The Place of Mobility: Technology, Connectivity, and Individualization

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The mobile is that which moves; mobility is the capacity to move. Movement can be a movement in place or a movement between places,[1] but without place there can be no mobility.[2] Communication is itself a form of movement – a communing between places – and so carries an essential mobility within it, as well as an essential relation to place. When we talk, in contemporary terms, of 'mobile communication', however, we do not refer to the intrinsic movement that all communication exhibits, but rather to an *enhanced* capacity to communicate across changes of place. That this is indeed an enhanced capacity is a reflection of the fact that what has changed with the advent of modern mobility in communication is not a change in the mere possibility for communication across changes of place (there have always been some ways, if often rudimentary and limited, to maintain communication even while on the move), but in the ways in which this possibility can be realised. So great is this change, however, that one might nevertheless say that the change is a *qualitative*, rather than merely *quantitative* one, and that it constitutes a

watershed in the history of communication marking off the mobile

communications of the present, and of the future, from anything that has

gone before.

The nature of the break at issue here is very often expressed in terms of

a radical shift in the human experience of, and engagement with, *place*, as well

as with space and time. Some writers have gone so far as to claim that what is

promised by the new technologies, if they have not already achieved it, is a

mode of life that is no longer tied to place as once it was. Thus Barry Wellman

writes of mobile phone technologies in particular that what they enable is "a

fundamental liberation from place", and he goes on:

Their use shifts community ties from linking people-in-places to linking people wherever

they are. Because the connection is to the person and not to the place, it shifts the dynamics of

connectivity from places – typically households or worksites – to individuals. The shift to a

personalized, wireless world affords truly *personal communities* that supply support,

sociability, information, and a sense of belonging separately to each individual. It is the

individual, and neither the household nor the group, that is the primary unit of connectivity.[3]

The shift from places to individuals that is identified by Wellman might seem

to be an obvious consequence of the fact that the mobile phone belongs to a

range of mobile electronic devices – pdas, laptops and netbooks, portable

music players, handheld games machines, even portable DVD players

(converging in the latest generation of 'intelligent' mobiles) – that have

proliferated over the last quarter of a century and that are all geared to

personal rather than collective use, and that can be carried on or close to the

person, being designed for use in no fixed location, and, in some cases, for use

while moving. In the mobile world that such devices enable, what remains the

same other than the individual that moves? In such a world, in which what is

delivered through such mobile devices is itself available and transferable

anywhere within a proliferation of networked sites, what is fixed other than

the individual who makes use of such devices?

The shift away from place that is associated with the rise of mobile

communication technologies is usually taken to be part of a broader shift

associated with the character of modernity as such – a shift that occurs in

relation to a range of technologies, and not only those of mobile

communication, all of which operate through the way in which they change

our spatial and temporal relatedness to things, to other persons, and to

ourselves, and that is seen to give rise to a world of relationality and

interconnection, proximity and compression, changeability and flow.

Globalization is the term that is most often used to refer to the overall shift that

is apparent here. Yet one might argue that although globalization is one

aspect of the shift away from place that is characteristic of modernity, the

other aspect that must also be attended to, following Wellman is precisely that

of *individualization*. Within the globalising connectivity of the contemporary

world, in which the borders and distinctions between places, times,

communities, and even nation-states have become ever so porous and uncertain, the one thing that remains as the basic unit of connection, and through which connectivity operates, is the single *individual*. Such a focus on the individual is neatly captured in what might be thought of as 'iBranding' – most obviously Apple's use of product names such as *iPad* and *iPhone*. The 'i' may be taken to refer to 'information', but it surely also carries connotations of the first person, 'I'. The *global world* of today is thus also, one might say, *myWorld* – globalisation and individualisation are brought into one.

