Revolution in Individual Everyday Life: Differential Space

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

This thesis uses the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Guy Debord to examine online networks, associated novel practices and spatial transformations which have unfolded since early 2009 to promote social and political change in Thailand, Guatemala and among the Romani people. Pre-existing political, economic and socio-economic conditions of each community are examined to understand how, when and why online spaces were produced and populated. Consideration of the availability and configuration of technological services and alternate communication models are used to define the conditions of collaboration between physical and virtual space. Analysis of the accessibility and design of online sites reveals how practices facilitated through differential space transform conditions in the physical realm to permit new conceptions of citizenship.
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Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgments ................................................................................................................ iii
Vita........................................................................................................................................ iv
Hypothesis ............................................................................................................................. 1
The Production of Space: Lefebvre, De Certeau, and Debord .............................................. 2
  Abstract Space and Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad .................................................................... 4
  Differential Space and Everyday Practices ........................................................................ 10
Real Virtuality: Differential Space, the Internet and New Conceptions of Citizenship ....... 15
  The Internet as a Technological Network .......................................................................... 17
  The Internet as a Virtual Social Space ............................................................................. 21
  Differential Space and New Conceptions of Citizenship ................................................... 23
Introduction to Case Studies ................................................................................................ 27
News Bulletin Boards in Thailand and the Red Shirt Political Identity ............................... 29
HablaGuate: An Online Democratic Forum for Guatemalans ........................................... 46
Roma Virtual Network: Legitimizing the Non-Territorial Nation of the Romani ............... 63
Conclusion: Case Study Patterns and Future Projections ................................................ 75
Works Cited ........................................................................................................................... 86
Hypothesis

Differential space is a means by which new practices and creative acts are deployed within the present economic condition of globalization. Henri Lefebvre’s spatial triad, in conjunction with his descriptions of abstract and differential space, can be used to decipher the various typologies of online networks within the participatory realm of virtual space which foster discrete conditions and adjacencies to physical and contextual space. The notion of human agency and the transformative potential of everyday life found within the writings of Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau and Guy Debord assist in cataloging recent interactions between the virtual and the everyday. These then unfold to support three primary motives within case studies of recent upheavals in Thai, Guatemalan and Romani populations: to forge new political subjectivities; to host spatial hybrids and to legitimize de-territorialized entities.

Further, the media and information theory of Castells and Bentivegna can be used to catalog the case studies based upon the composition, succession and intensity of vertical and horizontal communication models. These theories, in particular real virtuality, also provide a framework for analyzing the basic technological benefits of the internet which are exploited by the online network of each population to express difference and counter norms.

Finally, Greg Nielsen and Engin Isin’s substantive conception of citizenship can be used to frame the motives and results arising from the participatory actions of online engagement that are facilitated by differential space.
The Production of Space: Lefebvre, De Certeau, and Debord

While often associated with the era of mid-century industrialization, the spatial theories of Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, and Michel de Certeau can serve as a foundation for envisioning the internet as a socially produced space comprised of everyday practices generated by individuals situated within unique physical, political, and socio-cultural conditions. Marxist materialism underlies Henri Lefebvre’s assertion that space is not innocent; architectural form and spatial relationships promote habitus, yet cultural production and practices, in turn, produce spaces. Lefebvre, Debord and de Certeau agree that the conception, understanding, and physical composition of space are culturally produced and an individual’s practices and identity are in turn shaped by space. Space is therefore a construction that reinforces dominant ideologies, yet is a medium that supports the contestation and subsequent re-writing of hegemonic discourse from the level of the individual through multiple scales.

In The Production of Space, Lefebvre sets out to explicate his theory of the social production of space by considering and refuting four traditional spatial paradigms described by Edward Dimendberg as ‘mentalism,’ ‘textualism,’ ‘containerism,’ and ‘activism.’ Lefebvre writes that “…social space is constituted neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void packed like a parcel with various contents, and that it is irreducible to a ‘form’ imposed upon phenomena, upon things,

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upon physical materiality."² In his novel spatial ontology, Lefebvre wishes to overcome notions that social space, physical (natural) space, and mental space are discrete, inert categories or in opposition to one another.

First Lefebvre addresses the epistemological understanding of space as merely a mental construct, dependent upon a priori knowledge of a subject isolated from context and history. He asserts that space cannot be reduced to the geometric concepts of Euclid, as an abstract means of definition and categorization.³ Spatiality extends beyond the ideas and thoughts of a subject; it is lived and manifested in a physical sense. Neither is space only a collection of codes signifying meaning, which can be ‘read’ like a text. “…what this hypothesis does is cheerfully commandeer social space and physical space and reduce them to an epistemological (mental) space- the space of discourse and of the Cartesian cogito”.⁴ Lefebvre allows that a coded, textual system adopted by semiologists such as Baudrillard and Barthes can be used to describe or ascertain types of spaces, but are secondary to the production of those spaces. De Certeau agrees that activities such as reading, walking, and writing allow the subjective consumer/producer to create a text of sorts that organizes space and language.⁵ Lefebvre asserts that “a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it.”⁶ Furthermore, Lefebvre writes that semiotic codes isolate language from the subject and from context. Lefebvre

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sees language not as universal, but as embedded within place and contextually produced: “no sign can exist in isolation.”

Most importantly, Lefebvre, Debord, and de Certeau assert that space is not a container in which activities take place, but is actively produced and reproduced through social practices. Rather than the void in which political, cultural, and economic systems operate, space is created and imbued with value and meaning through the subjective and collective experiences and actions that actively constitute it. Also, powerful ideologies are not solely materialized within the concrete realm of visually-perceived space, but operate and are concretized through social practices and institutions.

Abstract Space and Lefebvre’s Spatial Triad

The social relations of everyday life are laden with possibilities and permutations; within the innumerable associated social spaces, human agents possess the capability for critique and transformation of existing conditions. Lefebvre presents a conceptual triad for considering space that melds the social, physical, and mental; the triad consists of spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces. Spatial practice constitutes social space, which is ordered in relation to modes of production and reproduction. Social space encompasses the processes of biological reproduction and the relationships between individuals, genders, family units, and deep seated political, economic and cultural processes. Social space incorporates these spatial practices of

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reproduction, as well as processes of production, linked to economic systems, market and commodity production and the division of labor. In capitalist societies, Lefebvre adds that a third component of spatial practice includes the reproduction of the social relations of production—generating the social relationships and norms that perpetuate capitalism. Lefebvre is careful to point out that social space is a general concept that includes “an unlimited multiplicity or uncountable set of social spaces.”

Representations of space refer to “the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers….all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived.” These conceived spaces are the infrastructural and architectural spaces that result from ideological power embedded within social practices that configure the patterning of formal and material typologies on the ground. Representations of space are designed spaces; theories that typify representations of space include Beaux Arts and Garden City planning schemes and perspectival or Cartesian understandings of space.

Lastly, representational spaces are the lived spaces of cultural imagery and symbols that form concatenations and adjacencies with spaces of representation and social practices. Located in the arts and literature, practiced by the Dadaists and surrealists, representational spaces have the ability to question the significance and shift the magnitude of spaces of representation and spatial practices.

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spaces reveal phenomenological characteristics that transcend optically perceived space; spaces are overlaid with imaginings, cultural symbologies and inimitable perceptions of a subject situated within a locale that is the nexus of the spatial triad. The importance of the temporality of the subjective experience and the potential of these symbolic overlays to alter and modify spatial interactions is paramount.

The spatial triad is evident in generalized descriptions of spatialized modes of production through which Lefebvre sketches the rise of capitalism. These spatial types include absolute space, historical space, abstract space, and differential space. In these four models, traces of the past systems are not fully subsumed by the present. Therefore, the space of a developing country might be described in terms of both historical and abstract space. These four spatial paradigms are related to systems and modes of production and the accompanying social relations of production. Because “…each mode of production has its own particular space, the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space.”

Absolute space is a romanticized version of ‘natural’ space, “the basis of representational spaces” in which pristine sites were chosen on the basis of their resources and propitiousness. Religious and social associations and institutional modifications began to overlay and acculturate these spaces of raw nature, giving rise to historical space. Historical space is then identified by the rise of representations of space, the division of space to produce and perpetuate social morays that in turn propel the drive for accumulation of wealth, power, knowledge and resources.

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The rise of industrial capitalism and the subsequent shift to informational capitalism via computerized information networks exemplifies abstract space as defined by Lefebvre. Abstract space is marked by the separation of the social relations of reproduction from the forces of production—an alienation that stems from the abstraction of labor and the commodity, and the rise of the society of the spectacle. It is influenced primarily by representations of space, produced to a lesser degree by spatial relationships and renders the realm of representational spaces nearly nonexistent. “The primary tendency in abstract space is the disappearance of the qualitative and its replacement by quantitative practices of measurement, exchange, and calculation.”

Abstract space is networked space, homogenizing social practices and “crushing” social difference through national, economic, and bureaucratic interventions. More than any other type of space, abstract space necessitates “tacit agreement” and “consensus” within its normalized routines of daily life.

For Lefebvre and Debord, abstract space is evident in the growth of industrialization and the era of Fordism. Unparalleled advances in mechanized production have given way to discordance between use and exchange values that ultimately modify the cultural valuation of commodities. Within the rapidly industrializing modern city, the power within conceived space is crystallized in the city planning schemes, boulevards, plazas and avenues that function to organize flows of capitalist production. Here are evident the geometric configurations—the representations of

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space—of commerce militarization, and surveillance. These are the spaces of the industrial city that habituate the consumer society organized around the consumption of the spectacle. Lived experiences begin to be superseded by the fetishism of the commodity20 and the images of the spectacle overtake reality. The spectacle is created by the dominant system of production and the dominant social class in order to perpetuate and legitimize the sway of the economy over lived social practices. “In all its specific forms, as information or propaganda, as advertisement or direct entertainment consumption, the spectacle is the present model of socially dominant life.”21 The spectacle is not one entity, but a stream of images and media that are representative of experiences and that replace interpersonal dialogues in favor of passive, partisan forms of communication.22 In The Society of the Spectacle, published in 1967, Debord writes of two types of spectacle: the concentrated spectacle of fascist regimes and police states and the diffuse spectacle of the U.S. and Western Europe. When he published Commentaires sur la Société du Spectacle in 1988, he noted that these two categories had become indistinguishable.23

Currently, abstract space is characterized by the emergence of what Manuel Castells terms “informational capitalism.” Castells locates the rise of informational capitalism in the late 1960’s—the result of three distinctive processes: the economic restructuring of capitalism and statism, the rise of information technology, and the


proliferation of bourgeoning social movements.\textsuperscript{24} As the primary capitalist countries began to de-industrialize in the 1960’s and 1970’s, complexes of flexible production began to emerge, along with growing service and tourism economies. Flexible production systems were implemented with online networks and the information, data processing and communication capabilities they offered. These networked technologies resulted in the radical alteration of existing societal spatio-temporal systems through new networks of electronic information exchange linked to the rise of multi-national capital. These systems of a new dynamic and flexible capitalism are “forms of production characterized by a well-developed ability both to shift promptly from one process and/or product configuration to another, and to adjust quantities of output rapidly…without any deleterious effects on levels of efficiency.”\textsuperscript{25}

The expansion and interconnection of world markets, coupled with the tactical benefits provided by information technologies has led to a globalized capitalism. In this era of neo-liberalism and of multi-national capital, products and resources are networked from one locale to another in a global chain of goods and processes linked to market competition and the rise of flexible production sectors of technology and finance. While the spatial conditions of physical locales remain diverse, Castells argues that for the first time, the world market is governed by a singular, globalized economy, driven by the knowledge and control of information. Information has become a powerful commodity, the distribution of which is a primary economic driver. Developing countries that find themselves disconnected from the worldwide flows of resources, finances, commodities,


and information become more and more powerless; Castells defines these regions as “the fourth world.” Informational capitalism has also separated the typical laborer from producers of immaterial labor—the network of workers who manage flows of information, resulting in more and more polarized conditions within everyday life. Furthermore, the integrity of the nation state has eroded, as global economic connections become more important than physically circumscribed territories, resulting in new conceptions of citizenship and a resurgence of nationalism and regionalism in some areas.²⁶

Differential Space and Everyday Practices

In dialectical opposition to the prevailing homogenization within the framework of abstract space, Lefebvre notes that the recognition and expression of difference can potentially give way to differential space.“...abstract space carries within itself the seeds of a new kind of space. I shall call that new space ‘differential space,’ because, inasmuch as abstract space tends toward homogeneity, towards the elimination of existing differences or peculiarities, a new space cannot be born (produced) unless it accentuates differences.”²⁷ Importantly, these new spaces are produced through the introduction of various daily practices that run counter to habituated norms.

