Chapter 4

Eugene O'Brien: Negotiating the Self – The Spectral Mobile Subject

Writing about Jacques Derrida after his death, Simon Critchley made the point that in his view, Derrida was a 'supreme reader of texts.' Critchley went on to describe Derrida's legacy in terms of his distinctive mode of double reading which initially was attendant to the scholarly context of the piece of writing in question. This involves 'reading the text in its original language, knowing the corpus of the author as a whole, being acquainted with its original context and its dominant contexts of reception.' Critchley sees this as the first step in the process: it is a laying down of a 'powerful, primary layer of reading.' The second aspect of this double reading is what is more normally seen as interpretation or hermeneutic reading, where the text is 'levered open through the location of what Derrida sometimes called blind spots.' Many of his double readings turn around such blind spots in order to explode from within our understanding of a particular author. The key point is that the explosion has to come from within and not been imposed from without. It is an attempt to think 'the unthought within the thought of a specific philosophical text.'[1]

This is as valid an account of this mode of French literary theory as I have seen and, in the course of this chapter, I would like to engage in precisely such a double reading of the phenomenon of globalization as it affects Ireland. In this context, I will tease out the different valences of one relatively unthought aspect of globalization – mobile technology – and will attempt to show how this has affected the double reading of our human subjectivity as it is now constituted, what I call '*spectral mobile*

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1   Critchley, Simon , "Jacques Derrida", *Symposium*, volume 8, number 1, 2005.
     http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v008/8.1critchley.htm.

subjectivity.' I see the globalized subject as spectral because of the manner in which notions of presence have been deconstructed by mobile phones, text messages and virtual reality. For example, my image can be on video giving a talk in New York, whereas I can contemporaneously be texting someone from my office in Limerick, while also engaged in a conversation with a person in my office. So the question arises as to where, exactly am I 'present'? And this technology also contributes to the 'mobile' aspect of my term, which derives from the way in which information and knowledge are all available to us on a mobile basis – no longer do we go to a specific place to make a phone call, or to use a computer or access the internet – all of these are now freely available to us on mobile phones carried on our person.

The idea of the spectre is one which has haunted culture from time immemorial – it is the ghost, the revenant, the figure which is between living and dead, between the past and the future, and this spectrality is very much at the core of the relationship between globalization and the subject. In *Specters of Marx*, Jacques Derrida discusses what he terms *hauntology*, in answer to his question: '[*w*]*hat* is a ghost?'[2] In this book, he discusses the spectrality of many areas of meaning, seeing ghostly hauntings as traces of possible meanings. But Derrida makes one important distinction, in that he sees spectrality and time as closely connected. He makes the point, speaking both of the ghost in *Hamlet* and the ghost that haunts Marx's *Communist Manifesto* (where the first noun is 'specter'), that: '[a]t bottom, the specter is the future, it is always to come, it presents itself only as that which could come or come back.'[3] In this sense, hauntology suggests a movement between past, present and future and a process of constant negotiation.

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2   Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning & the New International*. Translated from the French by Peggy Kamuf. Introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg. (London: Routledge, 1994), p.10.
3   *Specters of Marx*, p.39.

Derrida traces the etymology of 'negotiation' to the Latin *neg-otium*: 'not-ease, not-quiet . . . no leisure.'[4] He sees this '[no]-leisure' as the 'impossibility of stopping or settling in a position . . .establishing oneself anywhere.' This process is typified by the image of a shuttle, going back and forth between different positions.[5] He goes on to explain:

> I appropriated the etymology for this new writing (ethical or political). Un-leisure is the impossibility of stopping, of settling in a position. Whether one wants it or not, one is always working in the mobility between several positions, stations, places, between which a shuttle is needed. The first image that comes to me when one speaks of negotiations is that of the shuttle, *la navette*, and what the word conveys of to-and-fro between two positions, two places, two choices. One must always go from one to the other, and for me negotiation is the impossibility of establishing oneself anywhere.[6]

This would seem to be a very postmodern and reflexive position, and given the current debates in Ireland about immigration, religion, identity and our place in Europe, *pace* the Lisbon referendum, a very contemporary one. However, Derrida is at pains to stress that this shuttling is *not* a free play of undecidability, where anything goes; rather it is 'always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities.'[7] This oscillation is part of the negotiation that I see as central to the interaction between the technological and the personal; the local and the global; the cultural and the political. As Derrida puts it, the word must '*negotiate* its usage'[8] in debate, and this ongoing negotiation is probably the best way to view the relationship between the local and the global and between the Irish mobile spectral subject and the processes of globalization.

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4   Jacques Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality", in Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971-2001. Edited and translated by Elizabeth Rottenburg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p.11.

5   Derrida, "Deconstruction of Actuality", p.12.

6   Derrida, "Deconstruction of Actuality", p.12.

7   Jacques Derrida, Limited Inc. Ttranslated by Samuel Webber (Evanston IL: North-Western University Press, 1988), p.148.

8   Derrida, "Deconstruction of Actuality", p.12.

Writing in *Deconstruction in a Time of Terror*, Derrida makes the following points about globalization:

> And yet wherever it is believed *globalization is taking place, it is for better and for worse.* For better: discourses, knowledge, and models are transmitted better and faster. Democratization thus has more of a chance. Recent movements toward democratization in Eastern Europe owe a great deal, almost everything perhaps, to television, to the communication of models, norms, images, informational products, and so on. Nongovernmental institutions are more numerous and better known or recognized. Look at the efforts to institute the International Criminal Tribunal.[9]

In other words, to see globalization as either good or bad is overly simplistic. Like so many of its elements, globalization itself is both spectral and nomadic, moving to bring benefit and loss to different sectors of the global economy through processes of negotiation.