Not all have been persuaded, however, of the supposed break with place – whether understood as globalizing, individualizing, or both – that appears to be envisaged here.[4] Joshua Meyrowitz, for instance, has reiterated the fact that human life is always localised, always given over to place. "We are always in place", he writes "and place is always with us."[5] Meyowitz does not deny that new communication and information technologies have changed the way we experience place, but insists that these are indeed changes in the experience *of place*, rather than changes that result in the loss of connection to or dependence upon place.[6] Meyrowitz's own work can be seen as largely oriented towards understanding the changes in the experience of place that are at work here.[7]

Yet even if mobile technology, in particular, does not bring about the radical break with place that might appear to be implied by Wellman's analysis, there can be no doubt that contemporary mobile technologies,

especially as exemplified in the mobile phone, do indeed tend towards an emphasis on the *individual* rather than the place or the group. In this respect, the mobile phone can often lead us to overlook, or even to forget, the placed (or perhaps 'localised') character of our lives. This is not only true of mobile phones, but of modern technology in general. What is evident in the tendency to extol the effects of modern technology in doing away with place, along with the individualising tendency that accompanies it, can thus be seen to be a feature of the technology as such – its tendency to understand itself as indeed freeing us from the tie to place and as enabling new forms of genuinely 'personalized' or globalized connectivity. In this respect, what appears in Wellman's characterisation of contemporary mobile technology is part of the very *self-projection* of the technology itself. What makes that self-projection significant, however, is precisely the way in which it remains in tension with what I would argue, like Meyrowitz, is the continuing and inevitable *placedness* of contemporary mobile technology.

Yet what is the role of place here? Why must we suppose that mobile technology, which seems to be able to operate, for the most part, independently of any particular location, nevertheless remains tied to place? The answer, quite simply, is that nothing ever appears except that it appears *in some place*, and so in relation to what stands around it and with which it interacts. Although the same thing may be said to appear in different places, what makes it *the same thing* is precisely the way in which it relates to other

things in similar ways – the way, in other words, in which it is always similarly *placed*. Place does not refer us to some mere point on a map or to a kind of neutral container into which things can be put or from which they can be taken out. Place arises in the dynamic inter-relatedness of things, even though it is not reducible to any mere system of relations (although on this latter point, I will have more to say below).[8]

To inquire into any phenomenon is also, therefore, to inquire into the place of that phenomenon – and in a literal and no merely metaphorical sense. This is a fundamental principle that applies as much to discussions of mobile technology as it does in any other context. Mobility itself, which is always instantiated in particular places and forms, also carries an essential reference to place. There can be no question, then, of mobile technology, or any other technology, working in a way that does not also implicate notions of place and placedness. The question is not *whether* place is at issue here, but *how* it is at issue. Moreover, any consideration of contemporary technology, and so any consideration of the technology associated with mobile communication, has to take account *both* of the way that technology actually works in place, and so the ways in which it shapes and is shaped by the place in which it functions, *and* the way in which it also brings with it a certain projection of its own mode of functioning, which must include the way in which it projects its own relation to (or separation from) place – which is why the self-projection of contemporary mobile technology is so significant here.

The inevitable and fundamental character of the connection to place is of particular significance when it comes to understanding our own mode of being. Human lives are not lived primarily 'in the mind', or even 'in the body', but *in the world* – in the places in which we are brought together with other persons and things, and that provide the context for both thought and action. To be 'in place' in this way – to be 'in the world' – is certainly to be embodied, and, I would argue, to be 'minded', but who and what we are is not something determined by the body or even by the mind alone.[9] Put simply, human life is worked out in and through embodiment *in place*, and it is only through such placed embodiment that human lives can appear as meaningful, or, indeed, as human. The structure of embodied 'being in place' is thus the basic *ontological* structure within which the *empirical* circumstances of human lives are worked out.[10]

The 'working-out' of human lives in place operates in a number of different ways and at a number of different levels. Central to understanding that working-out, however, is the idea that what we might think of as the 'internal' character of human lives is inseparable from the 'external' character of those lives – that is to say, the meaning that attaches to attitudes, actions, experiences, and memories cannot be prised away from the worldly objects and events towards which our thinking and acting is directed, from the physical circumstances that give rise to experience as well as to memory, and that also constrain our actions even as they are affected by them, from our

very bodies as the means by which we act, by which we feel, and that are the immediate vehicles for self-expression. Our internal lives are thus always externalised, just as the externality of our surroundings is itself reflected back into the internality that we associate with subjectivity.

