CRUMB)*[20], a hub of information on curating new media that includes a vibrant discussion list, interviews, bibliographies and other research. This practice, states Graham, demands “more collaboration, more group work in production and exhibition, and more blurring of boundaries.” As Cook explains, “the field of media art is networked, and everyone is participating in that network.” Since new media art often requires expertise in many technical fields, skills a single individual cannot realistically acquire, collaboration—between artists, curators, programmers, scientists, designers, audiences, institutions and others—is a necessary for producing and presenting complex new media works. At the same time, the proliferation of *FLOSS*[21](*free/libre open source software*)[22], including some blogging platforms, has allowed individuals with limited technical knowledge or resources to develop online art projects and mount virtual exhibitions on their own.

### **Curating With Others, Curating Nowhere**

By tracing the trajectory in online curatorial practice from a singular curatorial voice, public or audience-enabled curating, and finally to curating facilitated by software, Christine Paul develops a critical framework to discuss “open-source” curating—inclusive of multiple agents, and the use of (open-source) software. C@C—computer aided curating (1993) by Eve

Grubinger, for example, brings together “the production, presentation, reception and purchase of art” (Paul 96) in one software-mediated network of artists, curators, viewers and collectors. In a similar vein, *Runme.org*[23], by Olga Goriunova and Alexi Shulgin, functions as an open database or “software art repository” (Goriunova and Shulgin 238)—to which anyone can submit—that is evaluated and filtered by an “expert team” of curator-like administrators.

“Open-source” or “DIY” curating has also been explored in traditional, physical exhibition settings. The Whitney Museum of American Art presented *Connections* in 2001—an interactive environment wherein users could select works from the Whitney’s collection and cause them to be projected on three walls in the gallery. The same year, at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA), visitors to *Your Show Here*[24] could choose from a broad database of twentieth-century works for projection at the scale of the original objects. *Do It With Others*[25] at London’s HTTP gallery encouraged collective interaction in the curatorial process through “E-mail-Art,” in which participants sent any kind of digital material to an open e-mail list, and selections were included in the physical gallery show. In addition, museums have expressed a commitment to exhibiting net art projects in their native environment with online galleries or “portals” (“*Artport*”[26] at the Whitney and “*Gallery 9*”[27] at the Walker Art Center). As a blend of “DIY” and online curation, Rhizome.org, an affiliate of the New Museum of Contemporary Art, offers its members the software and virtual space to curate their own exhibition from Rhizome’s *ArtBase*[28], a collection of over 2,000 new media artworks.

Why not do away with the corporeal curator entirely? The (free) *KURATOR*[29] software application, developed by Joasia Krysa, Grzesiek Sedek, Adrian Ward and Geoff Cox, automates the processes of selection and display in an “auto-curator” mode. Curating is reconfigured (and redistributed) as a mechanic organization process in which users submit pieces of source code. These users are, along with the programmers, the only human components of the system, while the privileged nexus of curatorial activity is occupied by a sophisticated piece of software—a code(ed) curator.

Several online exhibitions have used weblog software specifically to present their included works. Eduardo Navas, in his essay “*The Blogger as Producer*”[30] (informed by Walter Benjamin’s “The Author as Producer” from 1978), argues that blogs “are able to perform as platforms for not only feedback on printed media [...] but also as places to simply exchange ideas. [...] the active Benjaminian reader has reinvented herself as an online weblog writer.” The flexibility of weblogs—or their performativity—allows them to take on many roles: personal journals, news delivery systems, scholarly research projects, dialogical spaces on every subject and, certainly, art exhibitions. The blogger-as-curator has the task of “dressing” (coding) the weblog to include the design features and tools needed for her/his particular undertaking. The alert reader, who asserts her/himself by leaving comments or even making posts, actively participates in the blog’s production.