Writing about knowledge, technology and the globalized world, István Mezgár notes that tthe new world of knowledge-based industries revolves around precognition and adaption. He goes on to make the telling point that:

> the new world of Technologies (electronic and mobile) needs very high levels of adaptability to incorporate dynamic changes into the business and information architecture and the ability to develop systems that can be readily adapted for the dynamically changing business environment.[10]

He posits the two main views of knowledge management that are current in a globalized culture – one which notes that it is 'possible to represent knowledge in forms that can be stored in computers' and the other which

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9   Jacques Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Imagined Suicides: A Dialogue with Jacques Derrida", in Giovanna Barradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.123.

10   István Mezgár, "Security Technologies to Guarantee Safe Business Processes in Smart Organizations", in Cornelius T. Leondes, *Intelligent Knowledge-Based Systems: Business and Technology in the New Millennium* (London: Kluwer Academic, 2005) pp. 246-287, p.258.

argues that 'knowledge resides in the user's subjective context of action based on the information stored in the computer.' For Mezgár, mobile technology is an important driver of globalized modes of production and interaction because they allow for the connection of the individual to the internet in terms of Wireless Application Protocol (WAP) which provided a platform for the connection of computers, hand-held computers, laptops, mobile phones and smart phones.

The importance of mobile communication as a constituent of the globalized world in which we live is underlined by its habituation, and by the fact that we are actually surprised by the penetration of communications technology in our lives. Residing in our pocket or in our handbag, we now have radio stations, MP3 players, GPS connections, television and webcasts, access to the internet and numerous forms of messaging possibilities. And these messages are not just personal as financial and market-based data is also transacted at a giddying rate through PC networks, and the virtuality of the financial markets has become a byword for globalized industries. Ironically, in the Financial Services Centre in Dublin, there is very little actual cash to be found: all of the services and the products are virtual.

What this means, in effect, is that we are now transnational citizens of a globalized economy, with almost pervasive interconnection with other places, cultures and people. The mediatized negotiation of these connections has often been the subject of discussion, as PC terminals seem to have taken the place of currency exchanges, and the amount of actual cash notes in the world is dwarfed by the virtual billions that are traded and transacted in the global financial markets. Clearly, the role of technology in the global socio-economic *habitus* is crucial, and has been the subject of much discussion in 2008-2009. In a global context, the crash of various banks and insurance companies such as Lehman Brothers, Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA) and Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (FHLMC), more commonly known as Freddie Mac, in 2008 in the USA, and AIG and Northern Rock in the United Kingdom, meant that the effect of globalization was felt very sharply in Ireland. The response to this crisis was suitably speedy, as befits a financial sector where billions and trillions of dollars are transferred across the globe at fiber-optical speeds. The US government has guaranteed its sub-prime mortgage market to the

tune of 700 billion dollars while six European governments coordinated a 2 trillion euro rescue plan. A guarantee by the Irish government of some 400 billion euro meant that we followed suit in this process.

But in this globalized financial sector, one question worthy of being asked is the actual status of such sums of money? Of course, in terms of ontological status this question is easy to answer – there is no actual location where 2 trillion euro, or even 700 billion dollars, actually exists. These amounts of money are ontologically virtual, they are spectral and very mobile. There is no bank or financial institution where this money is to be found. It is a virtual, hauntological, sum of money created through various symbolic exchanges and negotiations, which are part and parcel of transnational and globalized financial markets. It is endlessly mobile, shifting from bank to bank, as a series of signifiers, wherever interest and investment rates are better. This is spectral capital that has an existence in the ultimate binary opposition that structures our global economy: the '1' and '0' of the binary computer code.

However, it would be a mistake, and one that is often made in connection with any discussion of French postmodern theory, to suggest that these virtual, spectral, mobile networks of financial transactions have no actual effect in the real world, because they do. At the higher end of the system, billions of euro can be guaranteed through a flick of a finger on a mouse, but at the lower end there are hard financial realities that are far from virtual. Thus the Irish government can guarantee the Irish banks' future with a virtual sum of 400 billion euro, in the knowledge that this actual amount of money is not to be found anywhere. However, in the Irish budget in October 2008, so stringent were the effects of the credit crunch, itself an effect of economic globalization, that the government suggested taking free medical cards away from all of its citizens who were over 70 as a way of saving some one hundred million euro. It is interesting that a change in figures in the spectral symbolic order of the budget provisions and currency thresholds can make such an actual difference to people living in the country. Here, the spectral financial markets have haunted the government and have caused the usual effect of spectres – fear and terror – in the population of Ireland who are over 70.

However, the response to this crisis is a further example of spectral mobility, as pensioners travelled en masse to Dublin to voice their frustration and anger at this treatment and they used the power of technology, specifically the media, to argue their case. And these spectral (in a double sense because they are nearer to death than most of the population), mobile (as they travel en masse to Dublin), subjects are examples of globalisation as a form of subjective empowerment, as they refuse to listen to the structural voices of the government. Indeed, after these demonstrations and a general media outcry in the country about the indiscriminate nature of the loss of entitlements – the original income threshold was €240-a-week for a single person and €480-a-week for a couple – the Taoiseach announced that the Government had decided to raise these figures to €700 and €1,400 respectively, thus removing all but a minimal number from access to free medical care.