The “right to difference” is expressed through the creation of differential space, and achieved through intentional practices or tactics that are deployed within the realm of daily life—a position in which the theories of Lefebvre, Debord, and de Certeau intersect. According to Debord, “everyday life marked a border, the frontier of the


controlled and uncontrolled sectors of life.”

This frontier marks the space between the controlled methods of production and the uncontrolled actions of lived experience, a space which nonetheless harbors the potential for pioneering tactics that can lead to the production of differential space. These uncontrolled actions of lived experience, for both Debord and Lefebvre, have been largely colonized by the spectacle and the reproductions of social relations of production that drove consumer desires and lifestyles.

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau mines the unrecognized potential for daily activities to re-appropriate and re-organize space and language. According to de Certeau, consumers constitute a marginal majority, a force that is not overtly productive of goods and commodities, yet is integral to socio-cultural production in countless ways. Members of this majority, in their myriad customary practices of quotidian life, possess the faculties to utilize consumer products and programs in the creation of their own innovative associations, practices and spaces. It is by these means that activities such as writing, walking or cooking can become subversive spatialized practices that are productive in their own right.

Like Lefebvre, de Certeau espouses a logic of spatial practices that accounts for principle norms that organize discourse and the numerous practices that are at variance with this dominant discourse. “A society is thus composed of certain foregrounded practices organizing its normative institutions and of innumerable other practices that

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remain “minor,” always there but not organizing discourses and preserving the beginnings or remains of different...hypotheses for that society or for others.”

De Certeau distinguishes between two types of practices: strategies and tactics. Strategies are calculated power relationships that anchor a prevailing discourse or institution within an associated circumscribed space, giving rise to ‘acceptable’ acts that perpetuate this discursive order and legitimize its demarcated space from the sphere of the other. As an example, de Certeau describes a scientific institution that pursues research from a “neutral” or “independent” laboratory. By contrast, tactics are deployed by the other, in the territories that are delimited and occupied by powerful institutions. At the core of the tactic are the underlying concepts of spontaneity and play. The tactic “must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.” A tactic, then, is a use or activity that is in opposition to a prescribed spatial function.

Debord and the members of the avant garde group the Situationist International experimented with their own set of social practices or tactics, in an attempt to reconfigure space through everyday actions that underscored the psychological and emotional effects of the subject involved in spatial production. The Situationists conducted two primary tactics: the dérive and the psychogeographic map. The dérive, or “drift,” like de Certeau’s tactic, was a method of walking that countered the norms of the industrial city. It was a walk devoid of preconceived purpose, in which the “usual motives


for movement and action were dropped.” The dérive made possible the situation: actions that unfolded within spatio-temporal coordinates. “Moments constructed into ‘situations’ might be thought of as moments of rupture, or acceleration, *revolutions in individual everyday life.*” Psychogeographic maps, notably Debord’s “The Naked City” (1957) sought to record the subjective, experiential distances, relationships, and qualities of districts encountered through the dérive. These assemblages resisted the homogenized ‘official’ maps of city planners in favor of a map of fluctuations, liminal spaces, and borders.

Everyday actions and lived experiences have the possibility to be reworked as critical practices that, because social practices and cultural exchange construct space, can lead to the materialization of new, differential spaces. In *The Critique of Everyday Life*, Henri Lefebvre concludes with a list of conditions that are necessary to precipitate “the radical transformation of society.” He writes that this metamorphosis must begin with the modification of the conditions of daily life; social relationships must evolve in complexity and quality, producing distinctive social spaces in which new practices and ways of living and thinking can develop.

In conclusion, while Lefebvre, Debord, and de Certeau were primarily active within the period of industrial capitalism, their spatial ontologies and focus on the agency


of the individual within daily life can be used to understand the digital networks of abstract space—the current space of globalization. Abstract space can be equated with the rise of industrial capitalism and the subsequent shift to informational capitalism and globalization via computerized information networks. Online networks and the communicative potential of the internet also led to the creation of new social formations alongside these flexible production systems. The internet has altered the nature of the spectacle, whereby access to media and online technologies has turned consumers into producers—as bloggers and citizen reporters—proposed by de Certeau. Differential spaces are the spaces of contestation created by individuals that allow for alterations in the physical conditions of daily life. Lefebvre writes: “A social transformation, to be truly revolutionary in character, must manifest a creative capacity in its effects on daily life, on language and on space…”

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Real Virtuality: Differential Space, the Internet and New Conceptions of Citizenship

In the conclusion of *The Critique of Everyday Life* vol. III, Lefebvre notes that systems of information technology, with their capacity for increased communication and networked information exchange, have begun to alter the conditions of everyday life.\(^{39}\) Indeed, he presupposes the importance of the issue in the *Production of Space*, when he writes: “How is computer technology deployed and whom does it serve? We know enough in this area to suspect the existence of a space peculiar to information science, but not enough to describe that space, much less to claim close acquaintanceship with it.”\(^ {40}\)

Lefebvre hypothesizes that technological innovations and commodities, from household appliances to military weapons, have served to fragment, regulate, and program everyday life, rather than truly transform or improve living conditions.\(^ {41}\) Yet Lefebvre, Debord and de Certeau allow that the opportunity exists within the sphere of daily life to experience reality over alienation, that the true progenitors of disaffected social relations can be critiqued and overturned. Recent advances in internet communication technology have led to the development of online sites and networks that result from such a critique and serve to rupture, rather than reinforce, the routines and norms of daily life. Conceptualizing the conditions of daily life that encompass and intersect with the virtual space of the online community allow for an understanding of the

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method by which available resources and critical actions are employed within differential space to change social relationships and spatial situations—how virtual and physical space overlap and unfold to create positive transformations.

An analysis of the networked space of the internet and the technologies that facilitate computer mediated communication necessitates the acknowledgment of the conditions of physicality and virtuality and their respective applications within a spatial framework. On one hand, the internet does not seem to be a space; one does not enter a homepage as one enters a dwelling, nor does the site contain objects or harbor physical entities. This categorization of space as a static container is dismissed by Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Debord in favor of a conception of space as socially produced, in which physical, or perceived space is only one component. This theorization of space as contingent upon cultural production in effect positions all space as a social construction, including the sites and networks of the internet. The utilization of the technologies offered by the internet within daily life generates a space because it allows for a range of social practices and relationships that comprise perceived, conceived and lived spaces as described by Lefebvre.

Differential space is the product of a critical engagement with internet technologies, with the intent to rupture norms or deploy new ways of interacting, communicating, or identity-making in everyday life. Using the technological tools offered by the internet, a series of relationships and activities are productive of space, just as

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flexible systems of production are closely tied to the evolution of new technologies that allowed for the networking and processing of information. The internet-as-technology, although spatialized through its arrangement of physical infrastructure, does not become a space until it becomes enmeshed with cultural and social practices. “The spatial practice of a society secretes that society’s space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction.” The benefits offered by an engagement with virtual space, specifically the detachment of the body from social practices and relationships, allow for the production and utilization of differential space.

The Internet as a Technological Network

In a description of differential space and how it is a product of engagement with internet technology, the internet must be defined as both a technological network of global information exchange and a virtual social space. The benefits of the utilization of internet technology include the flexibility of the network, the collapse of time/space restrictions in relation to geographical and political boundaries, the relative safety of the body from this disjunction from the travel of information, and the capacity to store and archive large amounts of data. While the internet may be conceptualized as an ethereal data cloud, in actuality it is a geographically grounded distributed network. The distributed network is more web-like than its predecessors, hierarchic telephone networks. Telephone networks were traditionally centralized or decentralized; either way, they relied on a central router or switching station to process and direct information.

Vertical or hierarchical models of communication in contrast to the horizontal model of

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The web include traditional media outlets such as radio, television, and newspapers, whereby information is sent from a source to a number of receivers.\textsuperscript{47} Here, just as in a telephone network, information is sent from a singular source, thus allowing for the control, co-option, or suspension of the entire network. Because the internet is a decentralized distributed network; it allows multiple ways for information to be routed and processed, resulting in a more flexible and resilient medium.\textsuperscript{48}

The configuration of this technological network and infrastructure is arrayed and deployed distinctively, according to its siting within local geographies and its relationship to the impetuses of political and economic regimes. As such, the components of the internet include the computers, cell phones, and other hand-held devices that constitute the first interface with the user, but the architecture of the internet is much more than this initial interface. Electronic data, or binary digits, are sent through telephone lines, coaxial cables, fiber optic cables, and the satellites and towers that comprise wireless networks using a set of protocols that allow networks to share information. Local users are connected to the internet through local internet service providers (ISP). These ISP’s are connected to the larger network through their subscription(s) to network service providers (NSP) that deal with regional or national traffic. These NSP’s are connected to each other via network access points (NAP) that form the backbone of the internet. The NAP’s are data centers that house the software, data, routers and switches that direct information to a specific html (hypertext machine language) address.\textsuperscript{49} In his article in


the *New York Times*, Tom Vanderbilt begins to describe the architecture of the data center, or NAP as “large, powerful, energy-intensive, always-on and essentially out-of-site.”50 For example, Google has twenty data centers in the U.S. and seventeen more spread throughout Europe, Russia, South America and Asia. Provisions for the construction of these multi-million dollar facilities include access to a water source (for cooling), access to cheap and plentiful energy, and large tracts of land for accommodation and security. The construction of data centers continues with the increase of internet users worldwide, resulting in the demand for more storage and processing capabilities.51

The number of people using the internet worldwide has quadrupled in the last decade and will reach two billion people by the end of 2010; “162 million of the 226 million new internet users in 2010 will be from developing countries, where Internet users grow at a higher rate.”52 The availability of new technologies and affordable handheld devices in these countries is a potentially enabling force that will disrupt dominant institutions that are perpetuated through censorship campaigns and the denial of internet access to marginalized populations. The new tactics deployed online also have the ability to establish new conceptions of citizenship.

Because the infrastructure of the internet is arrayed according to geographic, economic, and political reasons, marginalized populations may find themselves without tradition means of accessing the informational network. The individual must afford the personal computer, cell phone and service, but may also be limited by government-


owned telecommunications corporations and/or corresponding censorship imperatives. In countries like Guatemala and Thailand, infrastructure is restricted to urban areas, reinforcing the digital divide in terms of an urban/rural dichotomy that corresponds to ethnic, economic and cultural differences. Due to these restrictions to internet use caused by the “grounded” infrastructure of cable lines, there is a growing trend within developing countries to use mobile phones, which use satellite networks to connect to the internet. Mobile phones are in most cases more prevalent than personal computers and provide an economically feasible means of access. “Access to mobile networks is now available to 90% of the world population and 80% of the population living in rural areas…among the estimated 5.3 billion mobile subscriptions by the end of 2010, 3.8 billion will be in the developing world.”

However, disparities in access still exist between developed and developing countries and within countries by region and economic class. The specific geographic arrangement of the infrastructure that comprises the internet is more densely configured in developed countries, creating a “digital divide,” or what Castells terms the “fourth world.” While in developed countries 65% of people have access to the Internet at home, this is the case for only 13.5% of people in developing countries where Internet access in schools, at work and public locations is critical.

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Availability of internet access is critical because differential space is produced through the spatial overlap of the individual body rooted in a physical locale and the use of the internet to exercise a set of virtual, productive social practices that run counter to prevailing norms. The space of the body is the physical, geographical space of the everyday. Access to the internet is an essential component for the production of differential space within the realm of daily life. Access is the means by which the contextually situated person engages with other individuals using internet technology, producing differential space. The physical interface with personal computers, mobile phones, and associated electronic devices is an important factor of access. The body interacts with differential space through its proximity to the phone or computer screen and the physical motion used to convey information or participate in a conversation.\(^57\) Lefebvre writes: “Any revolutionary project today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid helpless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda.”\(^58\)

**The Internet as a Virtual Social Space**

The distinction between the physical and the virtual references the disjuncture between the physicality of the human body and the social space of the internet. “Virtual” is defined as existing “in essence or effect, although not formally or actually.”\(^59\) The space of online networks is non-Euclidian, not three dimensional, and allows for an extension of the self without a bodily presence. Communication, subjectivity, and identity

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become protracted from a body fixed within a location.\textsuperscript{60} It is this decoupling of the body from online space that results in its relative safety, along with the means by which it traverses borders, collapsing geographies, compressing space, and offering nearly instantaneous forms of communication. The communicative activities within online spaces may exist outside of a formal presence, but they are “real: actually existing”\textsuperscript{61} because they are generated with other situated individuals. Electronic modes of communication construct what Castells terms real virtuality\textsuperscript{62} in which a conversation within an online chat room or a dialogue within an electronic forum is just as legitimate as a physical face-to-face social encounter within a circumscribed locale. Real virtuality describes the productivity and authenticity of social practices within differential space and their real potential for altering the social practices, representations of space, and representational spaces of physical locales.