One might say, in fact, that the subjective always stands in an essential relation to the objective. Consequently, even our sense of self is typically shaped and expressed in terms, not only of our belonging to certain places and locales, as well as to certain communities and groups, but in the very objects that surround us, in the habitual modes and pathways that characterise our movement, in the ways we organise our living and work spaces, in the ways in which we hold our bodies and direct our attention. Since the placed character of human lives is, in this way, also a form of externalization, and since the external, the objective, is that which is accessible *intersubjectively*, so the placed character of human life is itself that on the basis of which human life is to be understood as essentially a mode of being-with-others. We find ourselves and others within the open space that is the world, as that is given in and through our concrete locatedness, and in being so located, we also come to a sense of the world as that within which we stand, individually and collectively, about which we think and speak, and in relation to which we act and experience.

It is within the encompassing structure of place that self, other, and world come together at the same time as they are held apart – it is within

place that they are brought into relation and so into differentiation. Consequently, whether our interest is in understanding the larger structure of human being or in examining some particular aspect of human life – such as the operation of some new technological configuration – the focus of our attention must be on the structure of place as that within which the human is given articulation, and the manner in which that structure is altered or differently instantiated. In this respect, the way place already emerges as an issue in the consideration of the technology associated with mobile communication can be seen to intersect with the way in which place appears as the encompassing frame within which the investigation of the impact of such technology operates. In fact, the question concerning the place of mobile comminations technology can be understood as identical with the question as to how, and in what ways, the place in which human life is constituted and configured is shaped by such technology – to ask after the place of the mobile phone is thus to ask after the way the mobile phone opens up new or different possibilities for human being, which is to say, opens up the place of human being in a new or different way.

One of the very first things to note about the place of the mobile phone, and so also about its place in relation to the human, is that the immediate site of its operation is most often *the hand* (hence the German reference to the mobile phone as a *Handi*) and *the face* (or more specifically the ear and mouth). Moreover, this is not significantly changed by the way such devices are now

sometimes used in conjunction with headpieces that no longer require the phone to be held close to the face. Additional to this is the fact that the mobile phone, whether used immediately in the hand or via a headpiece, is nevertheless usually carried on or close *to the body* (and so is available for use in different bodily positions or locations – eg. when walking or, if often illegally, when driving). This is an important feature of such devices: not only is it part of what makes them *personal* devices, but it is also part of what can lead to them being treated almost as an extension of the person – an extension of the self. Of course, that such devices are an extension of the self is itself a consequence of the externalised conception of the self and subjectivity that I outline above, but what is evident in mobile phone use is also a more overt, if partial, identification of self with the external device through the way in which the phone comes to be used and the significance that is ascribed to it.

It is inevitable that different users will relate to devices like mobile phones in different ways that largely reflect existing modes of self-formation – some will remain at a distance from the device, using its only occasionally or in ways that are more straightforwardly instrumentalist, while others, especially those who have grown up with it, will relate to it in ways that are much closer, drawing the device much more into the fabric of their everyday activity. For many contemporary mobile phone users, however, the phone has become so much a part of their lives that it functions as an external repository of memory that goes far beyond any old-fashioned diary or calendar,

containing addresses, phone numbers, dates, images, past conversations, as well as an increasing range of applications to access, manage, and enable a variety of activities and sources of information. In many cases, it also becomes a symbol of one's individual status as belonging to a connected community (or as not belonging in the case of those who carry no phone or who use only a very basic model), while the ability to customize ring-tones and other aspects of a phone's appearance or operation provides an overt exemplification of the phone as an externalized, if partial, mode of self-articulation.

