MENTAL THERAPY METHOD FOR CATHARSIS OF NEGATIVE FEELINGS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Technical Field

[0001] The present application relates generally to mental therapy for relief of fear, anger, resentment, and negative feelings by providing a cathartic outlet for them. The scope of the invention extends to a process or method for carrying out such therapy and also a combination of elements useful for performing the method of the invention. The invention also extends to other ancillary facets of the invention, such as computer-readable encoded media for performing the method on a computer, preferably one connected to the Internet, signals utilized in such actions, and other devices for performing the invention. Specific applications of the invention include therapy for victims of spousal abuse and certain AIDS patients.

Related Art

[0002] The existence of the processes of catharsis and discharge of cathexis have long been known, although their specific mechanisms may be disputed. Catharsis, for present purposes, may be defined as it is in The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition: 1. Medicine. Purgation, . . . . 2. A purifying or figurative
cleansing of the emotions, especially pity and fear, described by Aristotle as an effect of
tragic drama on its audience. 3. A release of emotional tension, as after an overwhelming
experience, that restores or refreshes the spirit. 4. *Psychology*. a. A technique used to relieve
tension and anxiety by bringing repressed feelings and fears to consciousness. b. The
therapeutic result of this process; abreaction. A shorter but similar definition is found in *The
technique used to relieve tension and anxiety by bringing repressed feelings and fears to
consciousness. 3. The therapeutic result of this process; abreaction.” *Cathexis*, for present
purposes, may be defined as it is in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English
Language* – “Concentration of emotional energy on an object or idea.” A negative cathexis,
therefore, is a concentration of negative emotional energy on an object or idea, and in
particular in the context of this invention a concentration of negative emotional energy on a
specific person, such as anger, anxiety, or fear directed to an estranged spouse or lover, or
other person with whom adverse interpersonal interactions have occurred. In catharsis or in
discharge of negative cathexis, a person decreases or relieves anger, anxiety, fear, hostility,
or other negative feelings or discharges a concentration of negative emotional energy, by
doing or participating in activities which may include a method of therapy, in particular,
psychotherapy.

[0003] Discharge of cathexis, as used herein, is to be distinguished from *anticathexis*,
which is considered to be related to the very investment of emotion that the invention is,
among other things, intended to dissipate or lessen. (Anticathexis is investment of energy in
repression of negative feelings instead of bringing them out into the open and discharging them.) Discharge of negative cathexis, as that term is used herein, is also to be distinguished from decathexis. That term usually refers to a slow diminishment of a positive cathexis, as occurs in mourning over the death of a loved one and in detachment from a once-valued relationship. See generally S. Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917).

(Abstract available online at http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=8724559&dopt=Abstract); M. A. Mittleman, “Triggering of Acute Myocardial Infarction Onset by Episodes of Anger,” *Circulation*, 1995:92:1720-1725 (available online at http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/full/92/7/1720?ijkey=64b686e51a543f0fbe80110a52d0cab9cb59ba36). By the same token, elimination or lessening of the negative thoughts and feelings that cause such stress and their adverse physiological effects is a useful, concrete, and tangible result. See J. E. Muller, et al., “Mechanisms Precipitating Acute Cardiac Events,” *Circulation*, 1997:96:3233-39 (“It has been reported that anger is the predominant behavioral affect in the majority of patients who experience life-threatening arrhythmias. ... [P]atients who are habitually angry can increase annual risk substantially and should be advised to seek appropriate counseling.”) (available online at http://circ.ahajournals.org/cgi/content/full/96/9/3233#SEC10).

[0005] It is known that victims of spousal abuse suffer stress induced by the abuse and feelings of fear, anger, helplessness, powerless, anxiety, loss of self esteem, and other negative feelings. See generally O. Barnett, et al., *Family Violence Across the Lifespan - An Introduction*, ch. 10, “Intimate Partner Violence: Abused Partners” (available online at http://www.sagepub.com/Barnett%20Chapter%20%2010_5133.pdf) (collecting references). As used hereinafter, the term “negative feelings” includes feelings of fear, anger, helplessness, powerless, anxiety, and loss of self esteem, among others.

[0006] It is known that one form of anger-relieving cathartic activity or discharge of negative cathexis is sticking pins into dolls supposed by the user to represent a person
toward whom the user has negative feelings. Thus, a person might want to stick pins into a
doll simulating bin Laden, or in an earlier era Stalin or Hitler. Some persons apparently
derive emotional benefits from sticking pins into dolls representative of football players
from a team rival to the user’s hometown team. See Bettendorf U.S. Pat. No. 6,663,462
(2003), “Aggression-Relieving Stuffed Doll.” This patent’s specification asserts: “Sports
fans often become quite agitated or even infuriated by the performance or antics of players
on their favorite sports team or the opposing team. It is both entertaining and relieving for
these sports fans to have an outlet by which to vent their emotion. Therefore, it would be
desirable to have a stuffed doll that simulates a sports player into which sharp pins may be
inserted.” This form of behavior relies on dolls or similar tangible physical objects, and has
done so since ancient times. In this connection, actual assault and battery is, of course,
illegal and is usually infeasible as a means of catharsis of fear and anger, for example, that
caused by spousal abuse.

Moreover, while it may be feasible to mass-market dolls or simulacra of famous or
widely known persons, such as bin Laden or Hitler, for use of the kind described above, a
mass-marketable means for similarly addressing a user’s anger, hostility, fear, or other
negative feelings (i.e., discharging such cathexis) in regard to a former spouse or lover,
personal rival, or other specific person well known to the user but not famous, well-known,
or widely publicized to other persons is unavailable. For example, it is not possible for an
ordinary person to find a simulacrum of an estranged spouse or lover in the marketplace, so
that it can be used in this connection. To be sure, in Voodoo and other shamanistic
practices, an appropriate doll or other physical simulacrum resembling the person who is the object of a user’s fear or anger may be fabricated on an individual basis. But this is time-consuming and expensive, and it does not lend itself to a mass-marketable application. On the other hand, committing aggressive or simulated aggressive actions against an object that does not really closely resemble the actual person who is the object of the user’s anger, fear, or similar negative cathexis is not very effective in bringing about catharsis or discharge of the cathexis for the user. It is believed that no inexpensive, mass-marketable expedient available at this time for achieving catharsis with respect to a specific, individual person toward whom a user has anger, fear, or other negative thoughts or feelings.