The simultaneous presence of the subject within the virtual social space of the internet and within a physical locale allow for the capacity of these overlaid spaces to influence and interact with each other, producing a new type of space\textsuperscript{63} and new conceptions of citizenship. As socially produced spaces, the differential space produced through engagement with online websites occupy a position within the spatial feedback loop in which newly constructed spaces give rise to new practices and ways of thinking. Differential space is produced through a series of actions, yet allows for the


\textsuperscript{63} Saco, Diana. \textit{Cybering Democracy: Public Space and the Internet}. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2002. 27.
reproductions of alternate spatial practices over time. Differential space, as a hybrid of the virtual and physical, allows for an expression of difference; new types of social interactions of high quality and complexity; new identities and conceptions of citizenship; and for practices that counter daily norms. These online spaces, in turn, influence and shape the conditions of the producers. Practices, relationships and associations within differential space unfold into physical space to revolutionize everyday life. They also unfold to affect the digital, technological space of the internet through the deployment of new platforms and technologies that continue to allow access to differential space—to this process of engagement.

Differential Space and New Conceptions of Citizenship

The individual’s critical engagement with internet technologies in differential space allow for ruptures and creative acts that constitute a new definition of citizenship and political subjectivity. In Acts of Citizenship, Engin Isin and Greg Nielsen set forth a substantive concept of citizenship that is at variance with traditional theorizations of citizenship as a set of rights and obligations granted to a passive subject through legal or political institutions. Citizenship and political identity are therefore constituted by the individual, produced through intentional actions based on critique. An act is predicated on intent; the decision to act is made through a recognition and rejection of normative behaviors. The deployment of an act of citizenship is a rupture in habitus, based on the recognition of the politicization of daily life. A parallel can be drawn between the act of citizenship and de Certeau’s tactics, the situations of Debord and the Situationist International, and the innovative actions of lived experience that arise out of a space

apart—Lefebvre’s differential space. Citizenship is claimed and subjectivity molded through the critical actions of online engagement—dialogue, citizen reporting, diffusion of information—facilitated by differential space.

Because citizenship is produced through the subject, it sheds its dependence on a legal or governmental apparatus whose institutional power is delineated by territorial geographies and boundaries—a power that is increasingly eroded in the current era of globalization. A political identity recognized by a sovereign state begins to construct a duality between “citizen” and “other” that is complicated by refugees, migrants, undocumented workers and indigenous populations who have been systematically refused their claim to rights.65 When citizenship becomes de-territorialized, it is disconnected from the governing body or the nation state and reinvested in the individual. Isin writes: “…citizenship, while typically understood as the legal status of membership in the state, if not the nation-state, [becomes] increasingly defined as practices of becoming claim-making subjects in and through various sites and scales.”66

The layering of virtual and physical space provides the capacity for the conceptualization of the act that is deployed within these concomitant realms relative to the self or through larger scales such as the community, region, or state.

Engagement with the real virtuality of differential space allows for the construction of a political identity outside the norm. The constitution of an identity or citizenship within differential space then affects one’s identity in the physical world. The reconceptualization of the self as citizen or “subject,” represents a move from a “legitimizing identity” to a “project identity” as defined by Castells. Legitimizing identities


are linked to social relations of production and normalized spatial practices that serve to
galvanize the power of a dominant institution. “Legitimizing identity generates…a set of
organizations and institutions, as well as a series of structured and organized social
actors, which reproduce…the identity that rationalizes the sources of structural
domination.” These identities are inscribed in space—rural areas, industrial
peripheries, city neighborhoods—and generated by particular social expectations and
actions. The emergence of a “project identity” or an identity linked to prospective social
change—is propelled by a critique and subsequent action, with the intent to rupture or
modify the conditions of daily life. Thus the act of citizenship and resulting newly
constructed “project identity” are components of a causal relationship. They are both
facilitated through and generative of differential space.

The creation of social or political websites with the implicit purpose to foster
interactions and practices that counter norms constitutes an act of citizenship, as does
the engagement with novel social practices facilitated by the site. Interaction with a
website alone is not productive of differential space; in fact, many web dealings could be
seen as reproductive of abstract space because they result in a coordination of
intellectual property and transactions within economic networks of capital. Consequently,
the establishment and use of websites out of contestation and critique by autonomous
and self-identified groups whose interests are in opposition to prevailing political forces
could be seen as a tactic—a use or activity that is in opposition to a prescribed spatial
function. Political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions, the necessity for valid and
truthful communication through media, combined with the flexibility and communicative

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benefits offered by internet, give rise to the creation of and interaction with differential space.
Introduction to Case Studies

The following case studies represent discrete motives for engaging with differential space. In Thailand, online activities forged a new political identity and movement and constituted a citizenship that had been repeatedly denied by the oligarchy; Guatemalans use HablaGuate’s online forum to contribute to an open dialogue based on citizen-generated information and reports, claiming rights as citizens from both the nation state and the first world. Romani activist organizations provide and distribute information through the online Roma Virtual Network as advocates for this non-territorial nation, leveraging their rights as citizens in relation to countries worldwide.

The case studies are framed by Lefebvre’s spatial triad and methodology in relation to abstract and differential space. Each study represents the convergence of political, economic, and cultural factors that led to the need for engagement with online space as a means to express difference. These factors are also represented in the configuration of the infrastructure of the internet, which underpins distinct means of access to differential space. The studies also allow for an understanding of the mutations and flexible adaptations of subversive media; internet technology represents a unique permutation of this process because it fosters more evolved and complex spatial practices that generate a distinctive space in which new practices and ways of thinking have developed. Finally, each study depicts how the actions facilitated by differential space may unfold into physical space, modifying the conditions of daily life in the physical realm.
While the case studies are important illustrators of political, economic, and social conditions that are contingent upon place, one is still able to detect basic recurring patterns of power relationships inscribed into space that legitimize expectations. These expectations arise from broad cultural constructions. Thus one sees the fine grain illustrated by each particular context and study, yet can also distinguish the larger repetitions and patterns that link them.
News Bulletin Boards in Thailand and the Red Shirt Political Identity

The production and utilization of differential space in Thailand after the September 2006 military coup was a medium for forging a unified political subjectivity. Use of differential space was the result of widespread influences: socio-cultural divisions, political upheaval, economic investment, and fluctuations and innovations in print, broadcast, and electronic media in response to state censorship. The cyclic replacement of democratically elected officials in military-backed coups in 2006 and 2008 coupled with the expansion of internet access starting in 2001 has resulted in daily engagement with differential space by rural internet citizens, or netizens who form the majority of the Red Shirt movement.

According to political scientist Thitinan Pongsudhirak, “In the past they [the provincial poor] were upset, but they weren’t cohesive as a force and coherent in their agenda. New technologies have enabled them to unify their disparate voices of dissatisfaction.” The Red Shirt protests that began with a gathering of an estimated 150,000 people on March 12, 2010 were coordinated through a combination of offline organizing, online social networking and covert radio and satellite television broadcasts. Prior to these mobilizations, the exchange of news and information and dialogues on bulletin boards and news forums succeeded in unifying the dispersed voices of rural

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citizens into a collective political force. The Red Shirt identity was formed around the collective belief that the current government represented “…an illegitimate front for a commercial, aristocratic and military elite that has repeatedly refused to accept the electoral decision of the people.”

The Red Shirt political identity, associated with the United Front For Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) political party, is the product of a deep-seated socio-political divide between the rural uplands of the north and northeast provinces and the Bangkok Metropolitan Region in southern Thailand. These two areas generally represent the spheres of influence of two oppositional political parties; the majority of UDD members hail from the northern provinces while the Peoples’ Alliance for Democracy (PAD) represents the interests of many middle and upper class residents of Bangkok to the south. During the mobilizations in the spring of 2010, the Red Shirts repeatedly referred to a “double standard.” While the Red Shirts’ media outlets were censored and members were arrested and persecuted for their political beliefs, members of the PAD had the tacit support of the government and therefore were not subject to these discriminatory actions.

The northern provinces and the Bangkok Metropolitan area also reflect socio-economic inequalities; wealthy professionals, middle class workers and other parliamentary members represent the interests of the institutional ruling-elite in Bangkok, while the rural regions are occupied by agrarian and blue collar workers that are aligned with the Red Shirts. Lefebvre’s conception of perceived space is produced through differing spatial practices of material and immaterial labor, inscribed in the conceived space of an urban/ rural divide. A recurring cultural binary also exists—as a layering of


symbolic, representational space—wherein the rural provinces are associated with “black market” economies that function apart from Bangkok’s industry, while at the same time are romanticized as simple village societies. Alternately, Bangkok is associated with progressivism and commerce, as it is the center of Thailand’s political, economic, and media industries.73

Many of the Red Shirt protestors are aligned with former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was deposed in a military coup on September 19, 2006. Others are dissatisfied with the successive military coups that have ousted Thaksin’s democratically elected predecessors. From 1997 to 2001, Thailand was ruled by the conservative Democratic Party, headed by Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai; his neoliberal agenda resulted in the adoption of free trade policies proposed by the IMF and the US Treasury Department and the ratification of a liberal constitution that granted civil rights and broadened freedoms of the press.74 The dissolution of parliament after a corruption scandal involving Leekpai’s cabinet members paved the way for Thaksin Shinawatra’s rise to Prime Minister in February 2001. Thaksin was a billionaire telecommunications mogul who used his political influence to expand internet, mobile phone, and broadcast media into rural provinces. Although his business holdings were transferred to family members upon his election, Thaksin’s Shin Corporation represents holdings in “Thailand’s biggest mobile-phone company and its only commercial satellite operator…not to mention a television channel, an internet service provider, an


advertising firm, an airline and a property developer.” Ultimately the Shin Corporation reflected the crystallization of power within elite Bangkok families with political ties.

As the leader of the Thai Rak Thai (Thai Love Thai) Party (TRT), Thaksin successfully garnered support from across the socio-economic spectrum by promising and delivering communications infrastructure and Keynesian policies to the rural residents in the north and northeast regions. The social welfare programs that were instituted by Thaksin in 2001 were among the first of their kind in Thailand and included a universal health care system called the 30 Baht Policy, debt forgiveness for farmers, and funds available for entrepreneurial developments, such as internet cafes, in rural villages. Although he was opposed by businessmen, military officials, and members of Bangkok’s growing middle class—associated with the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD)—Thaksin’s policies gained him increasing support not only from rural regions, but from the urban working class communities.

Thaksin changed the nature of rural life following his election in 2001 by instituting small business loans and offering outlying communities access to internet and mobile phone networks coupled with technological training programs. Thaksin’s policies and investments expanded the infrastructure of communication technologies—radio, internet, mobile phone, and satellite television—in rural provinces. This expansion has proved essential to increasing the modes of access to the internet, providing the

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potential for critical engagement within differential space. Between the years 2000-2010, the number of internet users in Thailand grew 660%.79 “In 2005, after four years of Mr. Thaksin as prime minister, the number of people using mobile phones in the...northeast had more than doubled to 5.3 million.”80 Thammakit Thammo, from the Department of Media and Communications in Chiang Mai Rajabhat University writes:

“Although the majority of [the Red Shirt] movement is from rural [areas] it does not mean that they cannot reach this new means of communication as the internet is easier to access than ever before. People without internet at home can access the internet either from [an] internet café or Tambol Administrations (sub-district).”81

Propelled by PAD dissenters from the middle and upper classes, along with the support of the military and the monarchy, democratically elected Thaksin was overthrown in 2006 coup,82 resulting in the leadership of General Surayut Chulanon.83 The civil liberties and press freedoms granted by the 1997 constitution had already begun to be dismantled before a royalist constitution was ratified in 2007 that permitted partisan media control and rule by martial law. The cycle of democratic elections and subsequent depositions continued when Samak Sundaravej was elected Prime Minister in February 2008, with massive support from the disenfranchised rural north and northeast regions, only to be replaced by current Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva on December 15th.

81 Thammo, Thammakit. “Re: Questions From a Graduate Student at the Ohio State University.” Email to Susan Noblet. 27 Oct. 2010.
2008, “after a court dissolved the pro-Thaksin People Power Party for electoral fraud.”

Reflecting on the coups of 2006 and 2008, CJ Hinke, of Freedom Against Censorship Thailand (FACT), writes:

“Thailand’s 2006 military agencies of the coup have been supplanted by two new military agencies, CRES [Centre for the Resolution of Emergency Situation] and CAPO [Centre for the Administration of Peace and Order]. These agencies are entirely in control of the present repression. Emergency powers are, in reality, martial law, and we are living in a state controlled by the military rather than a civilian government.”