The mobile phone as material artefact, and so as both a material articulation of self and the immediate, placed focus for mobile communication, often seems to slip away in discussions of mobile communication just as it can easily disappear in its actual usage (that it does so is again tied to the self-projection of the technology).[11] Yet it is important to be reminded of the fact that the placed materiality of the device, since it indicates the extent to which mobile communication itself depends on what is given *in place*, as *materially present*, even though what it enables is an engagement *across places*. The reminder of its materiality also reinforces the character of the mobile phone as itself belonging within a structure of externalized, materialized subjectivity articulated in and through place, and so as reinforcing the significance of place, and its necessity, rather than constituting a liberation from it. To reiterate a point already made above: the

mobile phone, along with the communications technology of which it is a part, is as much tied to place as any other phenomenon, and what is brings about is not a separation from place, but rather a change in the way place is experienced, or better, in the particular way in which place is configured, and the modes of engagement that are operative within it.

The character of the mobile phone as operating within what my be described as the personal space of the body or that is close to the body suggests that whatever changes are brought about by the mobile phone, they will include changes that relate to the space and place of the individual person. Mobile phone use requires that one carry the phone somewhere on or near to one's body, and one typically gives attention to the phone, and to that towards which one speaks and from which one hears, as one also gives primary attention to what one hears and says, rather to that which is around one (more or less the same set of conditions will also apply to the use of other such personal devices). This means that in using a mobile phone one is more focussed on what is immediately proximal to one's body than what is at a distance, even a very short distance, away. When one uses a mobile phone within a small, enclosed, or already personalized space, there need be no spatial discontinuity at work – such spaces already tend to be constructed in ways that allow or facilitate an internally directed focus. Public spaces and places, by contrast, are constituted by what is at a distance from the body, not what is immediately proximate. The use of the mobile phone in a public place

typically means that the user is turned into their body and away from the

place, which also means away from other persons and things in that place,

and this has the potential to establish various forms of behavioural and spatial

discontinuity. The public place can thus be seen as partially disrupted by the

personal place that appears within it.[12] The opposite can, of course, also occur:

the fact that the mobile phone can be carried on the person means that mobile

communication is possible in situations in which one might expect to be

removed from ordinary conversational engagement thereby allowing the

intrusion of the interpersonal into the space of the personal.[13]

What is crucial to attend to here is the way the apparent spatial or

topographic discontinuity at issue is expressed in behavioural form: the

difference in the spatial and topographic engagement is a difference in the

nature and possibilities *for action*. This is not to set the behavioural over

against the spatial or topographic, but rather to understand the spatial and

topographic as always articulated and expressed *behaviourally*. Indeed, the

working out of persons in place, and of place in relation to person, is itself a

working out that occurs in and through the behaviour of bodies in places –

which means that to understand a place one must always look to the way

behaviour is constrained or enabled within it. This is just what we have been

doing in looking to the 'place' of the mobile phone in the discussion above –

the discontinuities that emerge are discontinuities in place that are also

discontinuities in behaviour (often very obvious ones such as walking into

other people or things). That we may be distracted, perhaps dangerously so, when we use a mobile device in a public place, and especially when we move through such places, is an simple and familiar point; what is less simple and familiar is the idea that what is at work here is indeed a form of spatial or topographic disruption, and yet that is just what is at issue – and the disruption is not only a disruption manifest in distracted modes of activity, but also in an ambiguity in the very character of the spaces and places concerned.

One of the key points for which Meyrowitz argued in his analysis of the impact of television and other such media on social life was the corrosive effect such media have on our experience and understanding of the differences between various spaces and places, between various spheres of human life and activity, between different aspects of the self and of the social. The tendency at work here seems to be one that is exacerbated under the impact of contemporary mobile communications technology, together with the larger technological frame within which it operates, so that increasingly it seems that the differentiated spaces and places in which human lives are articulated, and from which they can never be entirely removed, appear to break down in the face of a focus on the individual who acts in ways that are often detached from or in tension with, and so may even appear to efface, those spaces and places. In this respect, Wellman's observation that the mobile phone afford "a fundamental liberation from place", and that, within

the frame of modern mobile communications technology, it is "the individual, and neither the household nor the group, that is the primary unit of connectivity'" picks out a genuine feature of the technology at issue here: although it does not achieve a real 'liberation' from place (something that is impossible given the placed character of existence, and especially of human existence), it does bring about a disruption in the character of place, as well as in our own mode of self-understanding, through its emphasis on the individual alone – on the individual as somehow essentially *displaced*.