This is another aspect of the negotiations of the global; as more people are empowered through communication and technology, so their voices are louder, and they see that they can change the structures which constitute them. The symbolic order of every society and culture changes as time progresses and globalised media which have strong user-input have affected a step-shift in the ability of ordinary individuals to participate in the symbolic order of their time and culture. Generally Ireland has had very positive economic responses to globalization. G. Honor Fagan has made the point that in a survey in 2001, by the American magazine *Foreign Affairs*, Ireland came out at the top of a world globalization index. She went on to say that: the indicators used were information technology, finance, trade, travel, 'politics' and personal communications, 'all designed to evaluate the degree of global integration' and the success of Ireland's economic policy was such that by 2001,

financial inflows and outflows were 'the largest in the world in terms of gross domestic product.'[11]

So Ireland, while now a victim of the downturn in globalized economic processes, has for quite some time been very much a global success story. Indeed, one could make the point that through globalization, technology and the spectral movement of capital, Ireland had developed from a pre-modern existence, bypassing the classic features of modernity, such as the rise of the bourgeoisie, strong manufacturing industries and a slow process of secularisation, and had become postmodern almost in spite of itself. Perhaps the only area of the country not affected by this was Northern Ireland, dogged by post-colonial and post imperial violence for over thirty years, but even here, through the peace-process, which was globally empowered through the good offices of Bill Clinton, George Mitchell and the EU, the violence was finally ended, and its end was coterminous with the flourishing of the Celtic TigerAnd it is notable that in the media, Northern Ireland is no longer a central news item. In terms of a negotiated Irish globalized identity, Northern Ireland has lost its metonymically central status as a key signifier of nationalism and post colonialism.

Part of the reason for this is that through mobile technology, and mediatized access to a broader sense of community, the intrinsic binary of nationalism and unionism has been dislocated. Just as the financial system of Ireland has been changed, for better and for worse, by the spectral movement of capital in our technologically-driven globalized economy, so, I would argue, have our individual notions of selfhood and our sense of human interaction been equally altered by globalization. Mobile

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11   G. Honor Fagan, "Globalized Ireland, or, Contemporary Transformations of National Identity'?, in C. Coulter and S. Coleman (eds), *The End of Irish History? Critical Reflections on the Celtic Tiger* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 110.

technology ensures that the influences of globalization are ongoing and mutually transformative. I will further argue that mobile technology, far from being something superadded to our sense of subjectivity, has now become a constituent factor of that subjectivity. The beep of our mobile phones, and the ongoing texting of others (6 million texts sent in Ireland in 2006 with almost 9 million being sent in 2008), defines a quantum shift in our relationships with the other, on a micro level, and with the global other on a macro level. I will also suggest that this sense of being constantly contactable has altered our sense of ourselves to a very significant degree. The relationship between self and other has been ontologically altered though the hauntological processes of technology. It is my contention that mobile technology is a core constituent of the symbolic constitution of contemporary Irish men and women. We have now achieved the status of users of technology at a global level, and also at a mobile level. The ability to connect to others in cyber-space has radically altered our sense of selfhood as well as our perception of our location in the world. For so long seen as an island at the edge of Europe and distant from the United States, we can now send texts, tweets and emails whose content is far more important that their source or country of origin. Such messages are sent from mobile devices which have almost become part of our clothing, as they nestle in pockets, pouches or handbags, and are as much a part of our somatic being. Even the way these devices appraise us of a new message is somatic in the haptic vibration which affects our bodies before registering with us on a rational or cognitive level. In this sense, it is a similar process to getting a nudge or a prick on our arm and then registering this fact. In other words, it is technology as part of our connection with the world – it is almost inside our body as opposed to being something external. Mobile technology has become part of the interface through which we experience the world. The negotiations involved in this process are complex and multi-layered, and I would draw on the work of Arjun Appadurai to illustrate this point.

In his seminal essay "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Culture Economy", he makes the point that the relationship between the global and the local, and between capital and the subject, is one which defies definition: 'the new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries).'[12] He goes on to postulate a new interactive negotiation

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[12]   Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*: *Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p.32.

(and I use the word deliberately in its Derridean sense) between different aspects of the globalized world:

> I propose that an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) *ethnoscapes*, (b) *mediascapes*, (c) *technoscapes*, (d)*financescapes*, and (e) *ideoscapes*. The suffix *-scape* allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These terms with the common suffix *-scape* also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, Diaspora communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements (whether religious, political, or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods, and families.[13]

And mobile technology, I would argue, produces this negotiation between these different '-scapes' by altering the very nature of what it means to be human. These interactive and multi-perspectival '-scapes' can be seen as broadly analogous to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*.