Control, expansion, and censorship of media outlets represent the fluctuating attitudes of successive ruling parties throughout the last two decades in Thailand. Vertical models of communication such as television and radio stations are easily co-opted or censored to justify those in power and sustain legitimizing identities because of their hierarchic structure. The Thai government owns or manages all six of the primary television stations, including iTV, an independently owned station that had been formed to “guard against a repeat of the military-led news blackout in 1992.” The state currently controls the programming on these six stations, denying citizens access to fair and unbiased news coverage. By 2009, 75% of licensed radio stations were operated by state agencies, while the military controls and closely monitors the content of the remaining 25%. Under the Computer Crime Act of 2007, internet sites have also been blocked, but the inherent flexibility of internet communication technologies paired with

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85 Hinke, CJ. “Re: Questions From a Graduate Student at the Ohio State University.” Email to Susan Noblet. 28 Oct. 2010.


increased penetration rates in Thailand have arguably made this the most difficult medium for the Thai government to censor. In summary, the relatively liberal press in the early 1990’s has devolved into increasingly censored and state controlled news programs evocative of Debord’s concentrated spectacle.

Censorship and press freedoms in Thailand are governed by laws that respond to current conditions coupled with the government’s imperative to maintain power in the future. In 1991, Thailand’s press was lauded as a democratizing forerunner in Southeast Asia, after the abolition of Revolutionary Decree 42 allowed divergent political opinions to be published.89 As a result, “Hard-hitting Thai newspaper reports were pivotal in turning public sentiment against the previous military dictatorship, resulting in the fateful 1992 street demonstrations that eventually led to democratic reform.”90 The constitution adopted in 1997 guaranteed civil rights and freedom of press,91 although under the 1941 Printing and Publishing Act, the government retained the right to censor printed material for issues of national security. The threat of defamation suits and lèse majesté charges were also used to pressure newspaper editors and owners to self-censor.92 Thailand’s lèse majesté law allows for the arrest of individuals guilty of defaming the monarchy, though it is often utilized to censor competing political views.93 Despite their tendency to sensationalize stories to turn a profit, newspapers had become the most liberal media


outlet in Thailand, free to criticize the current political regime as a result of their private ownership.\textsuperscript{94} In 2007, while the military began to censor the internet and broadcast media, newspapers gained complete freedom from government censorship after the passing of the Press Registration Act. However, 80\% of rural citizens in 2007 received their news not from newspapers, but from broadcast media,\textsuperscript{95} the liberalized content of the printed press evidently would not reach the majority of constituents opposed to the current regime, posing less of a threat of organized government opposition.

Community radio stations were the primary news broadcast media in rural areas, not newspapers. Since 2000, over a thousand community radio stations were formed throughout rural Thailand, espousing political commentary in local languages and providing news and call-in shows specific to local issues and events. The increasing numbers of community radio stations filled a gap in rural communication caused by the lack of circulating newspapers, high illiteracy rates and language barriers.\textsuperscript{96} Bourgeoning radio stations were a result of the 1997 constitution, which made provisions for the privatization of state-controlled broadcast media outlets. Section 25 called for the conversion of 25\% of state-owned radio stations to independent and community operated stations. These community radio stations conveyed critical news and commentary to the majority of rural citizens. \textit{Radio Neu Keun} FM 90.75 began

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broadcasting in the Karen language in 2002, providing cultural programming and weather and emergency broadcasts specific to southern Chiang Mai province.\textsuperscript{97}

Due to the political nature of community radio programs, the popularity of call-in shows, and their wide reach in rural northern provinces that supported Thaksin, the military began a dramatic censorship campaign against radio stations in the days following the 2006 coup. Call-in shows, an important platform for critique and political commentary among residents of remote areas, were immediately shut down. Mahawan Kawang, the manager of FM 92.5 in Chiang Mai, was arrested and detained, then ordered to broadcast news programs prepared by the military several times each day. Kawang’s case is not unique; other rural stations now self-censor out of fear of arrest and fines. Ethnic language broadcasts have now been banned—they were difficult to censor.\textsuperscript{98} What once was a vibrant medium for airing a diversity of opinions had become a mouthpiece for the military.

Political dialogues flourished in online bulletin boards and news forums after radio programming was no longer as viable a medium for the exchange of opinions and critical information. Internet technologies as utilized for the production of differential space allowed for increased interactivity within an equitable space that resulted in a complex horizontal network that spread from alternate vertical communications platforms. Due to recent government investments, internet platforms were affordable and accessible, providing accurate information on current events and decreasing


dependence on state-sponsored news. Thammakit Thammo from the Department of Media and Communications in Chiang Mai Rajabhat University writes:

“The notion of the public sphere, as originally proposed by Habermas, could embrace both physical and media spaces. Mass media in Thailand do not respond to...people from marginalized sections...That’s why [marginalized people] use alternative means of communication in order to make their voice heard. We have to believe in the power of human agency to challenge unfavorable structure[s].”

The participation on bulletin boards was an expression of difference that created and galvanized differential space, generated through these critical practices that ran contrary to the norm of the concentrated spectacle—used by the Thai government to sustain legitimizing identities. Differential space was constituted by a profusion of multiple viewpoints diffused through a responsive network; spatial practices and social relationships became part of a horizontal, or grassroots network between individuals and organizations, contrary to the verticality of state-produced media. Thais became producers, rather than passive consumers of news and information, recognizing the potential of differential space as a medium for both creating and accessing information not found in mainstream broadcasts. As contributors of these spatial practices and deployers of tactics, netizens were producing and coalescing a discourse that differed from that dictated by normative institutions.

The two most prevalent types of websites utilized by rural citizens following the 2006 coup were bulletin board sites and news agency websites such as Prachatai and Fah Diew Kan that provided a ‘web board’ for comments following each article.

99 Thammo, Thammakit. “Re: Questions From a Graduate Student at the Ohio State University.” Email to Susan Noblet. 27 Oct. 2010.


Differential space was produced through the engagement with internet technology that allowed for conversation and contribution on political bulletin boards.

“Bulletin board-based websites are places where people can propose topics and express opinions almost without constraints. The most popular site in this category is pantip.com with more than 100,000 visitors on any given day. Available on this site is the Rajadamneon Corner, a social and political bulletin board, where people can voice their concern on social issues.”\(^{102}\)

The flexibility of internet technology and the quality of spatial practices that differential space enabled led to the continued use of the internet even while Hi-Thaksin and SaturdayVoice, websites critical of the new government, were first blocked under the Computer Crime Act of 2007.

*Prachatai* and *Fah Diew Kan* were two popular news websites that contributed alternative analyses of the current political situation. These independent networks provided critical information that was missing from mainstream outlets, while allowing for engagement with the information through dialogue, resulting in a distributed network that arose from its intersection with an alternate vertical network. The production and exchange of opinions relative to each article became important sources of information in their own right and generative of nascent political movement.

“News providers will provide spaces for making comments at the end of each item of news reports...Some issues, for example, a press conference organized by the People’s Alliance for Democracy to declare its movement against the government [pre 2006 coup] drew comments numbering as high as 252 directed to this one item alone. Comments themselves become another destination for people to visit as many want to know what public opinion is on certain issues.”\(^{103}\)

CJ Hinke, of Freedom Against Censorship Thailand, describes *Prachatai* and *Fah Diew Kan*:


“Prachatai is an independent online news portal in Thai and English. One of their principal contributions was reporting on sensitive issues such as political arrests and hosting a public, anonymous web forum...Another strong voice was has been Same Sky. Fah Diew Kan is a radical print publication in Thai with a large online web board presence.”

_Fah Diew Kan and Prachatai_ were so effective at fostering participatory engagement, discussion and criticism that the Thai government demanded that internet service providers block access to the sites in early April 2010. The news agencies were also required to save information on users for ninety days—information that was used to arrest contributors to the ‘web boards.’ As a result, Prachatai closed down its web board in July 2010. Chiranuch Premchaiporn, Prachatai’s webmaster, explains the decision to close the site’s bulletin board: “We don’t want to mislead users that we can protect them online...We’d rather shut down the web board than collect our user’s personal data.”

The anonymity of the differential space of these “public, anonymous web forum[s]” was a means by which provincial dialects, which were cause for discrimination, became unrecognizable. Contributions to forums were written, negating any associations tied to ethnic languages or accents and therefore geographic residence. The inherent equality of web contributions freed people from prescribed class

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104 Hinke, CJ. “Re: Questions From a Graduate Student at the Ohio State University.” Email to Susan Noblet. 28 Oct. 2010.


107 Hinke, CJ. “Re: Questions From a Graduate Student at the Ohio State University.” Email to Susan Noblet. 28 Oct. 2010.

roles, removing a barrier to the complexity and quality of the interactivity within the horizontal network.

The conscious intentional engagement with differential space led to new type of project identity founded in social change and fueled by political discontent. Through the actions that resulted in this project identity, individuals claimed rights as citizens, calling attention to the ‘double standard’ and asking to be treated fairly. Through this process, centuries-old traditions of class-specific conduct were overturned. A political movement was forged that was not simply aligned with Thaksin but was imbued with meaning and overlaid with the lived spaces of cultural imagery. The Red Shirts co-opted the word *prai*, which translates as ‘peasant,’ and represented themselves as a feudal uprising against the elite. They not only focused on reclaiming rights to open communication and dialogue, but on expressing their anger at the customary removal of democratically elected officials. They had been stripped of their rights as democratic citizens by the military and elite, but now claimed themselves citizens through the acts of intentional online engagement.

While critique, dialogue, and access to information were facilitated by differential space, resulting in a new political subjectivity, the new practices that developed in this distinctive space began to subvert spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces within the physical realm. From March through May 2010, political protestors occupied Bangkok, successfully converging on parliament, shopping districts, and military barracks. Mass protests and gatherings of hundreds of thousands of Red Shirt dissenters marked a dramatic rupture in the day to day spaces of Bangkok.

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Political science professor Thitinan Pongsudhirak points out that never before had so many provincial protestors converged on Bangkok, while coordinating parallel protests in outlying provinces.\footnote{Fuller, Thomas. "Widening Disparity Strains Traditional Bonds of Thai Society." The New York Times. 1 April 2010. Web. 24 Sept. 2010.}

In a lecture delivered at the Australian National University College of East Asia and the Pacific, Dr. Peter Jackson describes his encounter with the Ratchaprasong intersection during its occupation on April 7, 2010. The intersection had been transformed from an upscale shopping district to a highly coordinated ‘Red Shirt’ camp and center of operations. The Ratchaprasong district bills itself as ‘the heart of Bangkok’\footnote{Ratchaprasong District. Experience the Heart of Bangkok. Web. 12 November 2010. <http://www.heartofbangkok.com/en/index.aspx>} and it seems that the intersection had been explicitly chosen by the opposition due to its symbolic association with the elite, as the nexus of Thailand’s largest mall, luxury shopping and five star hotels. The choice to mobilize at this intersection resulted in a dramatic transformation of its function, association, and activities as expressed by Lefebvre’s spatial triad. Lived experience began to supersede conceived space while practices centered upon the creation of a project identity. The roads themselves were barricaded about 500 meters from the center of the intersection, staffed by guards. People, cars, and motorbikes moved in and out of the space, but were first searched. Deliveries of food and supplies were constant; vendors peddled food, supplies, and souvenirs. There were designated areas for toilets, sleeping mats, a stage and projection screen, all contributing to a festival-like atmosphere.\footnote{Jackson, Peter. Thailand on the Verge. ANU College of East Asia and the Pacific. Canberra, Australia. 21 April 2010. Lecture. Web. 12 Nov. 2010. <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2010/04/23/video-of-thailand-on-the-verge/>} The intersection
was occupied until the protestors were forcibly dispersed on May 19, 2010. Abhisit's government responded to the large scale protests by declaring a state of emergency in Bangkok and other pro-Thaksin provinces. This emergency decree imposed curfews, outlawed gatherings of five or more people, and allowed for opposition leaders and protestors to be arrested and detained.\footnote{“Thailand Uses ‘Emergency’ Powers to Block WikiLeaks” New Zealand Herald. 19 August 2010. Web. 12 Nov. 2010.}

The coordination and organization of the mass protests in Bangkok was due to engagement with differential space, social networking websites, and unlicensed satellite television and radio broadcasts. News forum and networking sites not only strengthened the identity of protestors, but allowed them to plug into hierarchic networks in order to upload images and information from the protests into the space of the international community. During the mobilization, Thaksin tweeted to protestors and the Red Shirt presence remained active on sites such as Facebook, Hi5, and Youtube.\footnote{Corporal, Lynette Lee. “Thailand: Media Crackdown a Mistake, Say Analysts.” Asia Media Forum. 9 April 2010. Web. 22 Oct. 2010.} Sombat Boonngamanong of the Red Sunday group describes social networking as a key tool used to coordinate a peaceful mobilization of 10-12,000 citizens in Ratchaprasong intersection on September 19, 2010. “…we used social networking as our form of communication and used this constantly to expand this idea into a [popular] wave.” The gathering was meant to dispel the fear associated with the former Red Shirt camp after protestors were violently dispersed on May 19, 2010.\footnote{“Thailand: Interview with Red Sunday Leader Sombat Boonngamanong.” Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal. 6 Oct.2010. Web. 25 Oct. 2010.}

As evidenced by censorship tactics towards other communication mediums, the Thai government rightly understood the effectiveness of differential space as a means
for individuals once scattered throughout rural areas to forge citizenship and a new project identity. By plugging into vertical new networks, the Red Shirts used hierarchical channels bi-directionally—as a source of information and as a way to bring citizen reports of daily acts and protests to a larger audience. In addition to declaring a state of emergency, the government used the ambiguous Computer Crime Act to block Red Shirt websites and alternate news sites like Prachatai in order to weaken the protests and dissuade comments and knowledge of protests from reaching a broader audience, thus undermining the government-sponsored spectacle that sustained deep-seated cultural relationships based on division of labor, socio-economic status, and regionalism. In an interview on April 9, 2010, Supinya Klangnarong spoke about the government’s reaction to the protests: “This government is very insecure and believe that shutting down opposition sites will help them control the situation.”