If we are to understand the nature of the individualizing and displacing tendency that is at work here, then we need to reconsider a feature of place to which I referred briefly in the discussion above: although places are not reducible to any mere system of relations, places are nevertheless *relational*, arising in the inter-relatedness of things, even while they also support such inter-relatedness; moreover, places themselves constitute *networks of relations*. Just as any thing that appears does so within a context in which it is related to other things – within a place – so does any and every place stand within a larger web of places. Places are thus internally structured in terms of a complex skein of inter-relation, at the same time as they are externally connected within and in relation to other places. In this respect, places can be said to fold both inwards and outwards – outwards to other places, inwards to the place itself and to that which is given within the place.

The character of place as defined in terms of this combination of inward and outward means, however, that the relational character of place is not the relationality of a simple and evenly distributed 'network'. The relational character of place is best understood in terms of the relational structure that is evident in horizonality. The horizon marks out a certain field of appearance, drawing together, and so connecting, what appears within the horizon – unifying as it also limits.[14] The horizon does not simply delimit what is given within, but also holds open the possibility of connection to that which is without. The horizon is thus the marker of an internal unity that is also outwardly integrated. That the structure of horizonality should have this character, mirroring the character of place itself, should be no surprise, since horizonality is itself a fundamentally topographical concept.

The idea of relationality is constantly invoked in discussions of contemporary technology. Globalisation is itself understood as a form of complex relationality that transcends the usual boundaries, distances, and separations. Relationality is also at work in the idea of connectivity, and in the idea of the individual as the nodal point within the larger system of connections – as Wellman himself says: "It is the individual… that is the primary unit of connectivity". Yet the relationality at issue in such talk – in the ideas of globalization, connectivity or individualization – is *not* the same as that which is at issue in the idea place or horizonality. It is instead the relationality that belongs within a levelled-out and distributed network

linking a multiplicity of nodes whose character is exhausted in the relations in which they participate – a relationality that is *quantitative* in character rather than *qualitative*. On such a conception there are no *places* in the sense I have been using it here, but only *positions*, and as such it operates as a purely *spatialized* relationality of the sort exemplified in systems of coordinate geometry. The explicit rendering of such relationality in dynamic terms, terms that often involve notions of trajectory and flow, and that sometimes make appeal to more formal mathematical models, such as those available within dynamical systems theory, does not change the character of that relationality. It remains a relationality that does not work through the heterogenous, horizontal structure of place, but rather through the essentially homogenous, levelled-out structure of position and so of extended spatiality.[15]

The tension that is evident between the relationality *of place* and what we may call the relationality *of mere position* is often obscured in contemporary analyses by the very prevalence of the language of relationality itself – as if the contrast between a relational and non-relational account was the key issue, rather than the contrast between the placed and the positional. One result of this is that this tension often becomes an unrecognised element, and sometimes a source of inconsistency or obscurity, in those very analyses. It is also a tension that exists in the self-projection of contemporary mobile technologies as somehow standing apart from place at the same time as those technologies continue to operate, as they must, in and through place.

Moreover, the mode of self-projection of contemporary mobile technology also carries with it a particular projection of *ourselves*, the human users of that technology, as individuals located purely in terms of our positions within systems of connectivity. In so doing, it projects us in ways that are inconsistent with, and often obscure, our own essential placedness; it projects us in ways that largely reduce who and what we are to the mediated connections and exchanges in which we participate. It is this inconsistency or tension that underlies the behavioural and topographic discontinuities that often arise in conjunction with mobile technology – it also gives rise to discontinuities and tensions in the modes of human life that such technology projects and enables, but which that same technology also obscures.

It is commonplace to think of the connectivity enabled by contemporary mobile and digital technology in terms of an increase in availability and convenience that overcomes the barriers imposed by space, time, and place. We can thus gain access to information, perform certain operations, and connect with other individuals much more readily than we ever could before. Yet in making other things available to us, and in increasing the convenience and flexibility of our own dealings, we are ourselves made available to others, and to other systems and processes, and so are brought into a system in which we ourselves can be dealt with more conveniently and flexibly – whether this be in our work, in our dealings with government and business, or even in our relations with friends and family.