The *habitus* is the practical and unthought (and untaught) background: 'the *habitus* is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions; it is a general transposable disposition which carries out a systematic, universal application – beyond the limits of what has been directly learnt – of the necessity inherent in the learning conditions.'[14] As Bourdieu also explains: the conditionings associated with a 'particular class of conditions of existence produce the *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representation.'[15] Globalization, the virtual world, mobile technology, hauntological presence – these are all part of the contemporary *habitus*. In psychoanalytic terms,

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13   Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p.33.
14   Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction*. Translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), p.170.
15   Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practices* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), p.53.

one could make parallels between the habitus and what Jacques Lacan calls 'the big Other'. For Lacan, this is the way in which the symbolic order is experience by specific individuals: it is the practical effect on people of social and cultural codes, practices and ideologies. This process of negotiation is facilitated through the ability of the individual to enact with his or her local and global community and to have an active role in the transmission of culture through mobile modes of production. Perhaps the most important aspect of our current globalized world is that of information. Time and again we hear about the 'knowledge economy' and the 'knowledge society', and this has now become a key economic driver in Irish society, a point made by Mezgár, as we recall in terms of the global economy in general. But knowledge now is a conflation of those different '-scapes' cited by Appadurai, and as he himself had noted, the imagination 'is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order.'[16]

In previous pre-mobile generations, the relation between the knowledge culture industry and the individual was very one-sided. The culture industry produced books, films, newspapers, television and radio programmes and the subject was the quasi-passive receptor of this process and of these ideological products. One thinks of the individual in Nazi Germany or Communist China where the s/he was constituted through the ideological bombardment of the culture industry, and where the means of cultural production were carefully guarded. In these cases the *habitus*, or 'big Other' was carefully regulated and constructed. The individual was constructed as a passive recipient of such cultural coding, and his or her reactions were limited in terms of how he or she could affect the *habitus* or big Other of the regime in question. One thinks of the state of censorship that existed in the early Irish Free State, where foreign opinion was very carefully mediated through the established centres of power, namely Church and State.

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16   Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, p.31.

Now, however, control of print and image have been deconstructed and liberated so that every owner of a mobile phone can take pictures and videos, and can broadcast these images and videos on YouTube on the internet. This mobility means that whereas before, the studio, the newspaper office, the relevant government department, all of which were in the service of a single monolithic authority, were the locus of the production of information. However in our globalized Ireland, the individual, the subject, is now the producer of information, and our globalized technological society and culture means that such production is now mobile and democratic. As Derrida puts it: 'information can and must transform itself; it can and it must serve – as it often has – knowledge, truth and the cause of the democracy to come.'[17] And my analysis of the contemporary mobile subject will negotiate with Derrida's definitions and will be deconstructive in its epistemological structure. I use the term 'deconstruction' here in its technical as opposed to popular sense. Derrida argues that a new paradigm to begin, the older certainties and givens must be put into question and this is the mode of deconstruction that I advert to here.

Philosophically, deconstruction is important in its overall thrust towards the future, what Derrida has called the *a venir*:

What you need deconstruction for is to undo a number of presuppositions, prejudices and so on and so forth. But where you don't need to undo such things, you don't need deconstruction. … So it depends on the type of relationship that you have between interpretation and knowledge, and of course the more you rely on interpretative languages, on institutional practices and so forth, the more you need deconstruction.[18]

And in the case of attempting to analyse the effect of globalization, deconstruction is crucial. There is very little morality to be found in globalization because the word itself means so many different things to so many different people that it has almost become an empty signifier. The same is

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17   Jacques   Derrida, "Open Discussion ", in Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged. The Sydney Seminars*, edited by Paul Patton and Terry Smith (Sydney: Power Publications, 2001), p.88.
18   Derrida, "Open Discussion", p.110.

true of the ongoing march of technology, itself a metonymic representation of globalization, what Derrida terms 'technoscience and economic or telemedia globalization.'[19]

Technology has the power to change our subjectivity. In this respect, technology can be seen as what Derrida terms a *pharmakon*. In "Plato's Pharmacy", Derrida traces the rejection of the god Thoth's gift of writing by the Egyptian King Thamus. Thoth claims that his invention of writing is a *pharmakon* for memory and wisdom and offers his gift as a cure, but King Thamus returns it as a poison. Derrida observes the problematic aspect of the translation of *pharmakon*, as it signifies two opposite meanings – it translates as both cure and poison, and thus has both positive and negative connotations.[20] Paul Virilio makes the same point with respect to technology, speaking of the accidents which are a necessary stage of technological development:

> The accident is an inverted miracle, a secular miracle, a revelation. When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash; and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution. …. Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress.[21]

The pessimistic view of technology as poison has a long history. It has been seen as a very negative aspect of human development by various thinkers from popular and high culture. From Mary Shelley's eponymous monster, through to George Orwell's Big Brother, to the nearly omnipotent Hal in *2001 A Space Odyssey*, to dysfunctional cyborgs in *Blade Runner* and *Terminator*, to the Borg of *Star Trek* and beyond, technology has often been seen as inimical to the development of humanity. Indeed, even the term itself can have negative consequences: we often say that we don't want to be 'too technical', or the term can be used as an argumentative escape clause: 'technically he was guilty but in actual fact he was innocent.' Indeed the

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19   Derrida, "Autoimmunity: Real and Imagined Suicides", p.125.
20   Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), pp.71-2.
21   Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1999), p.89.

irony is that while our lives become suffused with technology, the term itself is still pejoratively seen as a negative. In all of the cultural fusions we see of the subject and technology – Darth Vader, Robocop, the Terminator in all of his (and her) incarnations – this fusion results in humans who move slowly, are robotic in their emotions, and are somehow lesser than the norm.