[0008] It would be desirable to provide an inexpensive, mass-marketable expedient for achieving catharsis with respect to a specific, individual person toward whom a user has anger, fear, or other negative thoughts or feelings, and/or for focusing and bringing out into the open such feelings so as to help dissipate them. Such an expedient should not be illegal as are actual assault and battery. It would also be desirable that the user not be required to believe consciously that the user’s catharsis-providing actions do in fact cause physical harm to the object of the negative feelings, or that the object of the negative feelings need to be so persuaded either, as some shamanistic practices require. See D. Morse, et al., “Psychosomatically Induced Death: Relative to Stress, Hypnosis, Mind Control, and Voodoo: Review and Possible Mechanisms,” *Stress Medicine* 7:213-32 (1991). Those are shortcomings of traditional Voodoo or shamanistic practices that it would be desirable to avoid.
SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] This invention provides a way for a user (a first person) to alleviate fear, anger, or other negative thoughts or feelings that the user has toward a specific second person, who is personally known to the user and with whom the user has previously has adverse personal interactions, or to focus such anger or negative thoughts or feelings on the second person who is an object of the user’s negative feelings. This is accomplished by having the user select and display an image of the second person, so that the image is visible to the user, and also select and display an image of an object that is potentially harmful to the second person. Then the user causes the displayed images to touch, become superimposed on, or located near one another. For example, an image of a knife is moved so that it appears that the knife stabs the image of the second person. It is then determined whether the fear, anger, or other negative thoughts or feelings of the user have been reduced. If not, the process is repeated. As a result, as in Voodoo and similar practices, the foregoing procedure transforms a state of mind of the user in a manner such that an at least partial catharsis or discharge of cathexis occurs, but without (as in Voodoo and similar practices) the user believing consciously that the user’s simulated actions actually harm the second person in the manner acted out. A preferred embodiment utilizes computer means to carry out this procedure, such as a PC or handheld portable programmed device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWING
[0010] Figure 1 is a block diagram of a computer system configured to carry out an embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0011] A difficulty with readily available expedients for discharging negative feelings that the invention addresses and overcomes concerns the issue of lack of sufficient resemblance between the object of the user’s negative feelings and the available object for discharging the negative feelings. For example, sticking pins into a bin Laden doll, or any generalized and undifferentiated object, is not helpful to an abused spouse in discharging her negative feelings toward the abusive spouse. The inventor considers that the insufficient resemblance between such a doll and the person against whom the user’s feelings of fear and anger have been aroused (because of the latter’s behavior toward the user) interferes with formation by the user of a sufficient association between such a doll and the abusive person. That in turn interferes with the needed linking between the user’s symbolic acts of retaliation and the abusive person. The inventor considers that effective catharsis of the kind sought here can be provided to the user only by providing the user with a thing against which symbolic or simulated harmful actions are directed and which the user substantially associates with her abuser or other personal object of a negative cathexis. It is considered that this requires a substantial resemblance of the thing against which symbolic or simulated harmful actions are directed and the actual abusive person or other personal object of a negative cathexis, such as a visually perceived image of that person.
Embodiment using a computer screen display

[0012] In an embodiment of the invention shown in Fig. 1, a user (first person) selects and causes an image 10 to be placed on a display device such as a computer screen display 12 that provides visual displays of images, using a computer program provided to the user by a vendor (directly or via the user’s therapist). The computer program may advantageously be in the form of computer-readable code embodied in a CD and installed on the hard disk of the PC. Image 10 embodies a photograph of a second person (such as the user’s estranged spouse), whom the user has known personally and toward whom the user has anger or other negative thoughts or feelings because of the first and second persons’ prior adverse interpersonal interactions. Image 10 may advantageously be a jpeg, such as one derived from a digital camera photograph of the second person. Other forms of graphics files can advantageously be used instead. For example, a gif of a drawing can be utilized, as can a bmp, png, or other graphics format.

[0013] Computer screen display 12 is operatively coupled to a processing unit 14, which is preferably a personal computer (PC) belonging to the user, or if the user is to receive therapy under the direct supervision of a therapist the PC is that of the therapist and is located in her office. Processing unit 14 can also be a microprocessor or microcontroller, if a special-purpose device is to be used instead of a PC. Thus, in a further embodiment the invention is implemented in a handheld, special-purpose, programmed microprocessor device, similar to a Palm Pilot, so that a user may carry it around with her.

[0014] A second image 16, embodied in a graphics file such as a jpeg or gif, is selected...
by the user and caused to be placed on screen display 12 at a first screen location 16A.

Image 16 depicts a knife, sword, axe, hammer, whip, arrow, club, fist, stone, piece of broken glass, or other thing potentially harmful to the second person. For example, image 16 could depict a heap of toxic powder meant, for example, to simulate anthrax spores mixed with a carrier such as talc or the toxic powders made by skinwalkers in Southwestern Native American mythology or folklore.

[0015] Image 16 is then caused to move from its first screen location 16A to a second screen location 16B, as shown in Fig. 1 by a dashed arrow line. The motion is advantageously effected by the user’s utilization of a cursor 18 (in cooperation with a mouse, trackball, joystick, keyboard, or similar input device 20 operatively coupled to processing unit 14) to drag the image. Dragging image 16 with a mouse is a preferred means for the user to translate or move image 16 from location 16A to 16B, but other means for effecting the motion are discussed hereinafter. In one implementation of the invention, images 10 and 16 are selected to be “objects” utilized by a Java applet that allows, for example, image 16 to be clicked on by the user, who then mouse-draggs it from location 16A to 16B.

[0016] The motion is effected in a manner such that in screen position 16B the object that image 16 depicts appears to harm the second person. If image 16 is that of a knife or sword, it may be made to appear to penetrate the body of the second person. If image 16 is that of a club, it may be made to appear to hit the second person on the head. If image 16 is that of a heap of toxic powder, it may be made to appear to be very close to the nose of, and being
inhaled by, the second person. If image 16 is that of pieces of broken glass, it may be moved by the cursor to appear to have been placed within the interior of the body of the second person. Other candidates for image 16 are axes, hammers, whips, arrows, chains, fists, and boots. Still further candidates for image 16 as potentially harmful objects will be apparent to skilled persons.

[0017] Audio output unit 22, which may be implemented with one, or more, speakers or by headphones, is driven by processing unit 14 in synchronization with one, or more, features or occurrences of the steps of the process of the invention displayed by screen 12, to enable at least one step to be either preceded, accompanied, or followed by an audible rendition of a phrase, mantra or incantation. The phrase, mantra or incantation may be selected with regard to helping the user overcome negative feelings caused by prior adverse interpersonal interactions between the user and a second person, which are believed to have precipitated the fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings of the user. This supplement to the process may contribute to a diminution of the fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or a reduction of the negative cathexis, in the user.