By mid-September 2010, an estimated 100,000 websites had been blocked by the government; because the internet is a horizontal, distributed network, unlike radio or television, web addresses were quickly changed or varied and information was replicated throughout a range of websites. For instance, when prachatai.com was blocked in early April, prachataiboard.com, prachatai.org and prachatai.net and the Prachatai Facebook page were all organized as alternate sources of information. Similarly, while the UDD Twitter account at twitter.com/uddtoday was inaccessible, mobile.twitter.com/uddtoday provided the same content.

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In response to the government’s crackdown on opposition websites, activist groups deploy tactics within the virtual realm that emphasize the importance of access to differential space so that critical engagement and participation may continue. Citizens risk prison sentences to offer circumvention software that allow access to blocked sites and proxy servers that guarantee anonymity of users. The *Thai Netizen Network* posts leaked lists of blocked sites and links to circumvention software. The *FACT* website offers a download of the complete blocklist and circumvention tools. One need only look at the sites listed on the blocked lists—the majority are explicitly associated with the Red Shirts—to understand the strength of organizing and identity shaping taking place within differential space.
HablaGuate: An Online Democratic Forum for Guatemalans

The murder of lawyer and activist Rodrigo Rosenberg in May 2009 ignited controversy and mass protests in Guatemala after a video surfaced in which Rosenberg claimed he was targeted for assignation by President Álvaro Colom. During this time, Kara Andrade created the HablaGuate website with the help of a web designer and a developer to facilitate citizen dialogue centered upon this controversial event. The site was further developed with funds from a Fulbright fellowship awarded in May 2010, allowing Andrade to collaborate with a growing number of volunteers and collaborators. The online democratic forum hosted by HablaGuate represents an effort to construct a virtual communication typology lacking within circumscribed space of Guatemala, a country that had been plagued with civil war and authoritarian rule from 1960-1996. Guatemala is a constitutional democratic republic, although democratization has done little to change the cycle of state-sanctioned violence that has silenced political dissenters and the general public over nearly four decades. HablaGuate represents a horizontal network model that is used to disrupt the government’s hierarchical communication networks that have repeatedly been used to sustain power relationships based on ethnic marginalization and economic exploitation. Since May 2009, HablaGuate’s public forum—accessed via the internet or mobile phone—urges users to contribute their story via photo, sound recording, video, text or email. The online forum


represents a safer platform centered upon critique, discussion, and citizen reporting within a culture that has been affected by decades of genocide and disappearings at the hands of successive military dictatorships.

Lefebvre’s spatial framework can be utilized to uncover a specific set of political, cultural, and economic conditions that predicated the need for HablaGuate’s online forum. The socio-spatial relationships that dominate the Guatemalan culture are rooted in colonization. Post-colonization systems of production were traditionally based on land ownership; wealthy land owners marginalized and exploited the indigenous population, assigning a legitimizing identity that refused them political participation and ownership rights. According to human rights activist Frank LaRue, in 1996, over 70% of the nation’s land was owned by only 2% of the population. Consequently, social, economic, and quality of life disparities can be traced to ethnicity, geographic region, and a feudalistic system of land ownership. The government—and by extension, the military—represent and perpetuate elite ladino interests, while over 80% of the population is impoverished, the majority of which are indigenous peoples who do not speak Spanish. Anita Isaacs writes that today’s Guatemala is:

“…a polity and society in which old patterns and structure of power still prevail, and in which the ethnic and class divisions that fueled the armed conflict remain close to the surface. The political transformations required to address Guatemala’s democratic deficit are fundamental. A marginalized majority must become able to exercise its citizenship rights and gain acceptance as a political player with agency.”

The country’s civil war (1960-1996) was divided along ethnic and geographic lines, pitting the indigenous populations and insurgents in rural regions against the


interests of the oligarchy that were concretized within Guatemala City and other urban areas. A common pattern of representations of space produces an urban/rural divide, in which indigenous populations are literally and symbolically marginalized. Guatemala City, located within the south central region, houses the government and is viewed as the physical manifestation of dominant ideologies and interests.

Guatemala City acts as the source of vertical models of communication, wherein news is written by a few and distributed to a wider audience—evident in television and newspaper content. During the civil war, the military dictatorship dominated media content, utilizing the uni-directionality of vertical communication to justify and uphold inscribed identities that guaranteed a sustained process of ethnic marginalization and economic exploitation. The spectacle, used to legitimize and perpetuate abstract space, attempts to flatten or homogenize difference through a unified stream of information and images. Anselm Jappe writes:

“….the spectacle monopolizes all communication to its own advantage and makes it one way only….And the message is One: an incessant justification of the existing society, which is to say the spectacle itself, or the mode of production that has given rise to it. For this purpose the spectacle has no need of sophisticated arguments; all it needs is to be the only voice, and sure of no response whatsoever.”124

The civil war, while agitated by underlying ethnic and economic tensions, was precipitated by a CIA-backed coup in which democratically elected president Jacob Arbenz was overthrown in 1954. Arbenz had begun to institute civil reforms, granting voting rights to indigenous peoples and restructuring agrarian and land ownership systems. These improvements were opposed by the elite, who depended upon the current spatialized system of inequality for financial profit. With the assistance of the U.S. government, the ideological order of the elites prevailed and dissenters were

marginalized and disappeared by the new military dictatorship, which instituted "a swift reversal of reforms and a narrowing of the space for free political contention. The repression sent a clear message: Democracy would lose out to preserving the traditional social and economic order."^{125}

After the coup, insurgents retreated to rural areas and began to occupy indigenous communities. Counter-insurgents were trained by the CIA and provided with sophisticated surveillance equipment and military weaponry, used to assassinate activist leaders, monitor dissenters, and target insurgent groups residing in rural communities.^{126} The military culture inserted into Mayan communities had a profoundly negative effect on economic, social, and cultural systems, because communities were often caught between the two factions.^{127} In 1979, the four primary guerrilla groups merged to form the National Revolutionary Unit of Guatemala (URNG), solidifying the oppositional forces.^{128} Under the reign of General Romeo Lucas Garcia (1978-82) and General Rios Montt (1982-83)—who incidentally ran for election in 2003—the Guatemalan military killed an estimated 200,000 civilians, creating an atmosphere of fear and oppression that persists today.

In 1996, President Alvaro Arzu oversaw the signing of the Peace Accords, effectively ending the country’s devastating civil war, although as Isaacs notes, tensions linked to legitimizing identities and an institutionalized denial of human rights persist.^{129}

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While the accords recognized the rights of the indigenous as outlined by international law, they were merely pledges, unsubstantiated by legislative revisions that would actually address the structuralized system of state oppression evident in land holdings and socio-economic divisions. Furthermore, the Peace Accords granted impunity to human rights violators—mostly members of the military—under the Amnesty Law of Article 5. The motives of the oligarchy are thus reinforced through legislative actions, while the tacit acceptance of human rights violations linked to an underlying military culture results in continued violence.

Members of the military have now formed organized crime units that continue to maintain a shadowed, yet perceptible link to the objectives of the state, contributing to escalating levels of violence through the enforcement of the imperatives of government and military officials. Due to the government’s “mandatory service” laws, the ranks of the armed forces have continued to grow and covert military groups, grupos clandestinos, have formed powerful, organized crime networks—many linked to an expanding drug trade. Today, the military and police presence in Guatemala is represented by 26,000 national police and as many as 120,000 private police. Isaacs writes of “a rural reality in which protesting peasants are still targeted for violent repression by well-connected criminal gangs and members of state-security forces.” The targeting of journalists has further contributed to individual censorship of opinion or contentious debate among the country’s public.

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After the 1996 Accords, Guatemala’s government continued to utilize vertical modes of communication to justify and guarantee power relations, often threatening those that used the media to criticize the government. The 1996 Accords made provisions for radio bandwidths to be made available to indigenous communities, many of whom are illiterate or speak primary languages other than Spanish. Instead, frequencies were auctioned off and the majority was bought by foreign companies for as much as $750,000. The privatization of radio frequencies makes illegal the 2,000 or so community stations that operate on ‘stolen’ bandwidths with signal strengths that may only stretch a few square miles. Community stations have attempted to acquire bandwidths legally, but the government has asked that they purchase the frequencies for $28,000—a sum that is unquestionably beyond the reach of rural indigenous communities.

Government interests seem to be threatened by the voice of the disenfranchised, perhaps because to recognize the voice is to acknowledge the act of citizenship and the accompanying project identity, created “when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and…seek the transformation of overall social structure.”

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While community radio remains an important and productive voice for indigenous communities, critical and investigative commentary continues to be answered with threats and violent actions in the name of government officials and associated members of the paramilitary.\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, many remote radio stations, while productive of their own information and commentary, do not have access to the horizontal networks of the internet because the infrastructure is primarily found in urban areas. Rural radio stations are thus unable to exchange and contribute content online due to geographic restrictions.

The broadcasts of community stations like \textit{Radio Mujb’ab’l yol}, while delivering oppositional commentary and analysis, represent a hierarchical communication model because news and information originated with members of the insurgency and was then diffused through the community. \textit{Radio Mujb’ab’l yol} was originally \textit{Voz Popular}, a public voice of the URNG from 1987-1996 that operated atop the Volcano \textit{Tajumulco}, the highest peak in Central America. When the station was denied a legal frequency after the peace accords, \textit{Radio Mujb’ab’l yol} began its broadcasts espousing subversive political commentary.\textsuperscript{137} Eventually, cultural and musical programming was added, but unbiased information on current events was difficult to come by. “When it did have news, station volunteers would travel to Xela by bus, go to an internet café, select news content from the web, and come back to Concepcion Chicquirichapa to broadcast what they found.”\textsuperscript{138}


The current primary media outlets continue to be located in Guatemala City, now comprise what Debord would term a diffuse spectacle; while not directly owned or operated by the state, the government controls the content obliquely through political leverage, and economic and physical threats. For example, “Electronic media ownership is concentrated in the hand of Angel Gonzalez of Mexico, a politically connected entrepreneur who favors conservative perspectives and controls four of Guatemala’s six private television stations.”\(^{139}\) The government influences printed content through the control of investment and advertising dollars essential to the operation of the four daily newspapers. These papers are owned by conservative businessmen and are written in Spanish, targeting an elite urban audience while excluding the 40% of Guatemalans who communicate in one of 24 indigenous languages.\(^{140}\) The production of written content by a few individuals results in dangerous working conditions for those reporters that do not write favorably about the government, or that investigate government officials’ ties to corruption, impunity, organized crime, or illegal drugs. Many investigative journalists have been forced to write without bylines, facing violence and threats at the hands of grupos clandestinos, who act under a general climate of impunity.\(^{141}\) Conditions are more dangerous in rural provinces, where both print and radio journalists have been targets of violence.\(^{142}\)

As a result of the relationship between the violent operations of organized crime networks and government proceedings, the Guatemalan government, in conjunction with the UN, agreed to the implementation of the Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad


en Guatemala (International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG) in 2008. However, this recent attempt to create a more just, democratic environment in Guatemala by an external mediator has not been entirely successful. The commission has called for the prosecution of corrupt government officials and demanded the resignation of police that have committed human rights violations. The CICIG has also insisted that the selection process for Supreme Court officials be made more transparent. The 2009 Law For Free Access to Public Information also strives to provide transparency and access to information regarding government institutions.143 While commendable, the CICIG’s demands are not backed by law. Furthermore, the extant legislation contains loopholes, allowing Congress to ignore CICIG’s requests.

