

Panel F2

Sala delle Colonne 1

Animation and Memory: Forms, Methods, Contexts, Practices



Melanie Hani

Animation and Therapy: An Animated Therapeutic Intervention for People Who Have Developed a Restricted or Absent Autobiographical Memory When Suffering with Grief

This paper presents the findings from a practice-based research project that explores the use of animation as a therapeutic intervention for people who have experienced 'complicated grief' related symptoms. The project was a collaboration between the University of Sunderland, the NHS, and St Benedict's Hospice, Sunderland. The methodology was developed from therapeutic, social and historical research and combines practical and theoretical approaches.

The initial focus is on the assembly of automatically-stored autobiographical memories which inform the 'death narrative' of a significant loved one. This narrative which bereaved individuals construct, informs their ensuing communication and interaction with their environment. Research has shown that memory processes can have a significant impact on developing and retaining significant symptoms of bereavement; in particular, the idiosyncrasy or absence of autobiographical memories contribute to regulated emotional health and wellbeing post-loss. This project explores the use of animation in enabling the bereaved person to construct a new 'story' by redesigning the 'cognitive route' between the memories that constitute the death narrative and the process of grieving. In this way, the animation process and outcome acts as a therapeutic tool to create an animated autobiographical memory which aids recovery.

Numerous animators have created films which have expressed representation of autobiographical events; however, in this instance, animation presented opportunities to create 'new' events that had been anticipated but which the death of the loved one had denied. The animation becomes an autobiographical memory which aids recovery by redirecting the episodic memory to more celebratory and positive events. Animation Therapy therefore affords an opportunity for giving new life, restoring old life, presenting current life and past life, 'giving life' afresh, not merely through a technical application, but through psychological, emotional, and physical re-configuration impacting on memory and experience.

The paper presents three projects which involved children and adults from a variety of backgrounds and with different levels of technical ability; workshops took place in The Design Centre, University of Sunderland after ethical clearance was completed. Animation with its visual, auditory, and tactile complexities mirrored the 'continuing bonds' between the bereaved individuals and their loved ones. Participants reported that using animation helped them to express their feelings in a way experienced as healing; filled a void created by sudden loss; and enabled them to recapture a shared life before illness.

The project demonstrates both the effectiveness of animation as a therapeutic intervention and the need for further research to evaluate its potential in this and other contexts.

Biography

Melanie Hani is a member of The Animation Academy, Loughborough University and founder member of HEART (Healing Education Animation Research Therapy). Her research examines the effectiveness of animation within therapy, criminology, education and as a methodology. Service users are from statutory (health, education, social care, research and probationary services) and voluntary sector organisations. Melanie's animation work has received recognition by the Queen for its contribution to public life; similarly, her inclusive strategies for children excluded from mainstream education and her work with the severely bereaved have been commended by Baroness Morris of Yardley and the Duke of Gloucester, winning an NHS Innovation Award and a Community Fellowship. In 2015, Melanie won the enterprise Award for social and cultural impact.

More recently, Melanie in collaboration with Leicestershire police has worked with the Complex Crimes Department on analysing walk cycles for offender identification and investigating the production of visual evidence as a process that begins with the capture of digital images by the relevant technology whether that be a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) camera, mobile phone or a Body-Worn Video Device and ends with the viewing of evidence in court.