These technologically enhanced creatures are seen as less than human and are invariably undone by their problems in relating to the other humans in their cultural contexts. In our culture, its ultimate synecdoche was the technologisation of death on the gas chambers, where instrumental rationality and the Fordist processes of mechanized capitalism, were brought to bear on the Nazi solution to the Jewish 'problem'. In these concentration camps, dead bodies become the product of the technological processes of train transport, cataloguing of people as commodities and bloodless gas chambers, where the dead, stripped of clothing, valuables and all marks of humanity, climbed on top of the dead in a pyramidal shape gasping for the last gulps of fresh air, a pyramid that facilitated the gathering of the bodies, and their transportation to the gas chambers, where the human was reduced to ashes through the processes of technology. Such instrumental reason was what drove Adorno and Horkheimer to publish their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*,[22] and to suggest and warn of the dangers of such technologisation of the human. Virilio, in his theory of technology and accidents, makes the point that now, with the advent of global technology, 'there is the risk not of a local accident in a particular location, but rather of a global accident that would affect if not the entire planet, then at least the majority of people concerned by these technologies.'[23] At a further level of pessimism, Virilio cites the case of Bob Dent, who was suffering from terminal cancer and who used a remote-control suicide device developed by his doctor Philip Nitschke, and parallels this with the case of the Russian chess grandmaster Gary Kasparov, playing a game against a computer

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22   Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Translated by John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997).
23   Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst*, pp.92-3.

specially designed to defeat him.[24] In these cases, the human is made lesser by technology, the *pharmakon* as poison would seem to haunt our study of technology

However, in the context of the *pharmakon* as cure, there is another perspective to be taken on the technical. Martin Heidegger, looking at the etymology of the term noted that:

> To the Greeks *techné* means neither art nor handicraft but rather: to make something appear, within what is present, as this or that, in this way or that way. The Greeks conceive of *techné*, producing, in terms of letting appear. *Techné* thus conceived has been concealed in the tectonics of architecture since ancient times. Of late it still remains concealed, and more resolutely, in the technology of power machinery.[25]

This notion of 'letting appear' is important in terms of how technology interacts with the human. In his groundbreaking *The Political Unconscious*, Fredric Jameson urged the reader and thinker to 'always historicize',[26] and in the current historical context, our very humanity is in constant negotiation with technology. But as we noted at the beginning of the chapter, Derrida is at pains to stress that this shuttling is *not* a free play of undecidability, where anything goes; rather it is 'always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities.'[27] And mobile technology, I would argue, produces this negotiation by altering the very nature of what it means to be human.

The either/or binary that I looked at earlier in terms of technology as a poison or cure, has been replaced by a more fluid relationship between the technical and the human. There is a Heideggerian revelatory function at work here as the connection between the subject and the other becomes more overt. And there is a process of negotiation going on here between the idea of a fixed phone and a mobile one. So we no longer ask who is speaking because we are now ringing a specific person, and not a

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24   Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (London: Verso, 2000), p.5.
25   Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p.159.
26   Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981), p.9.
27   Derrida, *Limited Inc*, p.148.

phone belonging to a house or place. When the phone is in one's pocket, all sorts of different behaviours accrue. For example, we no longer ask who is calling; instead we ask 'where are you?', as the location of the subject is no longer predicated by the location of the phone. In other words, the subject has become more nomadic due to the technology available, and the phone is now dictated by our location as opposed to vice-versa. Mobility is both caused by, and helpful for, mobile phone interaction – it is a negotiation between them.

In the globalized Ireland of today, we are engaged in a rapid technologisation process and it is my contention that this process is one of negotiation, whereby our very sense of being human in space and time, is being altered by the mobile technology that has become part and parcel of our lives. Culturally, spatially, temporally and politically, the self of contemporary Ireland is radically different to that of the previous decades or historical periods. I would cite Rosi Braidotti who talks about the feminist subject of knowledge in a way that parallels my own thinking. She notes that:

> The feminist subject of knowledge is an intensive, multiple subject, functioning in a net of inter-connections. It is non-unitary, non-linear, web-like, embodied and therefore perfectly artificial. As an artifact it is machinic, complex, endowed with multiple capacities for inter-connectedness in the impersonal mode. It is sexed, but it's all over the place.[28]

And it is to this end that I propose a definition of contemporary subjectivity in terms of the new relationship to the other and to the symbolic order. For Lacan, subjectivity is defined through a relation to the other through language and desire. In terms of our new mobile technology, our relation to the other – be that other people, the Symbolic other or language, is mediated through mobile technologies such as phones and SMS messages. I am suggesting that a definition of the way in which we enact with our global other through Appadurai's ethnoscapes, mediascapes,

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28   Rosi Braidotti, *Between The No Longer And The Not Yet: Nomadic Variations On The Body.* http://www.women.it/cyberarchive/files/braidotti.htm. (2007). [accessed January 5, 2009].

technoscapes, finanscapes, and ideoscapes. I would see our subjectivity as more instantaneously connected with the other and would define it as a *Spectral Mobile Subjectivity*. That the acronym of this definition is SMS (also standing for short message service) is helpful because the SMS service has revolutionised the way in which we connect to the other. I realise these are large claims but I will attempt to illustrate them under 3 headings: time, space, and attitude to culture and cultural production. I will look at the mobile phone, satellite navigation and the internet as the indices of this negotiation. It is through this mobile technology that we are spectrally mediated and can affect change in our *habitus* and big Other.