[0018] Audio output unit 22, which may be implemented with one or more speakers or by headphones, is driven by processing unit 14 while one or more steps of the process of the invention occur. This enables at least one step of the process to be preceded, accompanied, or followed by an audible rendition of a phrase, mantra or incantation. The phrase, mantra or incantation may be selected with regard to helping the user overcome negative feelings caused by prior adverse interpersonal interactions between the user and a second person,
which are believed to have caused the fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings of the user. This supplement to the process may contribute to a diminution of the fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or a reduction of the negative cathexis, in the user.

Pursuant to 37 CFR §1.52(c)(2) and 37 CFR §1.77(b)(4), an electronic document bearing a file name of “Ax2Head.gif,” containing 136 kilobytes, having a date of creation of May 2, 2005, at 11:10 a.m., prepared in compliance with 37 CFR §1.52(e), that is filed simultaneously as a constituent part of this application with two (2) duplicate compact-disc read-only-memories (i.e., CD-ROMs) labeled as “Copy 1” and “Copy 2,” each containing a table formed by a sequence of images illustrating aspects of at least one embodiment in the practice of the present invention, with the contents of each disk formatted in Graphics Interchange Format (“gif”) files with all text set forth in compliance with the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (“ASCII”), is hereby incorporated into this application by reference. Pursuant to 37 CFR §1.52(g)(4), the two compact disks are identical. This file is an animation that conveniently illustrates aspects of an embodiment of the invention.

The embodiment initially described above is one in which the user uses a cursor to move object 16 to object 10, from position 16A to position 16B. However, conventional computer programming expedients permit automatic motion of images 10 and 16 relative to one another without use of a cursor to effect the translation across the screen.

By engaging in the procedure described, and appropriately juxtaposing images 16 and 10, the user in effect commits mayhem on the second person in virtual, rather than
actual, space. After one or more such acts of virtual mayhem, it is determined whether a
desired cathartic effect has been realized, thereby substantially reducing the user’s fear,
anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or bringing about at least a partial discharge of the
negative cathexis. If not, the procedure is repeated. As used hereinabove, the term
“substantially” means not insubstantially. That is, the determination is made as to whether
more than a trivial or insignificant reduction occurred. The reduction should be at least
enough to be perceptible, as distinguished from de minimis and imperceptible. The purpose
is to bring about a therapeutically efficacious result, comparable to dispensing an effective
dosage amount of a medication. In the absence of a standard set by an individual therapist
for a specific patient, which is preferred and when available would supersede any rule of
thumb, it is considered that 5% provides a rule of thumb for substantial versus insubstantial
where a quantitative measurement is used, such as that described hereinafter for automatic
machine monitoring of blood pressure.

Determination of effect

Several different expedients are available for providing a way to determine
whether the user has undergone a reduction of her fear, anger, or negative thoughts or
feelings, or a reduction of or an at least partial discharge of her negative cathexis. The
method of determination can be by suitable verbal interrogation, if a therapist is using the
invention with a patient. Also, an individual user may self-interrogate herself in response to
messages on a screen display, thereby providing a YES or NO signal which is fed to
processing unit 14.
An individual user may also use any of a number of conventional electronic devices for determining reduction of stress by measuring a physiological parameter considered representative of stress, such as blood pressure, pulse rate, or palm-sweating. For example, blood pressure or pulse rate can be measured and monitored with many automatic measuring devices now on the market. The output of such a device is advantageously fed to processing unit 14, so that the process of the invention is repeated (for example, by using a conventional “while,” “do while,” or “do until” loop in the program) unless the device indicates an appropriate reduction of blood pressure or pulse rate (for example, 5%). (This portion of the system can be referred to as a determination unit. The “determination unit” can be hardware or software in a PC, as well as a combination of both.)

Alternative embodiments regarding motion of images

In a preferred embodiment the user moves image 16 by using cursor 18 from position 16A distanced from image 10 to position 16B near, touching, or within image 10. For example, the user moves an image 16 of a stone or rock from one part of the screen across the screen, so that the stone appears to strike an image 10 of the head of the second person.

But instead the user could move an image 10 representative of the head of the second person across the screen so that it appears to strike against an image 16 of a stone or rock. This is a comparable expedient. Thus, depending on the effect desired and the harmful object involved, the user causes the images 10 and 16 to touch, become
superimposed on, or located near one another, through the motion of one or the other, or both, images, in a manner such that the harmful object appears to harm the second person in, effectively, an act of virtual mayhem. (As used hereinafter, terminology such as “causing the image of the object to touch the image of the second person” means moving the object image to the person image, moving the person image to the object image, and/or any relative motion of the images by which the result is that they touch each other.)

Special cursors

[0026] As already described, in a preferred embodiment the user effects motion by using a cursor 18 to drag an image across the screen. Cursor 18 on a PC screen display is ordinarily an arrow, but it need not be. It is considered preferable for purposes of this invention to use a cursor shaped like a hand, for example, as occurs in applications such as Adobe Acrobat. Even more advantageously, cursor 18 is displayed as an open hand until the user moves it over image 16 (which is, for example, an image of an ax) and clicks the mouse. The open hand cursor image is then replaced by a closed hand image that appears, for example, to clasp the handle of the ax. The user then drags image 16 to image 10, with the cursor/hand appearing to grasp the ax.

[0027] In another implementation, the cursor is reduced to a one-pixel square after clicking on object 16, so that when the object image (for example, a rock) is translated across the screen by the motion of the mouse, the moving image (rock) seems to be just an extension of the user’s hand (which is on the moving mouse). These expedients increase the verisimilitude of the operation and are considered to enhance the user’s feeling that he or
she is personally performing or acting out the action depicted.

[0028] Such motion to translate image 16 from location 16A to location 16B can instead be effected in a predetermined manner by computer program means, without a cursor. This is described below.

**Animation effects**

[0029] In a further embodiment image 16 is an animated graphics file (or what the copyright statute, see 17 U.S.C. § 101, terms an audiovisual work). Thus if image 16 is that of a club, it may be programmed to show apparent motion of a club from a first position to a second position, for example, through a 90 degree rotation or a horizontal or vertical displacement. Then the club would appear in a first position to be somewhat distanced from the head of the second person and in a subsequent position appear to be contacting (striking) the head of the second person.