Other improvements in Guatemala’s nascent democratic climate are evident in the measures undertaken during the 2007 presidential election between General Pérez Molina and Álvaro Colom. The campaign was entered by fifteen political parties, all of whom had access to the media and many of whom were granted public funds. Six thousand more polling stations were opened and 50% more voters were registered—many from rural areas. Candidates were asked by an electoral oversight board to divulge the sources of their campaign contributions, although the board did not have the power to penalize those who chose not to disclose their funding sources.144 Unfortunately, the covert organized crime networks are thought to have provided significant amounts of funding for the popular candidates. These grupos clandestinos


are implicated in the deaths of 50 political candidates during the time of this particular election.\textsuperscript{145}

The institutionalization of violence within the social, political and cultural spheres in Guatemala has acculturated a level of secrecy and exclusivity within spatial practices and led for the need for an engagement with differential space. The benefits of internet technology supported social practices and relationships that could start to evolve in complexity and begin to flourish. Members of the military and oligarchy have systematically exerted power legislatively and physically, anchoring their panoptic discourse to the spaces of everyday life. Illustrative of de Certeau’s strategies, the state has successfully dissuaded the expression of difference—the tactics that counter norms—within the physical space of the body.

The primary benefit of differential space in this context is the ability to separate the exchange and contribution of critical dialogue from the physical self, while still allowing for the recognition that contributions are linked to a particular person situated within a geographic locale. HablaGuate’s public website for citizen reporting and debate has been necessarily located in the relative safety of the internet, its goal to:

“allow the participants to stay informed and to create communities online and offline where they can share their histories. The site will create a flourishing aggregate of local bloggers (more than 600), citizen journalists and non-profit organizations…and will stimulate dialogue, debate and participation in local issues.”\textsuperscript{146}

Differential space allows for freedom of expression and opinions and the exchange of ideas and stories with other interested individuals. These practices comprise the space of a forum to increase the quality and complexity of dialogues while allowing for previously marginalized citizens to participate in the exchange.


Referencing Habermas, Margaret Crawford points out that in practice, regardless of context or time period, the forum has functioned as an exclusionary space even while it continues to be associated with equality and democratic ideals. Therefore, the forum becomes the space of the strategy, described as a discourse anchored within a circumscribed space that is associated with a specific set of practices. The forum is defined as a “place of public discussion” and is generated through spatial practices between individuals as part of an ingrained political process. The forum is also a conceived space with a specific architectural quality and a representational space due to cultural associations and democratic conceptualizations. The highly delineated space of the forum represents the conceptual and physical division between the public and private spheres. However, the forum is a problematic space and concept because although it is associated with egalitarian ideals, in actuality it is based on a strict understanding of who comprises the “public.” In other words, few are granted citizenship and the corresponding participatory rights of the “citizen,” as opposed to Isin and Nielsen’s substantive concept of citizenship in which the claim to rights in invested in the individual. In Guatemala, citizenship rights are/were reserved for landowners and political elites and withheld from indigenous populations. During the civil war, these rights were rescinded from a larger portion of the public.

*HablaGuate*’s internet forum utilizes the technologies of the internet to address the discrepancies between the idealized concept and the practices that are evident of

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forums within the physical sphere. Within differential space, the forum itself becomes de-centered, dispersed from its principal location within conceived space to the subjective and contextual space of the political individual, the self-made citizen. Due to its location in differential space, HablaGuate allows for increased interactivity as a result of the co-presence of vertical and horizontal modes of communication; affordable access regardless of geographic location; and participation based on equality and anonymity. The website is a host for an array of methods and mediums by which previously marginalized Guatemalans begin to constitute themselves as citizens, claiming recognition of rights that extend beyond the nation-state to the first world.

Interaction and contribution to HablaGuate is an engagement with differential space, a conscious act of contestation that forges citizenship and nascent project identities; individuals are enabled to become both consumers and producers of information, tapping into and growing a horizontal network that traverses boundaries and geographical distance. The process of intentional dialoguing, commentary, analysis and critique constitutes a rupture in everyday norms, a modification of the conditions of everyday life that are so closely linked to the pervasiveness of sustained conflict, violence and ethnic marginalization. According to Guatemala’s Historical Clarification Committee: “During the long period of armed confrontation, even thinking critically was a dangerous act in Guatemala, and to write about political and social realities, events or ideas meant running the risk of threats, torture, disappearance and death.”

Participants in HablaGuate’s forum are “creating their own media and information

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networks they trust—a trust that is not often there for established media companies. HablaGuate’s links to other blogs, non-governmental organization (NGO) sites, and articles constitutes an alternative vertical network that allows citizens to search for information, bypassing the country’s commercial conservative media outlets. The site is also comprised of a vast horizontal distributed network of user-produced information relevant to everyday issues. These topics and subsequent exchanges become part of an archived collection of dialogue and valuable local information that can be searched and easily reproduced and linked to other activist networks. Engagement with the internet and the exchanges, commentary, conversation, research, and thoughts that follow are generative of a project identity in which the subject is recast as a social actor.

Access to differential space is critical in order for individuals to perform intentional acts of citizenship within the realm of their daily lives. HablaGuate was intentionally designed with mobile phones in mind because they are the most viable means of access for populations marginalized both economically and geographically. The internet penetration rate in Guatemala remains low because dial-up and high speed cable is found primarily in urban centers. As of June 2010, 17% of the population had access to the internet via these infrastructural means, further dividing peripheral indigenous communities from networked space, alternate sources of information, and horizontal or rhizomatic forms of spatial practice and communication. However, of a population of 13.5 million, there were over 17 million cellular phones in use in 2009.


compared to 1.4 million land lines. Roughly one in ten people has access to a phone via land line, while mobile phone density exceeds 100%. It was the realization of this resource as a means of internet connection that led Kara Andrade to develop HablaGuate. She writes: “...I imagined what news would look like if everyone who had a cellphone or at least access to one, could send, share, distribute, and report events they witnessed via a cellphone to a website and also receive that information.”

A primary feature of the site’s homepage announces ¡Haga Noticias! Envíanos tu Historia a través de SMS al (Make News! Send us your story via SMS). Underneath, the phone number is displayed along with options for submitting via email or submitting an article or blog with photos or video. Recents post sent via SMS describe the date and location of a student gathering, an “armed attack” that resulted in two homicides, fútbol scores and local road conditions after recent landslides. Describing how the website specifically accommodates access through mobile phones, Adrade writes:

“It’s a mobile-based platform, meaning that anyone who can send a text message to 4623-4789 can send their message directly to the website. They can also sign up to receive alerts to their cellphone via Facebook (free in Central America) or to their email via our feedburner. The sites are all created to be easy load on mobiles so that even if you don’t have a strong WAP [wireless access point] connection on your phone you can pull it up fast, less than 2 seconds.”

By accessing HablaGuate via mobile phone, the co-presence of the virtual and geographical allows Guatemalans to not only contribute to critical dialogue within the safety of differential space, but to choose to do so in a public or private way. Citizenship could be constituted across a spectrum of scales and situations; for example, the act of

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loaning someone a mobile phone for access to differential space would be an act of citizenship, as would using the phone to share information with others or contributing to the website as a group or individually. Referring to the website, Andrade writes: “It’s a completely open platform. Everyone has access to the website who has an internet connection on their computer or cell phone.”

*HablaGuate*’s forum promotes equality within spatialized relationships and horizontally networked communications by virtue of its engagement with digital technology and through administration and submission policies that define civic engagement through shared standards of civility. As a contributor to the site, an individual’s physically identifiable characteristics are replaced by visually or textually coded content, providing safety from both the threat of bodily harm and from discrimination on the grounds of traits like sex or ethnicity. The website is moderated for inappropriate content, which is removed with a warning sent to the contributor. The site’s *Community Standards* page reads:

“We encourage free speech and defend the right of everyone to express unpopular views. However, we do not tolerate hateful speech (speech which attacks or demeans a group based on race or ethnic origin, religion, disability, sex, age, veteran status or sexual orientation or gender identity).”

“There is zero tolerance for threats, aggressive behavior, bullying, harassment, invasion of privacy or disclosure of personal information of other members. Any person who commits any of the above behaviors may be permanently banned from HablaGuate.”

*HablaGuate* also recognizes that to generate a space for true public participation, the diversity of users must be enabled to assert a right to difference as equals. By incorporating visual and auditory platforms for discussion and exchange, *HablaGuate’s*

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<http://www.hablaguate.com/pages/4-normas-de-la-comunidad-hablaguate>
forum begins to address problems such as illiteracy, which can reach 60% in some indigenous communities, and language barriers that—irrespective of access—can contribute to lack of internet utilization in rural areas, therefore repeating a process of implicit exclusion. One of the most dramatic innovations that allows for a diversity of users is the Habla Radio application, available as a free download for Android mobile phones. The application allows a mobile phone to work as a handheld recording device suitable for recording radio broadcasts, conversations, or other auditory information. Habla Radio is integrated within the HablaGuate website, which archives a composite of uploaded radio shows and other files recorded with mobile phones. Recordings can also be downloaded and shared using the mobile phone application.

In the future, community radio in indigenous languages has the potential to become both more widespread and individualized, through its incorporation within HablaGuate’s online horizontal network. No longer will the short broadcasting range on usurped bandwidths be an issue; the benefits of internet technology will allow for an exponentially larger audience irrespective of geographical or political boundaries. The expense of buying legitimate bandwidths will be superseded by an online radio platform accessed by mobile phones, providing for more pervasive access. The combination of internet and radio technologies within differential space creates a medium that is comprised of distinct contributions, resulting in an individualized, grassroots effort. The exchange and uploading of information could be compared to an active dialogue, rather than a passive exchange. In short, Habla Radio represents profound implications for educating and mobilizing marginalized populations in similar situations worldwide.

*HablaGuate* also harbors future opportunities for the bi-directionality of produced media, with the incorporation of a “micro-donation based platform, similar to Spot.us, to fund more investigative reporting that originates from the SMS contributions submitted by citizens.”¹⁶² Rather than the one way dispersion evidenced by hierarchical forms of communications that move from a producer to the public, citizens using *HablaGuate* will be enabled to produce and post information that will then be used to journalists to bring items to the attention to the government and a larger audience. Citizens have the potential to become empowered producers of their own image and identity, claiming that these rights be recognized by the Guatemalan elite and by the first world.

As critique and investigation become more extensive and far-reaching through the engagement with differential space, the threats to Guatemalan reporters and journalists will be diffused. This widespread critique could potentially lead to increased public pressure for government transparency and legitimacy, overturning the structuralized norms that guarantee impunity for government and military officials. When more individuals engage with differential space to safely contribute everyday knowledge and express discontent in relation to government corruption, threats of violence from government officials and members of *grupos clandestinos* will decrease in efficacy. The engagement with the *HablaGuate* site around topics of local relevance will allow for a renewed sense of project identity that will unfold from differential space to reorganize social practices outside of the dictates of the Guatemalan elite.

Roma Virtual Network: Legitimizing the Non-Territorial Nation of the Romani

The Roma Virtual Network (RVN) acts as an informational hub in an attempt to build a hierarchical informational system that defines and legitimizes a self-proclaimed ‘non-territorial nation.’ The problem in categorizing the Romani as an ethnicity or minority coupled with their detachment from a specific geographic locale has complicated their claim to civil and human rights based on European law, precipitating the need for multiple organizations that advocate for their communities within differential space through contributions to the RVN. The Roma Virtual Network utilizes the capabilities of internet technology to collapse distance and political boundaries, allowing geographically scattered non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), Roma organizations, and the disparate members of the International Romani Union to communicate with government and news agencies worldwide. The speed of transmission and low cost of internet use allow contributors to this network to assert political power as representatives for their respective communities by sharing news and commentary with the RVN, which then widely circulates the information through its electronic mailing lists. These press releases dealing with timely Romani issues serve as statements from a widespread, underrepresented group used to advocate for the Roma in response to current events throughout Europe. The everyday contributions and exchanges within differential space have recently served to educate and mobilize a variety of individuals and organizations opposed to Nicolas Sarkozy’s radical campaigns targeting Roma camps in France.

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As an online hub that gathers and processes information, The RVN allows Romani advocates worldwide to express their right to difference and their critique of the political imperatives of host nations within differential space. The historic de-territorialization and heterogeneity of Roma groups required the gathering of Romani representatives to discuss political and socio-cultural imperatives affecting these groups similarly. This collective assembly of Romani activists and representatives has historically taken place in physical space and is structured much as a national government would be, with elected officials, appointment members and commissions.