The inter-connected subject that Braidotti adduces is a function of our mobile technology revolution. In his book *The Transparent Society*, Gianni Vattimo, the Italian media philosopher, advocates the 'hypothesis' that 'the intensification of communicative phenomena and the increasingly prominent circulation of information, with news flashed around the world (or McLuhan's 'global village') as it happens, are not merely aspects of modernization amongst others, but in some way the centre and the very sense of this process.'[29]

Worldwide there will be nearly 3 billion mobile phone users by the end of 2008, which means a penetration rate of 51%. There will be 931 million new users over the next 5 years. Of the almost 700 million mobile phones sold last year, some 250 million had built-in cameras, while, significantly, only some 80 million digital cameras were purchased. These numbers, impressive enough in themselves, reflect some fundamental conditions and changes in the very nature of the individuals who use them. Today there are 8 mobile phones for every 100 people in Africa. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the figure is 2. These figures appear to be low, but in the poor world phones are widely shared. And the economic benefits of the spread of the mobile are double what they are in the rich world. As recent British research suggests, in a typical developing

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29   Gianni Vattimo, *The Transparent Society* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1992), p.14.

country an increase of 10 mobiles per 100 people boosts GDP growth by 0.6 percent.[30]

The whole area of mnemotechnics, the ways in which we recall, record and remember the experiences we have, is interesting. And it is my argument that such mobile technology becomes a part of our subjectivity to such an extent that it has altered the way that we define that subjectivity. I argue that we now live in a negotiated relationship with the world and with the other which is mediated through our mobile technology. Pictures are visual recollections, tapes and audio are also ways of capturing the past. However, the digital camera and video recorders in most mobile phones have resulted in an exponential increase in the number of images that have been created and printed in the last two years – the figure, and it is impossible to be accurate, of 20 billion images and videos from mobile phones has been preferred. So, the reification of the image has also been deconstructed. With my camera I can take 50 photos and delete 49 of them. There is a new mutability about the image and we are less keen to protect or reify the image as we can always take more. It is as if digitization has made us less protective of the image and this also has implications for our concepts of selfhood and time. They also have implications for the way in which we act in space and time. We are now able to archive our experiences effortlessly and that means that we are far more inclined to take pictures and images of occasions. We are able to commit to our phone memory images, people, experiences and this can often shape the way in which we react. So my scopic drive is redesigned, and I see the space in which I am in both in the present moment, and as the source of an image which I can then observe. So my memories of a trip to France are now less my images of France, but images of me in France, and visual images which I can send to people on their phones. So even at a banal level, the ordeal of 'looking at my holiday snaps', has been transformed into an ongoing series of images sent from the place while I am still in that place.

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30   Leonard Waverman, Meschi, M. & Fuss, M. 'The impact of telecoms on economic growth in developing countries' *In Africa: The Impact of Mobile Phones: Moving the Debate Forward* (*The Vodafone Policy Paper series*, No.2, 2005).

The temporal sequence of my being in a foreign country, then coming home, and relaying my images to those at home is now deconstructed: I can now share my holiday snaps while still on holiday. I am able to transmit myself while mobile and my mobility and connectivity are now a core part of my subjective experience of travel – hauntologically I am in France and Ireland at the same time – a new form of spectral mobility.

In terms of self and other, the SMS service means that relationships are now altered in terms of their symbolic order. This changes much of our sense of self, and of how that is transmitted in literature. For example, the synchronous suicide of Romeo and Juliet, the isolation of Robinson Crusoe, the loneliness of Hamlet or Lear, could be ameliorated through SMS messages – a series of texts would immediately solve the problems. In fact a lot of literary dilemmas are about lack of communication and isolation and the actions that ensue from such isolation. In a contemporary context that just could not happen because we are now in immediate and embodied contact with the other through our phone. Most phones now have a vibrate function wherein there is a physical vibration of the phone to denote an incoming text message. This means that the other is able to physically affect our bodies through contact. In a real sense, we are no longer locked within our bodies as we have a somatic connection with the other through our mobile. The sensation of being alone is ours no longer. We are always contactable – even walking has changed, as the ability to walk, talk and text is now a necessary social skill. And the absent other now has the ability to touch us physically through the vibration of an SMS message – the self is hauntologically imbricated in the other and this is a fundamental change in our *habitus* and big Other.

Perhaps the most obvious change wrought by the mobile phone is mental and emotional connection. When my phone vibrates and I open the text, I now know, for certain, and without doubt, that someone has been thinking about me in the last 2 to 3 minutes and wants to communicate with me *now*. That means that we are connected to the other, albeit intermittently and albeit sporadically, and this has changed the experience of being human in the third millennium. And while this connection has nothing to do with where I am, and with my location, it has everything to do with me as a person. The SMS text or the call are focused on me.

So when I am speaking to someone, and simultaneously texting someone else, my relationships with the real and the virtual are in negotiation – and there seems to me to be a need to classify this new sense of subjectivity. The other is in connection with me and yet spectral and mobile because they are obviously somewhere else.

