

The Psychoanalytic Hour in Nomad Culture.

The structure of psychoanalytic psychotherapy around the analytic hour – sessions in the same place, with the same person, at the same time(s) and day(s) each week for 50 minutes – might seem rather odd and unnecessarily restrictive at a time when mobile technology has liberated our relationship to time, space and each other.

Like 'nomads'¹ we live life on the move, connecting to others (and the details of our lives) by wireless technology from wherever we happen to be at that moment. 'Work, love and play' are no longer tethered to specific times and places and can be conducted any time, any place by text, e-mail and social networking at the convenience of all parties.

The freedom of 'on the go', 'any time, any place', 'as and when I need it' has many advantages and a fixed commitment to a particular time and place, to a relationship based on embodied face-to-face engagement, as required for psychoanalytic psychotherapy, can feel weird and uncomfortable.

Mobile technology can give the feeling that there is always someone accessible at anytime, so being emotionally close to people or being alone may not seem a problem anymore. The fears and hopes about relationships that we all share may seem to disappear when there is always someone accessible:

- we do not have to feel lost when we can call on someone at any time;
- we do not have to feel either 'pinned down' or at a loose end when arrangements can be made spontaneously and changed if a better offer arises;
- when 'on the go' there is always an escape route if things get a bit heavy;
- the comfort of contact can be created at the touch of the button whilst still feeling free;
- thoughts and feelings can be communicated instantly by text relieving the mind of having to dwell on things and so on.

However, the nomad life style can also generate losses, pressures and dangers.

We can start to feel that no-one is ever *really* there for us because the person we are physically with is constantly 'on-call', ready to be summoned elsewhere at any moment. With a friend, who answers their mobile whenever it rings, we may feel both painfully excluded and awkwardly privy to someone else's relationship.

When alone we might feel constantly in suspense, waiting for the mobile to ring, unable to relax and get absorbed in one's own thing, a slave to an expectation of instant accessibility and constant availability that may make it feel as if life is no longer one's own, but turning off the mobile could risk making oneself dispensable, offending someone or missing the chance of a lifetime.

A public information poster- of someone on their mobile about to be mugged - warns 'be aware, don't be a victim'. This alerts us to the dangers of being so involved with someone else, somewhere else, that we are not in touch with what is going on around us, oblivious to possible dangers in the immediate present.

Experiences like these can easily leave someone depressed with an obscure sense of isolation, feeling that no-one is reliably there for them and they can never really be with themselves because they and everyone else are here, there, everywhere and nowhere. Offloading thoughts and feelings instantly can be a relief but not making time to clarify what we feel and join up thoughts can leave us feeling jangled, chaotic, confused.

This is where psychoanalytic psychotherapy may offer an oasis to the nomad who finds themselves unaccountably depressed, anxious, and confused.

Initially the way therapy is arranged may feel rather anachronistic and restrictive. The commitment to a particular time and space to be with your therapist and yourself may feel uncomfortable – even scary.

But the regularity of analytic sessions is tailor-made to awaken hopes and fears about emotional intimacy with another person and to observe, experience and explore these feelings with a therapist who understands.

¹ 'Nomads At Last': a special report on mobile telecoms, The Economist, 12.4.08

With a reliable space and time to process feelings, we no longer have to feel at the mercy of ourselves. Finding out what we do feel makes us less afraid of where our minds might go when we are alone. This leaves us more in charge of ourselves and our feelings and more able to give

ourselves what we need when we need it, whether it be time with others or time to ourselves, equipped to give ourselves the freedom to enjoy and protect our personal privacy and our intimate relationships whilst getting the most from our nomadic freedoms.