The first World Romani Congress took place in 1971 with representatives from over twenty countries gathered in London. During the Second World Romani Congress in 1978, the International Romani Union (IRU) was established, with the intent to petition the United Nations (UN) to recognize the group as a NGO. The International Romani Union represents a global affiliation of Romani that declared themselves a “non-territorial nation, with a flag, constitution, and [national] anthem.” The IRU is comprised of an elected hierarchy with a president, vice president, and secretary. A presidium of appointed members organizes NGO’s and other groups within their respective countries. The IRU was recognized by the UN as an NGO with consultative status in 1979, “serving as technical experts, advisers and consultants to governments and

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[UN] Secretariat. and has unsuccessfully petitioned the UN to be recognized as a nation, rather than and NGO.

Through the formation of the International Romani Union, the Roma defiantly forged themselves as citizens of their own ‘nation,’ dispelling the understanding of citizenship tied to a particular geography. Roma conceptions of citizenship differ significantly from those granted to other residents of the same locality, region or host country because the Roma were repeatedly denied equal rights by governing institutions. In fact, the Roma have been early demonstrators of Isin and Nielsen’s substantive concept of citizenship because their identity was not grounded in a specific geographic territory; instead the group claimed rights as citizens through a series of intentional, politicized actions. The Roma’s novel claim to a citizenship that was not reliant on ‘belonging’ within a geographically inscribed boundary was easily transposed to the boundless network of the internet. The RVN is the unified voice of this heterogeneous nation that uses their news to advocate for the Roma in front of a world audience. Today, Romas are scattered worldwide, with an estimated population ranging from 10-12 million in Europe. David Mayhall describes the ‘dual identity’ of the Romani, one tied to local context and legal nationality, and one ‘transnational identity’ that connects to other Romani cultures and groups across national borders and “unites all Gypsies behind the banner of a non-geographically specific Romani nationalism.”

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The traits, customs and identities of various Romani groups are so heterogeneous that rather than using 'essential' or generalized qualities to characterize them as an ethnic group, Hungarian sociologists János Ladányi and Iván Szélényi propose that they are most aptly described in terms of their repeated social and economic marginalization.\(^\text{172}\) The Roma are a diasporic group with origins in Rajasthan in northern India.\(^\text{173}\) They began to migrate north after invasions from Persia during the eleventh century.\(^\text{174}\) The Roma reached Europe in the early 1400's, moving from south central and southeastern regions and reaching Western and Northern Europe by the end of the fifteenth century.\(^\text{175}\) Some groups remained nomadic while others were settled and assimilated within their respective culture—often forcibly. For example, assimilation laws were enacted in western Hungary and Czechoslovakia by the beginning of the seventeenth century. Since their arrival in Europe, the Romani have been ostracized and persecuted; they have been forced into slavery, denied legal rights, employment and educational opportunities, banned, and deported.\(^\text{176}\) The stigmatization of various Romani groups was reified during the Enlightenment by scientists who propagated prominent stereotypes and misconceptions. In his book *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Humanity* (1791), Johann Gottfried Herder described the Romani as a "rejected Indian caste that is removed from all that is godly, decent, and civil after their


Stereotypes of the Romani continue to prevail in Europe today, compelling government officials to pass laws based on racial and cultural prejudice. In May 2010, Romanian president Traian Basescu recounted in a public interview: "There is a problem that makes it difficult to integrate the nomad Roma: very few of them are willing to work and many of them live traditionally on what they steal." The Romani are an exemplary group for this case study because they have historically been compelled to recreate their own cultural, social and economic space. For the nomadic Roma groups, the space of everyday life and dwelling was not contingent upon place, but upon identity. The space of community and culture was therefore internalized, often lacking geographical registration. As David Crowe writes: “Lacking a tradition, protective homeland or outside, supportive community, Roma have [had] to rely on their own local or tribal devices to preserve their core traditions and values.” The expression of difference was suppressed by prevailing cultural and institutional imperatives, leading to the need for communication, identity building, and organization within the differential space of internet engagement. Many nomadic Romani have and continue to be persecuted due to their lifestyle which is at odds with western conceptions of private property and agrarian land ‘improvement’ linked to the rise of abstract space. Lefebvre writes: “The dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces),

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and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there.\textsuperscript{180}

The measured and anchored conception of private property and space are categorized by Lefebvre as representations of space, through which institutions link economic and cultural value. The correlation between powerful entities and circumscribed space are described by De Certeau as strategies. The Romani’s conception of spatial relationships and their subsequent utilization and association with space is aligned with De Certeau’s tactics because groups have historically operated within the realm of the other, contrary to fundamental norms. The spatial relationships tied to systems of production as described in Lefebvre’s methodology differ between the Romani and other national citizens because the Romani were not part of dominant, state-sanctioned economic patterns. Their relationship to institutionalized economic structures did not change, although the economies in Eastern Europe were dramatically transformed after the fall of communism in 1989. In the communist regimes of Eastern Bloc, the Romani were often viewed as overly-independent group because of their internalized and self-sufficient practices, although communism provided access to state-sponsored employment. In an interview with \textit{The Independent}, Dijana Pavlovic relates: "It was Communism that gave my parents the chance to go to school….Education in Tito’s Yugoslavia was free and compulsory, and after school they got jobs: my father in a warehouse, my mother in a factory."\textsuperscript{181}


The plight of the Romani radically changed with the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the formation of the European Union (EU) in 1992, initiating what academics describe as the third wave of the European diaspora. “For the Roma, democracy unleashed their fellow-citizens’ latent hostility, while capitalism offered them few [employment] prospects.” Consequently, Romani searching for employment began to travel to Western and Southern Europe, while other groups were fleeing the war in Yugoslavia. This migration trend increased after Romania’s acceptance into the European Union in 2007, precipitating a cultural and political backlash in EU countries Italy and France, where the Romani population increased dramatically. Italian officials tended to view all Romani as nomads and utilized this stereotype to deny the Romani refugee status and access to housing. Instead, new immigrants were relocated to camps on the outskirts of cities, where they have been effectively ghettoized. Because the Roma have been spatially marginalized, forced to live on tracts of land at city peripheries, they are also denied access to jobs and economic mobility. In October 2010, the Italian government began shutting down state-created camps and enforcing a three month limit for residency. In July 2010, French president Nicolas Sarkozy advocated a strong political campaign to clear camps in France, resulting in the deportation of nearly one thousand Romani to Bulgaria and Romania. The online communications and organization fostered by the RVN, along with the transference of an


internalized project identity to differential space, has provided the Romani nation with the resources to claim a right to difference and express discontent with the French campaign of deportations.

While the tactics of the Romani were linked to an expression of difference internal to the group, critical engagement with internet technology and the subsequent production of differential space through the RVN allow for an externalized expression of the right to difference relative to dominant government institutions. The RVN aims to rapidly disseminate news and information of current events as a means of exerting political leverage to ultimately improve the conditions of the Romani within their respective countries. Utilizing the RVN, Romani groups and NGO’s become producers of their own news and information, rather than the subjects of journalistic inquiry. The RVN, began by Valery Novoselsky, operates “under the auspices of the International Romani Union (IRU) and the European Roma Information Office (ERIO).” The RVN serves as a host of information exchange for the IRU and for the European Roma Rights Center, the Society of Domari Gypsies in Israel, the RomNews Network, and the European Roma Information Office. The Network operates thirty-two mailing lists in twenty languages, facilitating “cooperation and exchange of information,” between individuals, Roma organizations, government agencies, and NGO’s. ¹⁸⁶

The expedited exchange and coordination of information facilitated by differential space has promoted organized actions against Sarkozy’s initiatives that have unfolded within the physical space of the everyday. When interviewed, both Ivan Ivanov, Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Council, and Novoselsky of the Roma

Virtual Network expressed the ways in which the RVN assisted NGO’s in their mobilization against Sarkozy’s newest initiatives. Internet technology allowed the RVN to provide accurate information that was quickly replicated and transmitted across geographic and national boundaries and language barriers. Ivanov writes:

“With the French case Roma communities and non-Roma human rights organizations were regularly updated of what is going [on] in the field in France and Romania and what is the reaction of the EU and other intergovernmental institutions. They were able to follow the process and in parallel of their mobilization, we have kept them up to date with the developments on Roma migration. Basically the mobilization in many European countries was due to the fact that information was widespread largely, regularly and in time.”

Novoselsky confers, writing: “The activity of RVN was very intensive in August-September 2010 in connection with the deportations of the Roma from France.” The RVN’s Roma_Francais listserv on Yahoo Groups contains an average of 50 messages a month from January to July, but numbers rose to 122 in August and 259 in September 2010 in response to Roma deportations; some messages advertised mobilizations planned by NGO’s and Roma groups as a result of the accurate information conveyed through the RVN. In a message titled “Express Our Disagreement,” posted by the RVN early on the morning of September 1 2010, the group Voice of the Roma writes:

“Face the xenophobia and politics of the pillory: freedom, equality, fraternity
Call for a citizen rally Saturday, Sept. 4
Place de la Republique in Paris, at 14.00
An avalanche ...”

In contrast to a rhizomatic, distributed network comprised of citizen-reported news, like that of HablaGuate, the RVN acts as a hub that unites compiled information sent by Roma group activists and the international media to exert leverage on government institutions as a cohesive ‘nation’ or institutional entity itself. In fact, one of the future imperatives of the RVN is the “establishment of [an] international Romani media corporation on [the] basis of …RVN’s structure,”¹⁹¹ which signifies the RVN’s adherence to a hierarchically arranged or centralized network model that utilizes differential space to reinforce the spatiality and power relationships that legitimize the existence and rights of the Roma ‘nation.’ When asked about contributors to the email group topics, Novoselsky writes: “Usually these are the activists of Roma non-governmental organizations, network persons from international organizations involved in [the] Roma cause. They simply send their communications to me directly [or] to one [of] 32 listserves of [the] Roma Virtual Network.”¹⁹²

The activist organizations within their respective countries may also be spearheaded by umbrella organizations with ascending scales of representation, denoting the highly organized nature of the vertical, hierarchically arranged network of NGO’s and individual representatives. The Roma Civic Alliance (RCA) of Romania is one such umbrella organization that collates and distills information from a “federation” of NGO’s which is then sent to the RVN. The RCA includes the association of NGO’s


and five individual representatives elected to a board of directors. Ivanov describes the way information is compiled from Roma groups and journalistic sources:

“…the information is provided either by our network members working with information projects or by mainstream media or information agencies…the RVN is a neutral network disseminating information of all Roma organizations which need their message or information to reach a larger public.”

In regards to the physical space of the everyday and the access to the internet afforded to the Romani population, poverty, language and illiteracy are recurring barriers to the internet, similar to conditions in the developing countries of Guatemala and Thailand. A vast majority of European Romas are impoverished, decreasing their opportunity to engage with the differential space of the internet. “…A UNICEF report released in 2005 said that 84% of Roma in Bulgaria, 88% in Romania and 91% in Hungary live below the poverty line.” Ivanov agrees, responding: “It is correct that many Roma are poor and do not have access to computers and [the] internet. [The] language barrier is another problem as most of the information we disseminate is in English.”

Because of the aforementioned barriers, the task of advocating for specific Roma communities, and thus the practices and contributions within differential space, have been taken up by educated activist leaders and NGO organizers who speak English and can translate between local languages.

“The European Roma Information Office whose information is also disseminated by the RVN does not rely only on internet communication with the communities. We send usually information to the organizations; Roma leaders and active young educated

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Roma who speak English...forward our information to the community into their languages.”

The future introduction of a communicative rhizomatic network might expand from and build upon the RVN’s vertical network structure, ultimately broadening the depth and vibrancy of the practices facilitated by this differential space. The addition of a platform within the RVN that promotes a horizontal, distributed network by addressing barriers to access has the potential to engage a sense of citizenship forged at the scale of the individual, rather than the scale of the group. Individual engagement with differential space would create an increased complexity of social practices and relationships that might respond and contribute to the informational media items put forth by the RVN, or simply create news for other Romani. Ivanov describes the intention to respond to language barriers that would expand the capacities of the RVN in the future. Though the idea is grounded in a model based on the reception of information from the RVN ‘hub,’ it may provide the impetus for Roma to generate their own news that might then be relayed to, or bypass entirely, the RVN. Ivanov writes of plans that might foster dialogue and make possible a citizen-generated news platform: “Lately we also try to disseminate information in the official language of the Roma where they live and in the future we will try to develop...this multilingual package of information.”

Conclusion: Case Study Patterns and Future Projections

The case studies that have been examined characterize an alternative, substantive conception of citizenship forged through engagement with the real virtuality of differential space. The spatial theories of Lefebvre, Debord, and De Certeau applied to three distinct case studies illustrate a new conception of online space that is produced through everyday practices. As a space to express the right to difference, differential space is produced through intentional acts that are entrenched within the space of daily life.