Here is one of the real ironies of the mobile phone: seen as a device that brings 'freedom' and individual control, it also brings, by the same token, increased subjection to the technological, and so also the social, political and even economic system of which it is itself a part. The world of mobile communication, of Wellman's 'liberation' from place, is thus the same world as that in which we are increasingly made subject to forms of remote surveillance and electronic data collection; in which our behaviour is increasingly shaped and directed by bureaucratic management systems both corporate and governmental; in which we are increasingly imprisoned within a network of often electronically mediated consumption and commodification.

Here is the real meaning of the 'individualisation' that occurs under the impact of contemporary mobile and related technologies: individualisation is a transformation in the way in which human beings appear that constitutes them as units within a positional system, and so as available and manipulable within that system. Inasmuch as we appear as simply the nodal points in such a system, so it is easy to lose any sense of oneself, or of one's own sense of place, apart from that system of constant availability and connection. While it is easy to miscalculate the amount of time dedicated to mobile phone usage (and to other related technologies),[16] there can be no doubt that an increasing amount of everyday activity is given over to forms of behaviour that are oriented towards digitally mediated

modes of exchange, and that position us within systems of digital

connectivity, and that the technology itself projects an image of the increasing

prevalence of such connectivity. Our lives thus appear to take the form, more

and more, of a continual stream of texts, tweets, messages, emails, blogs,

posts, images, transactions – a constant digital chatter in which we are never

'alone' – in which there is no real possibility of 'solitude' – and yet, precisely

as *individualised*, are more alone than we could ever have imagined.[17]

Particular technologies arise only as part of larger technological

systems (technology is never just a matter of some single 'device'), while

technology is itself inseparable from forms of social, economic and political

ordering.[18] The transformation of place into position that mobile technology

projects, along with the increasing tendency towards both globalization and

individualisation that is associated with this transformation, cannot be

viewed as merely a phenomenon particular to mobile technology alone.

Instead, what we can observe at work in mobile technology is just one

manifestation of a much larger and widespread phenomenon: the

technological ordering of the contemporary world is an ordering that is

centred on the projection of a mode of the world in which there is only

position, no *place*, only individuals, no *persons*, and in which *presence* has been

reduced to a mere 'presentness'. It is the world projected as little more than a

system of pure connection, relation, and exchange – a technological projection

that itself mirrors the system of exchange and connection projected by contemporary forms of economic organisation.

Yet as it is a *projection* of a mode of the world, the projection offered by contemporary technology does not erase place or person, nor does it efface any possibility of genuine presence. The positional ordering that contemporary technology projects is itself overlaid on an ordering of place, and it is an ordering on which that positional ordering, and contemporary technology, itself depends. Any 'liberation' the mobile phone may offer can occur only through the phone's concrete availability as a material artefact geared to the structure of the human body and to a set of human capacities and desires; the 'individualizing' effect of mobile technology operates only in relation to embodied human persons who nevertheless always transcend their character as connected 'individuals'. It is on the basis of the tension that is evident here between the projection of an essentially displaced mode of ordering and its continuing placedness that the possibility of a genuine critique of contemporary mobile technology opens up (and is already opened up, I would argue, in the work of Meyrowitz and others) – a critique that does not capitulate to the self-projection of the technology itself, and yet also does not lapse into any simple form of anti-technologism.

¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines mobility as: "Ability to move or be moved; capacity of change of place; movableness….Also facility of movement".

² To respond with the claim that mobility requires only space, and not place, is, first, to misunderstand the way in which even movement in space requires differentiation of the space in which the movement occurs and so requires some analogue of place at the very least.

³ Barry Wellman, 'Physical Place and Cyber Place. The Rise of Personalized Networking'. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 25 (2001), http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/~wellman/publications/individualism/ijurr3a 1.htm).