Two people are walking and talking in the street. At a certain point the mobile phone rings and one of the two starts talking to a third person, with all his or her gestures directed at the absent third party and not at the person next to her. In this context, where, precisely, is the person who is replying to the mobile phone? Spectrally present to the caller on the phone, is he or she not also spectrally present to the person to whom they are talking as they are not giving them their full attention? The same is true of people talking in company with friends and texting someone else at the same time. Are they fully present in actuality or in text? And this is also true even before they begin texting. Take the situation of four people talking in a group. A phone beeps or vibrates to signal an incoming text. Immediately all four people will reach for their pocket or for their bag to see if the message is for them. Immediately there is a reduction in attention to the topic of actual conversation as the prospect of a virtual conversation looms. Again, there is a spectralisation of the presence through an absent stimulus. Even the narrative imagination has to come to terms with this development. Whole films would have been impossible if there had been the mobile phone. Dr Zhivago sees Lara as she recedes into the distance. He is unable to stop her. But now the solution is easy as he can just give her a ring or send her a text. Hollywood is now taking note and basing films on this possibility. So our relationships with people become spectralised through the mobile phone and through the SMS message. We are haunted by aspects of the other. The barriers and borders between selfhood and alterity are now far more fluid and the self is more mobile in every sense of that term. As Derrida has noted:

> when I think negotiation, I think of this fatigue, of this without-rest, this enervating mobility preventing one from ever stopping. If you would like to translate this philosophically, the impossibility of stopping, this means: no thesis, no position, no

theme, no station, no substance, no stability, a perpetual suspension, a suspension without rest.'[31]

And I would argue that mobile technology is both constituent of, and a response to, this new sense of mobile subjectivity. There is no rest between presence and absence just as the spectre is unable to rest after death. But the same is true of another aspect of our mobile subjectivity and that is in our relation with space. Jameson has made the point that postmodernism is focused more on the spatial in contradistinction to modernism which is focused on the temporal.

Technology becomes part of the shaping of people and of space. For example, if my mobile phone has GPS capability, every place I go becomes a 'smart' place, inscribed in electromagnetic grids which can then be used to tell me where I am and where to go. Developed by the United States Department of Defence, GPS is officially named NAVSTAR GPS. The satellite constellation is managed by the United States Air Force 50th Space Wing. The cost of maintaining the system is approximately US $750 million per year, including the replacement of aging satellites, and research and development. Following the shooting down of Korean Air Lines Flight 007 in 1983, President Ronald Reagan issued a directive making the system available for free for civilian use as a common good. Since then, GPS has become a widely used aid to navigation worldwide, and a useful tool for map-making, land surveying, commerce, and scientific uses. GPS also provides a precise time reference used in many applications including scientific study of earthquakes, and synchronization of telecommunications networks. A typical GPS receiver calculates its position using the signals from four or more GPS satellites. Four satellites are needed since the process needs a very accurate local time, more accurate than any normal clock can provide, so the receiver internally solves for time as well as position. In other words, the receiver uses four measurements to solve for four variables: x, y, z, and t. These values are then turned into more user-friendly forms, such as latitude/longitude or location on a map, then displayed to the user.

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31   Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality", in *Negotiations*, p.13

Cyber space and real space coalesce, and my current location becomes a plane of technological inscription for this global information system, and the individual human becomes a series of location zones, an evolving piece of data whose information events are fed back into this digital retention system. It is as if the world is now covered in a layer of 'virtual graffiti' to use a term coined by Howard Rheingold.[32]

This virtual graffiti mediates the new through the familiar – our experience of the new is always slightly fearful, and one of the best examples of this is finding one's way in a strange city. As already noted, the grids of visual graffiti mean that I no longer have to worry about finding my way through streets. I no longer have to wonder if there is a restaurant, a hotel or a shop to be found because my web browser on my mobile phone will allow me to access all of this information at the touch of a thumb – and indeed, the opposable thumb, often seen by evolutionists as the defining creature of humans as toolmakers, has now, in the third millennium become one of our most important indices of communication – as through it we now access the world of text. Of course at another level, I have become part of the digitized web of visual graffiti because my GPS phone is emitting a signal to the satellite which can then orient me from where I am to where I want to go so I have become. So every beep of the device sends my location to the network, which then collates this information and sends me back a new destination. So my record on this planet is now being recorded on another medium. As well as my carbon footprint, there is also my digitized and triangulated footprint which is saved in various archives. So even my sense of selfhood has been changed.

Part of this change in selfhood is due to the interconnectedness between self and other and between self and place. The spatial relationship works on two levels. Firstly, as I travel through the city I leave other traces too, traces which will be incorporated into the global digital retention system. Every ATM I visit and every credit card transaction I make will be recorded. But my mobile device is a nomadic object; it literally

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32   Howard Rheingold, *Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution* (New York: Perseus Publishing, 2002).

 locates me within an electronic reproduction of the territory I walk over. And it is this mobility that is the key to the negotiating powers of mobile technology. The postmodern subject can be seen as nomadic, to use Rosi Braidotti's term, and in terms of her idea of the nomadic subject, the mobile phone is a seminal

The nomadic subject according to Braidotti's definition is 'post-modern/industrial/colonial',[33] and is a subject that moves against settled and conventional ways of thinking. The nomad is one who does not suffer from compulsive displacement but travels because he or she wants to. Braidotti advocates the cultivation of a 'nomadic consciousness' which she describes as follows:

> The nomadic consciousness combines coherence with mobility. It aims to rethink the unity of the subject, without reference to humanistic beliefs, without dualistic oppositions, linking instead body and mind in a new set of intensive and often intransitive transitions.[34]

Thus the nomadic sense of time is active and continuous, and metaphors associated with the state of the nomad are those of open space, the *noumos*, which is the etymological root of the word *nomad*.[35] One thinks of Glen Patterson's wry comment that Irish writers no longer emigrate – they go on lecture tours. One thinks of Irish emigrants and the way they have changed – three or four generations ago, the Irish went to America and Britain to build the cities of the second industrial revolution. One thinks of U2's resonant song 'The hands that built America' and how now, their sons and daughters go to work in those very buildings with a strong sense of making money and achieving the flexibility to return to Ireland when they so desire.