*Raiders of the Lost ArtBase*[31], a weblog exhibition in which curator Michael Connor excavated various works from the Rhizome ArtBase, consists of a series of posts, each discussing and linking to an artwork, over the course of a few weeks. Luís Silva’s *SOURCE CODE* is less narrow in its curatorial self-designation, functioning as an ongoing exhibition and a forum for conversations related to new media and net art. *Blog Art*[32], curated by Marisa Olson and abe linkoln takes a reflexive approach, using a blog to exhibit artworks that take blogs/blogging as their primary medium. The curators, or “filter-feeders” of these exhibitions can be anywhere, and nowhere in particular. Rather than centrally located (in an art institution within an urban metropolis) Web based curators exhibit from dispersed locations—a kind of “placeless” or “remote” curating that does not require the stable physical presence of the curator, only a reliable Internet connection.

### **A Weather Report: Unpacking New Climates**

*New Climates* aims to deliver a continuous stream of thought provoking, never before seen artworks to a broad, heterogeneous audience. It will be presented on Rhizome.org as an

online exhibition and promoted in various other new media art contexts. Beyond the art world, *New Climates* has been announced to various ecological activist and scientific groups with a focus or interest in art, which are listed as links on the exhibition site. In addition, the project is accessible by, and visible to, numerous online communities through its incorporation of social-technological platforms such as *WordPress*[33], *blip.tv*[34], *Technorati* [35] and *del.icio.us*. The open comments feature of the weblog will accommodate user participation in a steadily evolving conversation. As a whole, the weblog is designed to create an adaptable, accommodating space to address the issue of climate change, and its relationship to art and networked culture, at a time when it has garnered the attention of artists, curators and members of the general public.

*New Climates* suggests that there is some compatibility between blogging as a method of exhibiting art and the theme of global climate change. Since a weblog by nature creates a flexible and open-ended dialogical space—unfixed both spatially and temporally—it is a powerful venue to host an exhibition on climate change, an issue that is, likewise, continuing to evolve, catalyzing massive debates and spreading into many regions of our (networked) culture. An exhibition of art addressing climate change, and how we encounter this subject in this era of technological connectivity, should have a form that corresponds to its content: fluid, conversational and ever-expanding. In this way, the exhibition can cultivate a distributed, diverse, and global audience of viewers and participants.

The new artworks shown in this weblog exhibition will not be completed and presented simultaneously, subverting another curatorial convention: the concurrent “opening” of all projects in an exhibition. On the contrary, the plasticity of this exhibition space will promote staggered launch dates, extending between late February and early May, 2007. As of this writing, seven of the anticipated 14 new works have been launched. In addition, previously-exhibited works by participating artists—some of whom are also creating new works—have been included as “existing artworks.” The launched projects take varied approaches to the theme of climate change, ranging from media appropriations to live data feeds to personal narratives. All demonstrate awareness, if not direct confrontation, of their digitally mediated re-presentation. The contributing artists include students of art, as well as emerging, mid-career and established artists working in a variety of media from locations across the globe.

Alexander R. Galloway and Eugene Thacker ask the provocative question: “What is the temporality specific to the practice of curating?” (Galloway and Thacker 166). The discipline, they argue, entails the creation of “stasis” or “stillness”—both in the physical practices of preservation, as well as a “historical stillness” of defining and re-presenting the past. At the same time, curating invites a productive and proactive “opening up” of opinions, interpretations, and unexpected readings on behalf of visitors and spectators. In his *Raiders* exhibition, Michael Connor explored a similar notion inherent to the process of excavation, or curating from a (historicized) archive, even one containing “new” media art. Connor concludes his final curatorial post: “We must excavate our path forward from yesterday’s remains.” All curating, one may argue, involves a constant negotiation of preservation and creation, a simultaneously retroactive and proactive gaze.

Perhaps curatorial endeavors that incorporate new media are especially attuned to this splitting of past and future, as such practices engage emerging technologies while remaining hyper-aware of the challenges of preservation. Richard Serra, in speaking about his controversial sculpture *Tilted Arc* (1981)[36] installed on the plaza of the Jacob K. Javits Federal Building in lower Manhattan, stated, “to remove the work is to destroy the work.” With some new media projects, one might likewise claim, “to present and preserve the work is to destroy the work”—once it is taken offline, cataloged and archived, it is a different artwork entirely. The production of *New Climates* raises numerous questions about potential strategies for the preservation of software exhibitions. Can the exhibition, given its theoretical claims, simply be “closed,” its former dynamism surrendered to create an archival, static webpage? Or must the project continue to develop, possibly engaging additional artists and curators, in order to

stay true to its status as an “open-ended dialog”? It is my hope that *New Climates* will see the latter scenario, and that widespread attention and interest will produce a new generation of collaborators who will contribute to its further expansion.