Lefebvre’s spatial paradigms of absolute, historic, and abstract space represent an economic trajectory; the generalized linear progression denotes characteristics of space linked to shifts in economic modes of production, not strict categories that rigidly define the spatial qualities of a locale. The layered traces of previous spatial modes are configured uniquely according to geography. The case studies represent the space of developing countries—a space that is often primarily historical, yet newly industrialized and influenced by technological advances of a global economy. The patterns of economic and social marginalization within the three case studies are indicative of historical space; divisions between places of material and immaterial labor and expanding technological infrastructure and capabilities are linked to economic expansion and abstract space.

The differential space produced through engagement with the online realm of abstract space has gained a momentum and critical mass that has ruptured conceptions of physical space within the 2009-2010 time period. When that differential space and its
practices become generative of a prevailing ideology, a fifth spatial type may be evident, that of a normative differential space. Suggestive of a rupture, differential space is temporally situated and progressively recalibrated as an established part of the spatial feedback loop; the cultural practices that produce a space are facilitated by that space, which in turn reproduce and perpetuate that space.\textsuperscript{198} Consequently, this differential space and its associated practices can become organizers of a discourse and normalized practices that are representative of homogeneity rather than difference. The actions that perpetuate a differential space may become systematized; what was once a space to express difference may become widespread as difference becomes similarly shared. Consequently, differential space is produced through a continually changing set of ruptures, exercised by an individual or group, that are contingent on innovative, creative critique of the conditions of daily life.

Because these ruptures are initiated within a pre-existing spatial type, designers have the opportunity and the desire to create spaces that encourage new actions and ways of thinking that challenge traditional conceptions of spatial uses and practices. Within the discipline of landscape architecture, the design process begins with a consideration of the potential users of a space and the range of behaviors that are encouraged or discouraged by the programmatic goals of a design. But space is more than the sum of its physical components; it is imbued with meaning through cultural practices and symbolic overlays; it is subjective and generated by the situated individual. It is a related virtual landscape that produces, influences and impinges upon physical domains. In \textit{The Landscape Urbanism Reader}, Charles Waldheim quotes Bernard

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Tschumi’s project description for the Downsview Park proposal *The Digital and the Coyote*: “Airstrips, information centers, public performance spaces, internet and worldwide web access all point to a redefinition of received ideas about parks, nature, and recreation, in a 21st-century setting where everything is “urban,” even in the middle of the wilderness.”199 Through identifying the socio-cultural striations that comprise space, landscape architects have the capability to juxtapose the local and the global by integrating the resources and benefits of internet technology and managing access to flows of networked information with respect to the subjective actions and experience of the individual located in a designed space.

The case studies in Thailand, Guatemala, and among the Romani people illustrate a redefinition of space arising from increased access to internet technology. While the motives underlying the overall organization and growth of the online networks vary dramatically, the case studies share an evocative pattern of characteristics. These similarities include geographic, ethnic, political and economic marginalization that is legitimized through the spectacle and through normalized practices. Each of these cases also represents the bridging of the digital divide in developing countries due to a shift from material labor and capital to increased investment in technology. Mobile phone networks are now available to 80% of the world’s rural population and “the developing world is increasing its share of mobile subscriptions from 53% of total mobile subscriptions at the end of 2005 to 73% at the end of 2010.”200 New handheld devices


coupled with increased internet availability have enabled the fourth world\textsuperscript{201} to access and produce information and establish new conceptions of citizenship through the utilization of differential space as a disruptive force in which to exert difference and destabilize current norms.

In Thailand, contributors to web boards such as *Prachatai* and *Fah Diew Kan* constructed a new political identity and claim to citizenship arising from the participatory actions of individuals within differential space. The state-dominated spectacle originated in Bangkok and was used to fix cultural identities within rural northern provinces. This system of marginalization was perpetuated by normalized practices and was expressed through divisions of material and immaterial labor and social relations of production. The state censorship in 2007 of mediums important to the diffusion of knowledge in rural provinces, particularly television and community radio stations, led to online contributions and dialogue that spread horizontally from a framework of topics put forth by alternative online news agencies. The investment in internet and satellite phone infrastructure in rural areas that began in 2001 resulted in increased access to differential space within daily life. The critical analyses, commentary and dialogue generated through differential space resulted in a cohesive identity that united individuals from geographically scattered rural areas.

The unified project identity of the Red Shirts was expressed in mass mobilizations from March through May 2010 that dramatically changed the day-to-day spatial functions of Bangkok and the prerogatives of Abhisit Vejjajiva’s government. The protest actions continued to feed online discussions and contributions to bulletin boards,

forums and social networking sites that brought news of events to a broader audience, despite the government’s attempt to block websites in order to weaken the mobilizations. In fact, as contributors to sites like Freedom Against Censorship Thailand and the Thai Netizen Network began to make the government’s secret list of blocked sites public, the motivations of those in power became clear. The government wished to suppress the political opposition by blocking online sites that threatened existing power relations. In conclusion, the participation and dialogue that began online in late 2006 fostered a unified political identity that resulted in mass protests in 2010. The online practices that constituted this coherent identity also resulted in the online deployment of new tactics to continue to allow citizens access to differential space, such as proxy servers and circumvention software.

In Guatemala, citizenship was forged through the collaboration and exchange of dialogue within HablaGuate, a public online forum initiated in May 2009. Similar to Thailand, the urban/rural divide in Guatemala signifies ethnic and economic marginalization based on a historic system of land ownership. The military government influences radio, television and newspaper content, information which perpetuates and legitimizes the norms linked to this marginalization. This social divide is also closely related to the country’s civil war from 1960-1996 and the resulting military culture and climate of impunity. Unlike Thailand, the primary barrier to political opposition and critique is not censorship, but the threat of violence linked to a military culture that has targeted dissidents and indigenous communities in the past.

The primary benefit of HablaGuate’s internet forum is the separation of the physical body from the political dialogue. Because rural areas lack internet infrastructure, the site was designed to accommodate contributions via cell phones, which are
inexpensive and plentiful in rural regions. Cell phone access extended the ability to forge a new citizenship through contributions and dialogue, obscuring ethnicity and identity with anonymous text message contributions. Contributions can also be made through the *Habla Radio* platform, attesting to the vitality of community radio despite issues of legality and limited broadcast range. The incorporation of *Habla Radio* with the site supplants the traditional vertical structure of broadcast radio with a more participatory and flexible auditory network based on oral language. The citizen-generated news and commentary based on topics relevant to daily life created a more trustworthy horizontal network of news and information that changed the way vertical networks function by subverting government networks, incorporating a public radio platform and creating a space for this body of information to be distributed to journalists and audiences worldwide. Citizen reporters, as producers of information, substantiate their citizenship and expose government corruption in their own words. *HablaGuate’s* platform allows for video, audio, text, and photo contributions that begin to transcend language barriers. The site’s accommodation of multiple modes of contributions is a model for Thai and Romani networks and others that face similar barriers of language and illiteracy.

The Roma Virtual Network was formed to represent the interests of the scattered members of the Romani ‘nation’ through a centralized hub that uses collaborative information as political leverage to advocate for the conditions of Roma communities throughout Europe. The RVN also serves as a vertical network that legitimizes the spatiality of the nation itself. The Roma were systematically denied rights by their host nations, so their group identity became internalized, unbounded by geography and specific to the group itself. This novel conception of identity linked to formation of the International Romani Union, a ‘non-territorial nation’ that led to a unique construction of
citizenship outside the bounds of governing institutions. This conception of citizenship was well-suited to the internet; within differential space, the group’s identity was facilitated outside of geographic and political boundaries.

The RVN has used differential space to create a vertical network for communication and collaboration among geographically scattered Roma rights groups and non-governmental organizations that has the potential to grow a horizontal network of citizen contributions in the future. The accuracy and timely replication of information has helped French and Romanian organizations to coordinate events against Sarkozy’s Roma deportation campaign in August and September 2010. Currently, access to the technology utilized to produce differential space lies in the hands of activists and NGO representatives, but the incorporation of an accessible platform for individual contributions could create a vibrant addition to the RVN. The addition of a platform for audio recordings and text messaging, like that of HablaGuate, would enable Roma individuals to produce news and information themselves using mobile phones or handheld devices for internet access. The result would be a beneficial citizenship constructed at the scale of the group or ‘nation,’ and also substantiated through an individual’s contextually specific engagement with differential space to provide unique and diverse opinions.

The recognition of recurring political, economic, and social patterns and increasing access to the internet exemplified by the case studies allows for the identification of other bourgeoning movements that are facilitated through differential space and have the capacity to reposition and remake conceptions of citizenship. In 2011, individuals in China, Burma, and Sudan will continue to express difference and discontent with internet technologies, rupturing normative discourse through the
production and utilization of differential space. More widespread internet engagement will begin to revolutionize daily life in these countries.

Briefly, communist China has a history of censorship, blocking sites like Twitter, YouTube and Facebook\(^\text{202}\) and recently placing prominent artist, blogger and activist Ai WeiWei under house arrest.\(^\text{203}\) Yet the country also boasts a strong community of netizens that discuss controversial issues, organize protests and participate in online dialogues with government officials. These online dialogues have the potential to change the uni-directionality of traditional political communication network.\(^\text{204}\) In March 2010, the government set up an “e-congress” website in which citizens could discuss relevant issues with Premier Wen Jiabao. In this case, citizen contributions to this forum had more powerful and effective results than the parallel session of the National People’s Congress, in which representatives did not question or engage the Premier.\(^\text{205}\) Internet access is growing rapidly in China; while the overall internet penetration rate is still low at nearly 32% of the population,\(^\text{206}\) nearly two thirds of these individuals use mobile phones to access the internet.\(^\text{207}\) In the future, expressions of popular dissent online will subvert the strict imperatives of the communist government.

Similarly, in the wake of Burma’s Saffron Revolution in 2007, which pitted Buddhist monks against the military junta, a small community of Burmese bloggers is

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using the internet, text messaging and Twitter to monitor the November 2010 elections as self-proclaimed citizen journalists. Although most believe the elections are rigged and the military government will remain in power, the bloggers aim to inform voters of the political process and monitor polling locations. They will use text messaging and Twitter from their mobile phones to describe the degree of impartiality at individual polling locations. The group intends to use an aggregate blog hosted outside the country accessed with proxy servers to ensure the anonymity of their online contributions. “The bloggers’ hope for the election is that a civilian-fronted government will bring some new freedoms, small cracks in the system that can be wedged open by their drive and activism.”

Finally, Girifna (we’ve had enough) is a political group focused on voter registration and education that formed in October 2009, in anticipation of the first multi-party election since 1986. The group is now 7,000 members strong on Facebook and uses Skype and text messaging to coordinate gatherings and mobilizations. Girifna also has a multi-media online presence with a YouTube channel and an internet radio station. Although overall internet penetration rates throughout Africa are low at 9.6%, lagging behind the developing country average of 21%, mobile phone subscriptions in Sudan have nearly quadrupled since 2006 and are now available to half the country’s

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population of 40 million. Girifna’s use of YouTube and internet radio could garner support from remote areas of Sudan, facilitating claims to citizenship that could potentially result in a mass uprising against the military government.

These examples from Sudan, Burma and China represent a movement toward education and engagement with specific channels of citizenship provided by political institutions. They illustrate the capability for the act of citizenship to not only redefine the subjectivity of the individual, but to re-engage traditional channels of citizenship that have been neglected or misused. Therefore, differential space allows for the expression and deployment of the tactic in combination with the prescribed procedures allotted to citizens, such as electoral rights and voting processes. Differential space, as exemplified by China’s “e-congress” can arise from a platform that hosts a new iteration of governmental proceedings, using the internet for increased equality of access. The accountability of both individuals and political institutions may start with the act of citizenship promoted by differential space.

The closing of the digital divide therefore has profound implications for the expression of new claims of citizenship in developing countries worldwide. The time period in which the case studies are positioned, 2009-2010, is critical to understanding the intersection of factors leading to the need for differential space through utilization of internet technology. At the micro scale, this intersection is comprised of political, economic and geographic factors specific to daily life in each context. Viewed through a wider lens, the case studies are illustrative of the position of developing countries within a successional composite of historical space and the abstract space of neo-liberalism, wherein the knowledge and control of networked information has furthered class divides,

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while the subsequent rise of new technological industries has the potential to subvert these imperatives and create a more powerful, democratic conception of citizenship.


<https://docs.google.com/Doc?docid=0AVRBCFI3N4OeZDlkNjNobl8xMGZ4Y3BqdGN4&hl=en>


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