[0030] The animated graphics file could be programmed to loop indefinitely or a predetermined number of times, so that the second person appears to be repeatedly struck on the head with a rock or club. If image 16 is that of a knife, it may be programmed to show apparent motion of a knife from a first position to a second position, for example, through a horizontal or vertical displacement. Then the knife would appear in a first position to be somewhat distanced from the body of the second person and in a subsequent position to be penetrating the body of the second person. The animated graphics file could be programmed to loop indefinitely or a predetermined number of times, so that the second person appears to be repeatedly stabbed. If image 16 is that of a heap of toxic powder, it can be placed near
the nose part of image 10. The successive frames of the animated graphics file would then
depict the heap of powder changing from a heap to a cloud of particles that blows toward
and into the nostrils of image 10.

[0031] It is considered preferable in the case of some users to require each animation
performance from the first through last frames of the animated graphics file to be initiated
by a prespecified volitional user action, such as a mouseclick or keystroke carried out by
means of user input device 20, instead of automatically endlessly looping an animated
graphics file. Whether impersonal commission of simulated mayhem (automatic initiation of
the animation sequence) or requiring positive user involvement in actuating the simulated
mayhem (i.e., by using a user actuated initiation means for each animation sequence) is
more therapeutically efficacious may have to be determined empirically case by case. In
some circumstances, the user’s repeated act of pressing the return key or pressing a mouse
button, thereby initiating a new animation sequence of a simulated stabbing or clubbing of
the second person provides enhanced catharsis. The motor action by the user actualizes the
user’s feeling of personal causal involvement in the retribution event. Other users, perhaps
more squeamish, may prefer to see the second person “get what he has coming” without
need for their active intervention. It is advantageous, therefore, to include a design feature
that permits operation in either of these modes at the user’s option.

[0032] In a variation of these embodiments, use of an animated graphics file permits a
simulation of blood to flow or drip from image as an apparent result of the hostile actions
committed against it. A programming expedient that advantageously simulates blood flow is
to superimpose image layers over the initial image of the second person, where the added
image layers embody the blood flow. The inventor has placed, and made available on-line,
on the Internet an illustrative animated gif using this technique –
www.law.gwu.edu/facweb/claw/

Ax2Head.gif. This gif shows an animation of Fig. 1 hereof, in which blood is shown
flowing down the head of image 10, as an apparent result of the action of image 16 (an axe).

[0033] It is contemplated that relatively simple animation effects, such as that of the club
or knife, can be provided as part of a vendor’s standard CD-based product. More complex
animation techniques, however, are likely to be more feasible with a service-bureau type of
implementation, using the Internet.

[0034] Technology for implementing the foregoing expedients is well known to those
skilled in the art of programming graphics, although at this time such technology does not
appear to be used for therapy. Thus, expedients similar to those described in the preceding
paragraph can be implemented by means of Java applets. An example of such Java
programming, for purposes of entertainment or amusement, rather than for therapeutic
alleviation of anger or anxiety with respect to a specifically known person such as a former
spouse, is available on the Internet. See the Web page of Virtual Design Group, Inc. of
Atlanta, GA, at www.virtual-design.com/ demos/voodoodoll/
voodoo.asp?section=demo&subsection=voodoo. For example, most of the routines needed
to implement the graphics for this invention are standard library features in Sun
Microsystems’ Java Software Development Kit 1.5. Alternatively, Flash could be used to
create the visual animation.

[0035] While PC graphics have been described above, the same principle applies to other image creation or reproduction devices. These include, without limitation, projection on a wall or screen, Palm Pilot-like devices, holographic projection, and other holographic devices.

[0036] Pursuant to 37 CFR §1.52(c)(2) and 37 CFR §1.77(b)(4), an electronic document bearing a file name of “Ax2Head.gif,” containing 136 kilobytes, having a date of creation of May 2, 2005, at 11:10 a.m., prepared in compliance with 37 CFR §1.52(e), that is filed simultaneously as a constituent part of this application with two (2) duplicate compact-disc read-only-memories (i.e., CD-ROMs) labeled as “Copy 1” and “Copy 2,” each containing a table formed by a sequence of images illustrating aspects of at least one embodiment in the practice of the present invention, with the contents of each disc formatted in Graphics Interchange Format (“gif”) files with all text set forth in compliance with the American Standard Code for Information Interchange (“ASCII”), is hereby incorporated into this application by reference. Pursuant to 37 CFR §1.52(g)(4), the two compact disks are identical. This file is an animation that conveniently illustrates aspects of an embodiment of the invention. (The same file is also available at, and can be downloaded from www.law.gwu.edu/facweb/claw/Ax2Head.gif.)

Internet-implemented embodiments

[0037] One aspect of the invention is how it is exploited commercially. As described previously, a vendor can exploit the invention, among other ways, by programming suitable
computer-readable code onto a computer-readable medium (such as a CD) that the user can
input into the user’s PC or special-purpose programmed-microprocessor device. This
approach essentially requires selling the CDs and/or special-purpose programmed-
microprocessor devices to end users. An Internet-based approach lends itself to more varied,
complex, and elegant expedients. If the user connects her PC to the vendor’s Internet site, a
more service-bureau type of approach is available.

[0038] Particular different images of additional harmful objects can be vended by Internet
means – particularly those such as the previously described animated graphics files of clubs
or knives and of exploding heaps of toxic powder. Such images can also be made available
on a fee-per-use basis. Internet and service-bureau implementations also lend themselves to
customized effects not otherwise feasible for most users. For example, software now exists
that permits combination of image files – one person’s head on another person’s body. This
permits combining a custom head (i.e., an image of the second person) with an already
animated graphics file of a body. Thus, a user may send a jpeg or gif of her ex-husband’s
head and/or entire body to the vendor via Internet; the vendor may then send back an
animated graphics file that causes an image 10 of the ex-husband to appear to be stabbing
himself in the stomach or otherwise being injured. This technique permits apparent changes
(such as alterations or mutilations, or loss, of body parts) to occur as a result of the
aggressive actions performed virtually against the second person. In an extreme case, the
returned image might show the ex-husband simulating Oedipus by sticking a sharp object
into his eyes and bleeding copiously, thereby providing classical catharsis to the ex-wife
without any actual harm coming to the ex-husband, while at the same time the ex-wife
suffers no conscious guilt or legal liability to which causing actions in actual, rather than
virtual, space would expose her. Similarly, expedients may advantageously be employed
such as that of an animated representation of a pit bull chewing on a body part of the second
person or of a bear disemboweling him. Other forms of mayhem simulation will be obvious
to those skilled in the art, for example, as suggested by the celebrated case of
software programmer of ordinary skill will be aware of the sources of routines, modules,
and small programs for performing the foregoing expedients and the other graphics-related
functions used in the invention, so that they can readily be incorporated into the overall,
larger program of the invention.)