⁴ It is not entirely clear how strongly one should interpret Wellman's talk of "liberation from place". One might argue that Wellman is not claiming that that mobile communication frees us from place altogether, but only that it frees us from the dependence on *specific* places. Still, the rhetoric that is employed here, and not only by Wellman, certainly supports the impression that what is at issue is indeed a quite radical shift, rather than anything more qualified.

⁵ Joshua Meyrowitz, 'The Rise of Glocality. New Senses of Place and Identity in the Global Village', in Kristof Nyiri (ed.), *A Sense of Place. The Global and the Local in Mobile Communication* (Vienna: Passagen Verlag, 2005), p.21.

[6] See Meyrowitz, ibid. The persistence of place at issue here is increasingly recognized even by many of those thinkers who may otherwise be seen as emphasizing a shift to new forms of spatiality – see, for instance, Nigel Thrift's discussion in 'A Hyperactive World', in R. J. Johnston, Peter J. Taylor, and Michael J. Watts (eds), *Geographies of Global Change: Remapping the World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2n edn., 2002), pp.29-42.

[7] A task already underway in Meyrowitz's ground-breaking work on the social effects of television and related media in *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). In that work Meyrowtiz identifies the way in which electronic media change our sense of the differences between places – something that can also be seen to be at issue, as I discuss below, in the 'individualizing' effect of mobile communications technologies.

[8] See Malpas, *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), for an exploration of the centrality of this idea in Heidegger's thinking, and so also to philosophical inquiry as such; see also *Heidegger and the Place of Thinking* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, forthcoming, 2011).

[9] One can think of mind and body in a more expansive way as already extending out into the world (as I do in works such as *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), but it is a much narrower conception of both that is commonly assumed –

for the most part we tend to think of the mind as what is internal and private, what is 'inside the head', and the body as that structure of flesh and bone that is contained within the outer surface of the skin.

[10] For the arguments that lie behind this claim, and some account of the structure at issue here, see *Place and Experience*, passim.

[11] The disappearance of the device in its use is a familiar and frequently noted phenomenon – perhaps the best-known discussion of the phenomenon is in Heidegger's *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), §§15-16. For my own discussion of the issue as it relates more specifically to modern digital technology, see Malpas, 'Acting at a Distance And Knowing from Afar: Agency and Knowledge on the World Wide Web', in Ken Goldberg (ed.), *The Robot in the Garden* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), pp.108-125.

[12] Although how this occurs, and to what extent, is clearly dependent on social and cultural circumstances – the relation between personal and public spaces in an Indian village street, for instance, is very different from that which obtains in a North American shopping mall.

[13] Such an intrusion of the interpersonal into the personal has developed, however, alongside changes in the size and portability of telephones even prior to the appearance of mobile and wireless devices. In this respect, the intrusion of the interpersonal into the personal that is possible with mobile

technology is an *intensification* of an existing development rather than something entirely new.

¹⁴ For a discussion of the relation between ground and limit as they operate here see Malpas, 'Ground, Unity, and Limit', in *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, forthcoming, 2011).

¹⁵ On the distinction between place and space, and so also between place and 'position', see *Place and Experience*, pp.19-43, *Heidegger's Topology*, pp.258-265, and also 'Nihilism, Place, and "Position'', in *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*.

¹⁶ In spite of the way in which particular devices disappear in their use, technologies, and particularly consumer-technologies, often present themselves, in ways that directly thematize their own power and importance; moreover, as users some to see themselves as dependent on those technologies, so they may well regard them as having a greater role in their lives than is actually warranted.

¹⁷ See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (New York: Basic Books, 2011)

¹⁸ For this reason, it is fundamentally mistaken to view technology in primarily *instrumentalist* terms – as if technology could be made to serve certain social or political ends (Kentaro Toyama argues, in 'Can technology End Poverty?', *Boston Review* Nov/Dec 2010, that mobile technology is less

likely to counter existing circumstances and tendencies, than to reinforce

and intensify them), but nor should it be viewed as merely an outcome of

existing forces – as if it were entirely passive. Technology thus has *effects*

that are an outcome of its own character, even though technology is also

embedded within a larger socio-political framework.