For Braidotti, the nomadic subject is a utopian figuration that is not about displacement but about a discursive freedom from dominant narratives:

> [The nomadic subject is] a figuration for the kind of subject who has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions, successive shifts, and coordinated changes, without and against an essential unity.[36]

These changes in space have already been examined in terms of how mobile technology changes our perceptions. The same is true of my attitude to space. As I drive from Limerick to Dublin, I look at roads and streets on my GPS receiver and the images I see are almost cartoon-like images of the actual places. So rather than look at the actual space, I look at the virtual space in front of me, and my relationship with signage is also different.

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33 Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p.4.
34 Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p.31.
35 Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p.26.
36 Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, p.22.

Instead of looking at a map, and waiting until I come to a specific street to take a turn, I now look at the GPS screen which tells me to turn left in 500 metres. It is important here to stress that the real is not replaced with the virtual mapping of the street; instead, the subject looks at both and negotiates between the two, now looking at the screen and now looking at the real world outside the car. The real streetscape is haunted by its two-dimensional image on the screen just as the two dimensional image is also haunted by the real street over which and through which the car is traveling. One could see the connection as a haunting or even as a Lacanian *méconnaissance*, a misrecognition that is a recognition. The added fact that the GPS image of the street speaks to us makes the identification clearer. The voice of the Sat Nav will tell us that in 500 meters, turn left, or will advise us that at the upcoming roundabout, we need to take the second exit. The more advanced systems will also tell us of traffic alerts and of holdups on roads. One could see the negotiation of the real and the virtual as an example of Derrida's idea of hauntology, and of how spectral mobility is now a central metaphor of how we interact with the world.

We have already looked at Derrida's ideas on hauntology, and I would argue that this haunting is part of our visual relationship with GPS (itself a technology predicated on our mobility as subjects). But it is also a significant factor in our relationships with others in terms of presence and absence as mediated by our mobile phones. One of the most common subjective experience is being lost in a strange place and, one of the corollaries of being lost is the need to ask directions. However, in some of the more high-tech GPS systems, my mobile phone will tell me how to find my destination with basic instructions like next left, second exit at roundabout etc. Here, a basic human experience has been transformed by technology. In a new town or city, I can access information on tourist sites of interest through the web, and I do not need to actually talk to people. The mobile phone thus causes me to have less oral connections in reality than one might suppose. At another level, through SMS messages, oral interchange can often be interrupted by text messaging. How often do we see people having conversations at a table in a café or bar while at the same time texting someone else. Indeed text itself is a *pharmakon* as it has all of the immediacy and the direct access of speech while still being a kind of writing.

As has been his wont, when Derrida looks at a new concept, he looks for a neologism to voice that concept, and in *Echographies of Television*, the 'portmanteau nicknames' that he outlines at the beginning of the book, 'artifactuality' and 'actuvirtuality',[37] suggest how technologies create the world as much as reflect it. These two terms take in the Heideggerian connection between *techné* and *poien*, between revealing and making and they both gesture towards the constitutive and transformative role that mobile technology has both on the subject and on the subject's negotiation with his or her world. Both terms are originally used with respect to television, with 'artifactuality' describing how public speech is produced in the maintenance of actuality. 'Actuvirtuality' suggests that with the 'actuality effect' of live television[38] that the virtual has infiltrated the event to the point where the rhythm of the event, its temporality, has changed.[39] Artifactuality and actuvirtuality do not attempt to 'deny' the reality of the event. Rather, they aim to deconstruct actuality in order to be attentive to what might be untimely, spectral, or specific to the event as an arrival: to remain open to 'the fact that something happens only once'.[40] In *Echographies*, Derrida grants that the technological possibility of the live changes 'our understanding of the entire field': As soon as we know, 'believe we know,' or quite simply believe that the alleged 'live' or 'direct' is possible, and that voices and images can be transmitted from one side of the globe to the other, the field of perception and of experience in general is profoundly transformed.[41]

He suggests that these same tele-technologies accelerate the speed of democratization, and indeed 'have done more for what is called democratization … than all the discourses on behalf of human rights.'[42] So, I would conclude by looking at the effect of the mobile phone on our subjectivity and would, like

37   Jacques Derrida, *Echographies of Television: Filmed Interviews* (London: Polity Press, 2002), p.3.
38   Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, p.5.
39   Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, p.7.
40   Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, pp.20-21.
41   Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, p.40.
42   Derrida, *Echographies of Television*, p.71.

Derrida and Braidotti, suggest that we need to redefine our subjectivity in the light of the influence of the nomadic, spectral, actuvirtual and artifactual negotiations that are created by tele-technology. And to this end I would offer the formula SMS – Spectral Mobile Subject – as an apt description of how we relate to our historical context in the 21st century. This signifier has the ability to stand for Spectral Mobile Subject, or Short Message Service, and I am reminded of the Vodafone advertisement where a woman was passed along a crowd like a text message. SMS captures the dimensions of the relationship between our negotiations of the real and the virtual, self and other, mobility and stasis but most of all, of the hauntings of the one by the other and the one by the all.