Such seemingly extreme applications can prove especially beneficial in
circumstances where the second person has caused a serious and irrevocable injury to the
first person. For example, the method of the invention is advantageously adapted for use in
an AIDS therapy, such as that of Example 2. It is considered that the first person’s use of
this method helps alleviate the feelings of anger and resentment due to this serious and
irrevocable injury. Another type of serious and irrevocable injury for which such expedients
may be appropriate is a case where the second person has caused the death of a third person
having a special relationship to the first person (for example, killed a child of the first
person). Therapy to overcome feelings of helplessness and powerlessness in cases of
spousal abuse, such as Example 1, are also candidates for such expedients.
[0040] In such Internet-implemented embodiments, the computer-readable code is not preferably encoded into a computer-readable medium such as a CD (although it can be) that is then provided to the user, but rather as a computer-readable signal that is transmitted via the Internet from the vendor to the user’s PC or vice-versa. (Signals may need to be transmitted in both directions, not only for payment of the vendor but for interactive aspects of the procedure.) In Internet-implemented embodiments, the method of the invention is adapted so that at least a substantial portion of at least one step is effected by transmitting a signal via the Internet from the user to the vendor or from the vendor to the user (or both).

Incantations

[0041] Further, the vendor can vend a phrase, mantra, or incantation to the user to use with the method, and can do so, for example, by Internet means. Indeed, the phrase, mantra, or incantation can be combined with appropriate computer code so that a sound system and sound file plays the phrase, mantra, or incantation audibly while the steps of the method are performed; the package of necessary code is advantageously vended as a unit by Internet means. Such a phrase, mantra, or incantation is customizable for the particular therapeutic use. For example, spousal abuse therapy is appropriately accompanied by selection of a different kind of phrase (for example, “You are not helpless! You can control your life!”) than is suited for use in therapy with regard to being dumped by a lover; in other cases the negative feelings and thoughts in question will call for still different types of language. For best therapeutic effect, such phrases should be selected so that they will help to alleviate the particular kind of negative feelings involved. For example, in a case of spousal abuse the
negative feeling to be overcome are those of fear, powerlessness, vulnerability, or anger caused by spousal abuse, and the example given above (“You are not helpless! You can control your life!”) is selected for that purpose. Feelings of victimization, for example, may call for words suggesting the imminence of retribution or vengeance against the second person. Still other users may prefer phrases, mantras, or incantations in Aramaic, such as “Avada Kedavra!” while other users may consider Latin phrases to be more efficacious, such as “Arde in regnum phasmatis!” Customization of the phrase for a given user can involve use of the name of the second person: for example, “Take that, Greg!” or “Drop dead, Alex!”

When such an incantation is to be used, the computer program controlling the PC must utilize and/or include hardware and software components for causing an audible recitation or rendition of the incantation that a vendor has provided for this purpose (as a sound file, such as midi, rm, wav, wma, or xmf), so that the recitation occurs during at least a part of the procedure. PCs typically include (or come equipped with) conventional software (e.g., RealPlayer, IrfanView) and hardware (sound cards and speakers) for playing music, which is advantageously put to this use. The foregoing incantation unit can either cause recitation of the incantation automatically on screen placement of object image 16, for example, or else upon a specified user action such as a keystroke or a mouse click on a button shown on the GUI, done at a moment selected by the user.

It is considered that the cooperation between the audio performance of the incantation and the simultaneous performance of the translation of object image 16 across
the screen and against second person image 10 enhances the functional impact of the
simulated mayhem and makes it appear (perhaps subconsciously) more efficacious to the
user. Moreover, the ability of the system of the invention (or a vendor employing it) to
provide prerecorded incantations in Latin or various mysterious foreign languages provides
a facility that users are typically unable to provide on their own for themselves. It is
considered that these features enhance the desired therapeutic effect. Also, as previously
suggested, different users’ therapy needs can call for use of different, indeed, customized,
phrases or incantations. A library of these can be provided along with the computer
program, so that appropriate ones are available for selection by the user. Alternatively,
appropriate ones for a particular user’ therapy needs can be made available over the
Internet.

Illustrative examples

EXAMPLE 1

Jane Doe is a victim of spousal abuse. As a result she has negative feelings such
as fear, vulnerability, powerlessness, and helplessness with respect to John Doe, her abuser.
Jane Doe has formed a negative cathexis with respect to John Doe.

A vendor commercially exploiting the invention sells a CD to Jane Doe or to her
therapist (who can direct its use by Jane Doe in therapy). The CD is encoded with computer-
readable code (a computer program and various data files) to permit the user thereof to carry
out the following procedure on the user’s conventional PC equipped with Windows 98 or
higher. The user copies the CD to the hard disk of the PC.
[0046] A photographic image of John Doe, a jpeg obtained by use of a digital camera, is input. The program resizes the John Doe image to a predetermined size (very approximately, image height 25% to 40% of screen height) and prepares a John Doe thumbnail image. Both the resized John Doe image and the thumbnail image are stored in a subdirectory (folder), which is conveniently designated “Abusers.” (Resizing gifs and jpegs to a desired size, while retaining the aspect ratio, is a commonly available function on most standard graphics programs, such as IrfanView. Many thumbnail programs, such as ThumbsPlus, are also available.)

[0047] Another subdirectory (folder) copied to hard disk from the CD is conveniently designated “Weapons.” This folder contains jpeg or gif images of knives, clubs, rocks, pieces of broken glass, and the like, which are appropriately resized with respect to the resized John Doe image to make the relative sizes of the images appear realistic. Thus the size of a club or knife would be in realistic proportion to the size of a head or body.

[0048] Jane Doe activates the program (for example, by clicking on a button on a graphic user interface [GUI] control panel on the screen display). A menu or group of buttons appears on the screen display. A message such as “Select Abuser” appears on the screen display and the file menu of Abuser (second person) images appears as thumbnails. The user clicks on a thumbnail John Doe image and thereby selects an Abuser. The resized image of the Abuser, John Doe, now appears at the right part of the screen display as image 10 of Fig. 1. (The mechanical implementation of this portion of the system can be referred to as a person image unit. In the embodiment described hereinabove, this unit comprises portions of
a computer program cooperating with portions of the PC.)