In our collective discussion of climate change, it is interesting to observe, we exercise a similarly diametrical concern for “yesterday’s remains” and “our path forward.” In media reports on the issue, one may perceive a temporal split between the “evidence” of climate change (rooted in the environmental disasters of recent history) and a “hope for the future,” in which emissions are curbed and catastrophe averted. Many of the launched projects in the exhibition look to our geological, technological, and individual pasts in order to take on this question of the future. To facilitate this aim, *New Climates* provides spaces of “stillness” (such as the “gallery” page of archived projects) and points of opening and escape: public comments, remixable posts and links elsewhere. *New Climates* exhibits new art, adding to a cultural “history” of artwork on climate change; at the same time, it continues to evolve, refusing to succumb to stasis.

This exhibition, one can be sure, will be followed by countless future projects that will approach this subject from new curatorial vectors. The vast majority of these shows will be produced outside traditional exhibition spaces. We have entered an age in which anyone can curate. We are witnessing a proliferation of distributed exhibitions made possible through new virtual platforms for interaction and exchange.

The challenge is open for the taking: explore the networked wilderness of the Web; create new climates for curatorial performance; blog your (he)art out. Disperse and repeat.

- [1] *SOURCE CODE* - <http://vercodigofonte.blogspot.com/>
- [2] “*Remix and Remixability*” - <http://rhizome.org/thread.rhiz?thread=19303>
- [3] *Curating Immateriality* - <http://www.data-browser.net/03/>
- [4] *computer viruses* - [http://0100101110101101.org/home/biennale\\_py/index.html](http://0100101110101101.org/home/biennale_py/index.html)
- [5] “*Curating New Media Art*” - <http://bethgranter.wordpress.com/2006/09/01/curating-new-media-art/>
- [6] “*Web 2.0*” - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE>
- [7] *weblogs* - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog>
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- [9] *new media art* - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_media\\_art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_media_art)
- [10] *syndication and subscription* - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS\\_\(file\\_format\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_(file_format))
- [11] “*tags*” - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tags>
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- [13] (*del.icio.us*) - <http://del.icio.us/>
- [14] *RSS* - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS\\_\(file\\_format\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/RSS_(file_format))
- [15] *FeedBurner* - <http://www.feedburner.com/fb/a/home>
- [16] *SMS* - [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short\\_message\\_service](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_message_service)
- [17] *YouTube* - <http://www.youtube.com/>
- [18] *Dispersion* - <http://www.distributedhistory.com/dispress.html>
- [19] *Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI)* - <http://www.eai.org/>
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- [23] *Runme.org* - <http://www.runme.org/>
- [24] *Your Show Here* - <http://www.dinoff.com/portfolio/massmoca.html>
- [25] *Do It With Others* - <http://www.http.uk.net/docs/exhib12/exhibitions12.shtml>
- [26] *Artport* - <http://artport.whitney.org/>
- [27] *Gallery 9* - <http://gallery9.walkerart.org/>
- [28] *ArtBase* - <http://rhizome.org/art/>
- [29] *KURATOR* - <http://www.kurator.org/wiki/main/read/Kurator>

- [30] *The Blogger as Producer* - <http://www.netartreview.net/monthly/0305.3.html>
- [31] *Raiders of the lost ArtBase* - <http://www.rhizome.org/art/exhibition/raiders/>
- [32] BlogArt - <http://blog-art.blogspot.com/>
- [33] WordPress - <http://wordpress.com/>
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- [35] Technorati - <http://technorati.com/>
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**New Climates** was developed during a curatorial fellowship at Rhizome.org, an affiliate of the New Museum of Contemporary Art - <http://www.rhizome.org/>

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