[0049] A message such as “Select Weapon” now appears on the screen display.

Thumbnail images are presented showing the knives, clubs, rocks, etc. stored in the
Weapons folder. Jane Doe clicks on a thumbnail image of a rock and thereby selects as
image 16 of Fig. 1 an image of a rock. The full size image of the rock now appears at the
left part of the screen. (This portion of the system can be referred to as an object image unit.
In the embodiment described hereinabove, this unit comprises portions of a computer
program cooperating with portions of the PC.)

[0050] Both images now become objects or “sprites” that are used by a computer program
such as a Java applet.

[0051] A message such as “Act Now” appears on the screen display. Jane Doe moves the
cursor to the image of a rock, left clicks the mouse, and drags the rock image rightward
toward the image of John Doe. Jane Doe moves the cursor so that the rock appears to strike
John Doe. That is, Jane translates the rock across the screen and makes the rock appear to
hit John on the head. Jane may repeat the process as desired before exiting the program.
(This portion of the system can be referred to as a translation unit. In the embodiment
described hereinabove, this unit comprises portions of a computer program cooperating with
portions of the PC.)

[0052] Jane’s execution of the process is cathartic and helps lessen her feelings of fear,
vulnerability, powerlessness, and helplessness with respect to John Doe.
[0053] Bill Smith is an AIDS patient. Bill is depressed and harbors severe feelings of resentment against Tom Brown, a former partner of Bill. Bill believes that Tom, while being knowingly HIV positive, caused Bill to contract AIDS by exposing Bill to HIV through failure to utilize appropriate protective measures to prevent such exposure to HIV during personal contact. Bill has developed a negative cathexis regarding Tom.

[0054] The procedure of Example 1 is repeated but the image from the Abusers folder is that of Tom and the image from the Weapons folder is that of an animated graphic of a knife that displaces itself longitudinally from left to right one time when activated. Bill drags the knife image to a position to the left of a part of the image of Tom. The animation sequence begins only when the user, Bill, performs some specific manual action such as pressing a return key, clicking on a button on the screen, or right-clicking the mouse. That is a means for initiating the animation, which then begins and the animated knife image appears to stab the image of Tom. Bill right-clicks (or otherwise actuates the initiating means) as many times as he desires to symbolically stab Tom. This conduct effects or facilitates a partial discharge of Bill’s negative cathexis towards Tom.

EXAMPLE 3

[0055] A therapist directs a patient Mary to carry out the procedure of Example 1 or 2. After one or more virtual rock bashings or stabbings, the therapist interrogates Mary to determine whether a cathartic reaction has occurred. (The therapist may also compare Mary’s before and after blood pressures.) If a substantial cathartic reaction occurs, the therapist has Mary exit the program. If not, the therapist has Mary carry out additional
virtual rock bashings or stabbings.

EXAMPLE 4

[0056] Alex is angry and depressed because of Greg’s conduct. Greg drove his car recklessly while under the influence of a controlled substance. Greg wrecked his car, but escaped uninjured; however, his passenger, Alex’s son Jason, was killed. Greg was charged with manslaughter but merely received a year of probation.

[0057] Alex carries out the procedure of Examples 1 or 2. He completes a predetermined number (one or more) of sequences of virtual rock bashings or stabbings of Greg, a message appears on the screen display, such as “Do you feel better yet? Click on YES button or NO button.” If the user Alex clicks on the YES button, the program terminates. If the user Alex clicks on the NO button, another predetermined number of sequences of virtual rock bashings or stabbings is initiated by placing the “Act Now” message on the screen display.

EXAMPLE 5

[0058] In a variation on the procedure of Example 4, the PC is provided with a supplemental input device that automatically measures user pulse rate. Instead of asking the user Alex whether he feels better yet, the PC now periodically evaluates the measured user pulse rate input. If the user pulse rate is not lowered to a predetermined extent (for example, 5%), the program keeps looping back to “Act Now.” (This is subject to user override.)

EXAMPLE 6

[0059] Jane Doe of Example 1 (or her therapist) provides to a vendor a photograph or
jpeg image of John Doe. (John Doe’s image is image 10 of Fig. 1.) The vendor, using
conventional techniques, prepares an animated gif, an electronic copy of which has been
included with this application. (It is also available at, and can be downloaded from
www.law.gwu.edu/facweb/claw/Ax2Head.gif.)

[0060] The gif is an animation of Fig. 1 in which an image 16 of an ax at the left of the
screen automatically crosses the screen to an image 10 of John Doe at the right of the
screen. The ax then appears to chop the top off John Doe’s head, which is horizontally
displaced to the right of the adjacent lower part of the head. Blood appears to flow down
the head and from the ax. The gif then loops back to its first frame and the same action
repeats.

[0061] The vendor provides the gif to Jane Doe (directly or via her therapist). Jane Doe
views the animation several times until a determination is made that viewing the animation
has had a desired (cathartic) effect. Jane Doe now stops viewing the animation. Her state
of mind has been transformed so that her previous feelings of fear, powerlessness,
vulnerability, and anger resulting from John Doe’s spousal abuse of her have been reduced.

Other implementations and general operation of invention

[0062] The specific embodiments described above are based on a PC and computer screen
display, but the invention is not so limited. For example, holographic cards and similar
devices already exist in which an image viewed at one angle appears different when viewed
at another angle. The bird logo on a VISA credit card is an example. The District of
Columbia driver’s license uses a similar expedient for security purposes. It is considered
uneconomical (i.e., too expensive) at this time to create for a single user a customized
holographic card animation comparable to that of Example 6. With anticipated advances in
holographic technology, however, it should in the future become possible to provide, at a
commercially practicable cost, a generally credit card sized holographic device embodying a
user-customized animation generally comparable in concept to Example 6. That would
permit a therapist to provide a patient like Jane Doe with a portable holographic card that
she could use inconspicuously at any time and place when feelings of anxiety occurred.

[0063] The invention is thus considered to extend more generally to any similar process
or combination of elements that carries out these steps: causing an image to be visibly
displayed to, or perceived by, the first person (user); this image closely resembles a specific
second person who has caused the user to feel fear, anger, helplessness, vulnerability, or
other negative feelings. A further step is causing another image to be visibly displayed to,
or perceived by, the user. This other image is that of an object seen as potentially harmful
to the second person, for example, a knife or axe. Relative motion of these images in
relation to one another is caused, so that the object appears to the user to be harming the
second person. This brings about the transformation of subject matter described above
(whether the images are located on a computer display or any other display device). That is,
the state of mind of the first person (user) is transformed by the foregoing actions so that
catharsis or discharge of negative cathexis occurs to at least some extent, even though the
user does not consciously believe that the actual harms depicted befall the second person.
The elements of the invention, in combination and cooperating together, thus provide a
means for a reduction of fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, and/or a reduction of
or an at least partial discharge of a negative cathexis, to which the user has become subject
because of prior personal adverse interactions with the second person.

[0064] While the biochemical or other physiological mechanism of catharsis is disputed,
the existence of catharsis is not seriously disputed and has been believed in, in one form or
another, since at least as early as the writing of Aristotle’s Poetics, and expedients for
performing sympathetic magic generally or analogously related to the above described
discharge of negative cathexis were believed accomplishable and have been sought to be
accomplished perhaps as early as when cave men 15,000 to 20,000 years ago drew pictures
on cave walls at Lascaux showing arrows being shot into edible game — although not by
the means described and claimed herein. (There are important distinctions between the
present invention and these expedients. Aeschylus did not intend the bloody bath episode in
The Agamemnon to be utilized by Athenian women as therapy for spousal abuse, nor did it
provide that function. Likewise, Sophocles did not intend Oedipus Rex as therapy for young
men jealous of their fathers’ relationship with their mothers. Further, Voodoo and
sympathetic magic expedients are not sought or provided as mental health therapies. They
are intended for use simply as “machines” for accomplishing their supposed result
(manipulation of the external world), and they require users to believe in them, as pointed
out, for example, in D. Morse, et al., “Psychosomatically Induced Death: Relative to Stress,
Hypnosis, Mind Control, and Voodoo: Review and Possible Mechanisms,” Stress Medicine
7:213-32 (1991).)
Despite the disputes over how catharsis works, it is considered that in the context of this invention, the thought patterns of the user that constitute or are representative of anger, anxiety, fear, hostility, or other negative thoughts or feelings are transformed to user thought patterns that constitute or are representative of less anger, anxiety, fear, hostility, or other negative thoughts or feelings. Such thought patterns may be embodied electrically, biochemically, or otherwise in a manner not fully explainable in the present state of scientific knowledge. It is widely accepted that memories and other thought patterns are embodied in electric and chemical signals that circulate or are transmitted from place to place within the human brain. Indeed, a considerable body of information exists on how different forms of mental activity can be imaged on electronic brain scan displays, and how changes in such activity upon occurrence of certain stimuli or mental activities can be viewed on such brain scan displays. See, e.g., M.S. George et al., “Advances in Brain Imaging: An Overview of What the Primary Psychiatrist Needs to Know,” available on line at http://www.musc.edu/psychiatry/fnrd/primer_overview.htm. It is thus considered that the operation of the invention causes one set of such signals within the brain to be transformed into a different set of such signals, where the first set is representative of one physical state (characterized, for example, by fear or anger based on memories of prior experiences) and the second set is representative of a different physical state (characterized, for example, by a reduction in such fear or anger).

The invention thus achieves the desirable objectives of providing an inexpensive, mass-marketable expedient for achieving catharsis with respect to a specific, individual
person toward whom a user has anger, fear, or other negative thoughts or feelings, and/or
for focusing and bringing out into the open such feelings so as to help dissipate them. The
expedient of the invention is not illegal as are, for example, actual assault and battery. The
user is not required to believe consciously that her catharsis-providing actions do in fact
cause physical harm to the object of the negative feelings, and the object of the negative
feelings need not be so persuaded either. This advantageously avoids producing feelings of
guilt in the user or risks of liability, which creating such belief by engaging in actual
physical acts could cause. Moreover, the difficulty is obviated that it is likely that neither
the user nor object of the feelings could readily be so persuaded. The invention thus avoids
or overcomes those shortcomings of analogous traditional Voodoo or shamanistic practices
and of actual physical retaliation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

[0067] While the invention has been described in connection with specific and preferred
embodiments thereof, it is capable of further modifications without departing from the spirit
and scope of the invention. This application is intended to cover all variations, uses, or
adaptations of the invention, following, in general, the principles of the invention and
including such departures from the present disclosure as come within known or customary
practice within the art to which the invention pertains, or as are obvious to persons skilled in
the art, at the time the departure is made.

[0068] It should be appreciated that the scope of this invention is not limited to the
detailed description of the invention hereinabove, which is intended merely to be
illustrative, but rather comprehends the subject matter defined by the following claims.

[0069] As used in the specification and claims:

[0070] The term “image” means a likeness or representation of a person, animal or thing. The term includes pictorial images such as those capable of being embodied in a graphics file (jpeg, gif, png, bmp, ico, ani, etc.) of a photograph, drawing, or other picture. References to providing, accepting, or selecting an image (and like expressions) refer to providing, selecting, etc. such a graphics file (such as a jpeg or gif), or a signal or machine-readable medium embodying or representative of such a file; or providing, selecting, etc. something from which the subject matter of the image can be perceived, reproduced, or communicated.

[0071] The term “display” is usually used herein as a verb, but it is not so restricted and is used at times herein as a noun, and while a display device includes a computer display (e.g., CRT) the term “display device” is not so restricted and just requires that a device is used that causes the images to be displayed to or perceived by the user.

[0072] The term “processing unit” includes microprocessor, microcontroller, and personal computer. The terms “image unit,” “determination unit,” and “translation unit” include hardware and/or software components.
WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of providing mental therapy for reducing fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings caused by a prior adverse interpersonal interaction, said method comprising the steps of:
   
   (1) causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, a first person an image closely resembling a second person, said first person having, in respect to said second person, because of a prior adverse interpersonal interaction between said first person and said second person, fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings as to which said first person desires therapy;
   
   (2) causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, said first person an image of a potentially harmful object;
   
   (3) causing said image of an object to touch, become located within, or become near said image of said second person in a manner such that said object appears to harm said second person; and
   
   (4) determining whether said fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings of said first person have been reduced and, if not, returning to step 2.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein, prior to step 1 of claim 1, said first person has a first state of mind, said first state of mind characterized by thought patterns constituting or representative of fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings; and wherein said method
further comprises transforming said first state of mind of said first person to a second state of mind of said first person, said second state characterized by thought patterns constituting or representative of a reduction of said fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein prior to step 1 of claim 1, said first person has a first state of mind, said first state of mind characterized by a negative cathexis with respect to said second person; and wherein said method further comprises transforming said first state of mind of said first person to a second state of mind of said first person, said second state characterized by an at least partial discharge of said cathexis.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein said method further comprises transforming said first state of mind so that in said second state of mind said first person comes to feel that he or she has imposed retribution or vengeance on said second person, said transforming occurring without said first person consciously believing that his or her conduct has actually caused said second person to suffer a physical injury.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one step is carried out by a machine.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein said image of a second person and said image of an object are each located on a computer display visible to said first person, said computer display operatively coupled to a programmable processing unit operatively coupled to a
memory, said memory storing a computer program for carrying out said method of claim 5.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said image of an object is embodied in an animated graphics file, said file embodying an audiovisual work that is performed on said computer display when said first person engages in a prespecified action on an input device operatively coupled to said processing unit.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein said image of an object is translated on said display so that said image of an object appears to touch or penetrate said image of said second person, and then said image of said second person is transformed so that said second person appears to be bleeding or sustaining a mutilation.

9. The method of claim 6 further comprising:
   a step of logging on to the Internet; and
   an Internet-implemented step of causing a payment to be made to a vendor; and
   wherein at least one step of said method comprises transmitting a signal over the Internet between the first person and the vendor.

10. The method of claim 6 wherein at least one step of said method is preceded, accompanied, or followed by an audible rendition of a predetermined phrase, mantra, or incantation.
11. The method of claim 10 wherein said predetermined phrase, mantra, or incantation is selected with regard to helping overcome negative feelings caused by said prior adverse interpersonal interaction between said first person and said second person.

12. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one step of said method is preceded, accompanied, or followed by an audible rendition of a predetermined phrase, mantra, or incantation that is selected with regard to helping overcome negative feelings caused by said prior adverse interpersonal interaction between said first person and said second person.

13. A method for providing mental therapy for a victim of spousal abuse, said method comprising the steps of:

   (1) causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, a first person an image closely resembling a second person, said first person a victim of spousal abuse by said second person, said first person having, in respect to said second person, feelings of fear, powerlessness, vulnerability, or anger caused by said spousal abuse;

   (2) causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, said first person an image of a potentially harmful object;

   (3) causing said image of an object to touch, become located within, or become near said image of said second person in a manner such that said object appears to harm said second person; and
(4) causing said first person to undergo a transformation of mental state, said transformation comprising a reduction of said feelings of fear, powerlessness, vulnerability, or anger.

14. The method of claim 13 wherein at least one step is preceded, accompanied, or followed by an audible rendition of a predetermined phrase that has been selected for mental therapy use in regard to a victim of spousal abuse, said phrase selected with regard to helping to alleviate feelings of fear, powerlessness, vulnerability, or anger caused by spousal abuse.

15. A method for providing mental therapy for an AIDS patient having feelings of victimization, said method comprising the steps of:

(1) causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, a first person an image closely resembling a second person, said first person harboring feelings of anger and resentment against said second person because said second person was HIV positive and knowingly or intentionally caused said first person to contract AIDS by exposing said first person to HIV through failure to utilize appropriate protective measures to prevent said first person from exposure to HIV during personal contact;

(2) causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, said first person an image of a potentially harmful object;

(3) causing said image of an object to touch, become located within, or become near
said image of said second person in a manner such that said object appears to harm said second person; and

(4) causing said first person to undergo a transformation of mental state, said transformation comprising a reduction of said feelings of anger and resentment.

16. A machine adapted for use in a therapy for alleviating anger or negative thoughts or feelings of a first person with respect to a second person, said machine comprising:

a person display unit for causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, a first person an image closely resembling a second person, said first person having, in respect to said second person, because of prior adverse interpersonal interactions between said first person and said second person, fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or a negative cathexis, as to which said first person desires therapy;

an object display unit for causing to be visibly displayed to, or perceived by, said first person an image of an object potentially harmful to said second person; and

a translator unit for causing said image of an object to touch, become located within, or become near said image of said second person, in a manner such that said object appears to harm said second person;

said image display unit, said object display unit, and said translator unit, when successively actuated, providing a reduction of said fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or a reduction of or an at least partial discharge of said negative cathexis.
17. The machine of claim 16 further comprising a determination unit for determining whether said first person has undergone a reduction of said fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or a reduction of said negative cathexis, and for again actuating an operation of said translation unit unless a reduction of said fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or a reduction of said negative cathexis has occurred.

18. The machine of claim 16 further comprising a processing unit operatively coupled to a memory in which is stored a computer program for operating or effectuating said image display unit, said object display unit, said translator unit, and said determination unit.

19. The machine of claim 18 further comprising a sound system operatively coupled to said processing unit and, operatively coupled to said processing unit, an incantation unit for causing said sound system to make a predetermined phrase, mantra, or incantation audible during at least a portion of a time when said machine is operated.

20. A customized holographic card embodying a plurality of sequentially related images that, when viewed sequentially, provide mental therapy customized for a user of the card, said card embodying images of a potentially harmful object and a person with respect
to whom the user, because of prior adverse interpersonal interactions between said user and
said person, has fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or a negative cathexis;
said card adapted to provide a sequential display in which relative locations of the
image of the object and the image of the person change in a manner such that the object
appears to harm the person;
said card providing to said user, when said user views said sequential display, a
reduction of said fear, anger, or negative thoughts or feelings, or at least a partial discharge
of said negative cathexis.
ABSTRACT

A method and apparatus are described for providing a way for a user to alleviate fear, anger, or other negative thoughts or feelings that the user has toward a specific other person, who is personally known to the user and with whom the user has previously has adverse personal interactions, or to focus such anger or negative thoughts or feelings on the second person who is an object of the user’s negative feelings. This is accomplished by having the user select and display an image of the other person, so that the image is visible to the user, and also select and display an image of an object that is potentially harmful to the other person. Then the user causes the images to touch, become superimposed on, or located near one another. For example, an image of a knife is moved so that it appears that the knife stabs the image of the other person. It is then determined whether the fear, anger, or other negative thoughts or feelings of the user have been reduced. If not, the process is repeated. As a result, the foregoing procedure transforms a state of mind of the user in a manner such that an at least partial catharsis or discharge of cathexis occurs, but without the user believing consciously that the user’s simulated actions actually harm the other person in the manner acted out. A preferred embodiment utilizes computer means to carry out this procedure, such as a PC or handheld portable programmed device.